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The Poetics of the Künstlerinroman and the Aesthetics of the Sublime

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Volume XI

Evy Varsamopoulou

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General Editors' Preface

The European dimension of research in the humanities has come into sharp focus over recent years, producing scholarship which ranges across disciplines and national boundaries. Until now there has been no major channel for such work. This series aims to provide one, and to unite the fields of cultural studies and traditional scholarship. It will publish the most exciting new writing in areas such as European history and literature, art history, archaeology, language and translation studies, political, cultural and gay studies, music, psychology, sociology and philosophy. The emphasis will be explicitly European and interdisciplinary, concentrating attention on the relativity of cultural perspectives, with a particular interest in issues of cultural transition.

Martin Stannard
Greg Walker

University of Leicester

Foreword

This book was originally written at the Centre for Critical and Cultural Theory of the University of Wales in Cardiff, where I was a doctoral student, and subsequently revised while working at Anglia Polytechnic University. The State Scholarship Foundation of Greece made it possible for me to spend the necessary years reading, writing and thinking about this project by approving my research proposal and by their generous financial support. The Centre for Critical and Cultural Theory offered a stimulating forum for discussion and debate of contemporary theory, literature and philosophy through its reading groups, its academic staff and post-graduate students. I am particularly indebted to my supervisor, Dr Jane Moore, who bore patiently with my early explorations and allowed me to develop freely the directions into which the literature took me. Professor Diane Elam and Dr Steven Vine were enthusiastic supporters and readers of some or all of this work and also helped by running reading groups and seminars for the discussion of Kant and other philosophers' work on aesthetics and the sublime. Professor Chris Norris generously helped by reading through the second chapter and advising me to expand on certain points. I would like to thank Professor Patricia Waugh for her constructive criticism of the book in its early form as a doctoral thesis and her support for its publication. The series editors, Professor Martin Stannard and Dr Greg Walker of the University of Leicester, have shown unflagging interest and patience during the three years it took for this manuscript to enter the world of published books. I am particularly grateful to Maria Varsamopoulou and Adam Woodruff, who read through the entire manuscript with care, and for their friendship, support and faith in my work that sustained me. This book is dedicated to my family who helped me live through and overcome the greatest difficulties in completing this book and for their unreserved faith, support, encouragement and spirit of endurance.

Introduction

The *Genre* of Genre Criticism of the *Künstlerinroman*

The underlying premise of this book is that the *Künstlerinroman* or (female) artist novel, is a genre that merits and demands a separate study of its own. The second premise is that studies that limit the range of artist novels studied reveal as much about the concerns and defining features of the genre without losing sight of the specificity of each novel. Therefore this study will not satisfy desires for encyclopaedic overviews, generalisations or over-arching comparisons. It is, in fact, a study of one kind or sub-category of *Künstlerinroman*: literary in focus and Romantic in mode. However, in order for such a study to be introduced, in the first place, the *Künstlerinroman* has to become recognizable as a genre. How can we recognize a genre? In terms of principles, genre theories range from the classical prescriptive notion of pure types to the Bakhtinian acceptance of the multiplicity of discourses defining the novel itself.[1] My own position could be best described as siding with the Bakhtinian end of the spectrum. While I by no means consider it necessary to specify generic affiliations or theorize genre at every approach to a literary text, to systematically avoid the question of genre, when it may be especially significant for the historical, interpretive and theoretical reception of a particular work of literature, seems equally biased. To refuse to name or to describe a text's participation in a genre is to refuse to a certain degree our (scholarly) response to a text. It also serves to obscure the socio-historical network of literature, and even to render more difficult our understanding of the meanings of critical terms like Romanticism, modernism and postmodernism, by not approaching them through specific examples of literary (novelistic) production.

It should be possible to discover some features that all *Künstlerinromane* have in common with the earliest examples of the genre. Its differences from various other genres, as well as the generic influences intrinsic to the *Künstler/ Künstlerinroman* tradition, cannot be grasped without an (at least) rudimentary understanding of its genealogy from within an important event in European literary history: Early German Romanticism. For this reason, I find it worthwhile to reach back into literary history to the *Künstlerroman* or (male) artist novel –

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1 I am referring to the survey of pro- and anti-genre theories in Ralph Cohen's 'Do Postmodern Genres Exist?', ed. Marjorie Perloff, *Postmodern Genres* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988). For a discussion of heteroglossia and the incorporation of rhetorical and artistic genres defining novelistic discourse, see Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel' (1935–1936), *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

preceding the (first) *Künstlerinroman* by seven years – its break from the *Bildungsroman* and its significance as a Romantic genre. If women's artist-novels have always been set up by critics as, at best, participators in a genre inaugurated and perfected by male writers, then unlike many famous *Künstlerromane*, they were also not placed in the delusory category of exclusive genre membership. As the vicissitudes of literary fate would have it, the postmodern understanding of the flexible, historically mutable and always 'impure' category of genre, has cast its vote in favour of such 'participation without membership'.[2]

Künstlerroman is the name given to a kind of German novel which made its appearance in 1798 with Ludwig Tieck's *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen* [*Franz Sternbald's Wanderings*].[3] The beginnings of the *Künstlerroman* are intimately related to Goethe's *Bildungsroman*, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* [*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*] (1795), out of which grew the attention to the conflicts between an individual with artistic pretensions and modern society. However, the *Künstlerroman* almost immediately established an antipodal relationship to *Wilhelm Meister* by virtue of its Romanticism, which rejected the priorities and principles informing the *Bildungsroman* form. A comparison was drawn from the very beginning between Tieck's and Goethe's novels. The distinctive trait

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2 Jacques Derrida, 'The Law of Genre', *Diacritics* 7.1 (1980), p. 63. I am in agreement with Derrida's 'hypothesis' that: 'Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging' (Derrida, 'Law', p. 65). Derrida takes issue with Gérard Genette's essay 'Genres, "Types", Modes', *Poetique* 32 (1977): 299–421. His disagreement stems from certain unquestioned presuppositions of Genette's 'distinction between nature and history' and 'its implications with regard to mode and to the distinction between mode and genre' (Derrida, 'Law', p. 62). Derrida argues for not only the inoperativeness, but also the irrelevance of Genette's model when reading a liminal 'text', such as Maurice Blanchot's *La Folie du Jour* (1973). However, as I remarked earlier, if some texts elude all genres, this does not also mean that 'genre' is inoperative in all literary texts since not all are 'liminal'.

3 Tieck's *Künstlerroman* is specifically a *Malerroman* because it has a painter protagonist. The trend of *Malerromane* set by Tieck is probably influenced by the re-introduction of the figure of the artist as an individual worthy of study, in addition to art and aesthetics. Theodore Ziolkowski, in *German Romanticism and Its Institutions* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), attributes the proliferation of *Malerromane* to the impact of Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder's *Herzensergiessungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders* (1797) [*Heartfelt Outpourings of an Art-loving Friar*], which filled a gap in the new enthusiasm for art and artists of Early German Romanticism. In this work, Wackendroder 'elevated anecdote to a privileged status by attributing spiritual value to the life of the artist, who is able to create great works only because he has lived a good life' (339). Tieck had planned *Franz Sternbald* together with Wackenroder, but had to write it himself after Wackenroder's untimely death. Ziolkowski also cites Wilhelm Heinse's *Ardinghello* (1787), an epistolary *Künstlerroman* which predates Tieck's but differs in its emphasis; art in Heinse's novel is only one of the pleasures in the pursuit of hedonism, whereas in Tieck's it vies with religion as an all-consuming involvement which effects a virtuous transformation of the individual (Ziolkowski, p. 339).

that seems to set the two genres apart in the late eighteenth century is the central character, which in the *Künstlerroman* must be an artist (or aspiring artist) of some sort. An individual character is the focus of each kind of novel. The *Künstlerroman* was the narrative account of the formation, development, education, psychology of an artist, as a *special* type of individual.[4] However, this was not all. The theorist, critic and writer of German Romanticism Friedrich Schlegel had hailed Tieck's novel as 'the first novel [roman] since Cervantès that is Romantic and in this well above *Meister*'.[5] The final break which established the *Künstlerroman* as a specifically Romantic genre came with Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802). This was composed in emulation of Tieck's *Franz Sternbald* and also as an 'anti-Meister' answer to Goethe's *Bildungsroman*. Whereas Goethe's hero is the son of a merchant who dreams of a career in the theatre but ends up as a surgeon, Novalis's is the son of a craftsman (artisan), who dreams of 'the blue flower'. This generational turning point reflects the change from a certain medieval notion of the artist as skilled craftman only, to the Longinian or modern (Romantic) ideas of the work of art as defined by something beyond teachable skills. The infinite, or the resting place of eternity beyond death, are among the references of the blue flower, which became an enduring symbol in German Romanticism.[6] As a Romantic novel, it spurns representationalism and opts for romance, allegory and fairy tale, interspersing prose with poems and songs while being an amalgamation of philosophy, religion, history, science, alchemy and, indeed, all present and past forms of knowledge, whether 'philosophic', 'artistic' or 'scientific'. The great poet who will save humanity from its present course of destruction by an *aesthetic* activity; Romanticizing the world and revealing the truth in and through art, will do so necessarily by this *mélange* of all things into one. In Schelling's terms, art is the most important of the modes of human knowledge production because the aesthetic intelligence *recreates the world*. Novalis's Heinrich has therefore no small mission and he himself, through its accomplishment after the long period of 'waiting' as active learning and apprenticeship to art and the world, will have gained a lofty, even otherworldly position *vis-à-vis* earthly existence. In *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Novalis embeds so much philosophical reflection and scientific

4 All other character formation novels could be termed *Bildungsromane* (novels of formation), *Erziehungsromane* (novels of education), or *Entwicklungsromane* (novels of development), depending on their emphasis on different aspects and processes in personal development.

5 Friedrich Schlegel, cited in J.F. Angelloz, *Le Romantisme Allemand* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1973), p. 13. Translations from the French or German quoted will be my own. Schlegel came to write his own *Malerroman*, *Lucinde* (1799), which has both a man and a woman painter as protagonists. Strictly speaking, this could be considered the first *Künstler(in)roman*, which Madame de Staël would definitely have heard about, if not read. In Schlegel's novel 'art is still the manifestation of religion, but it is now the secularized religion of love' (Ziolkowski, p. 344).

6 Maurice Cranston, *The Romantic Movement* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 36.

observation that its ambition seems to outstrip even Schelling's expectations for the work of art.[7]

In a nutshell, we have the artist as an individual who resists being socialized as a 'useful' or 'productive' socio-economic contributor who merely 'fits into' his community; he seeks another world and finds it, not in religion, but in art, which he pursues with religious devotion. Hence the attraction to what is otherworldy: fairies, magic, infinity, spirituality, the sublime. In this 'otherworldy place' (of art) *within* the world, the *Künstlerroman* stages its social critique.

This belief that the creative artist is a special type of individual in society is specifically a Romantic notion, circulating in particular socio-historical communities: first in Germany, then in the rest of Europe and its then colonies. That the education and formation of an artist was deemed a special case, and that he was no longer considered, as before, a simple artisan or craftsman owed much to the revival of an exalted status of the man of genius as an artist. Genius as a notion carried along with it mystical, metaphysical beliefs for centuries, at least since the Romans, but it became newly enhanced with the quasi- (or pseudo-) scientific prejudices of evolutionary and nascent psychological theories, philosophies of the sublime and modern perceptions of society.[8]

On the other hand, that the writer chooses to write about a writer (or any other artist) is also indicative of the growing self-consciousness of the novelist as literary artist of the most prominent modern literary form (the novel or *Roman/roman*). Linda Hutcheon discusses this in *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*:

> The origins of the self-reflecting structure that governs many modern novels might well lie in that parodic intent basic to the genre as it began in *Don Quijote*, an intent to unmask dead conventions by challenging, by mirroring. The self-consciousness of Cervantes' text has been handed down, through the likes of Sterne and Diderot, to the Romantic artist-hero of the *Künstlerroman*.[9]

It is true that the *Künstlerroman* with a writer or poet protagonist discloses a critical awareness of the *métier* of literary art, blurring the boundaries between

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7 See, for instance, F.W.J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism (1800)*, translated by Peter Heath (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1997). That Novalis's thought in *Heinrich* reflects his own careful study and pondered response to the philosophy of his day – especially Kant, Fichte and Schelling – has been investigated and demonstrated through scholarly work. For a survey of the history of the reception of Novalis's *Heinrich*, including published and unpublished studies, see Dennis F. Mahoney, *The Critical Fortunes of a Romantic Novel: Novalis's Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1994).

8 I am indebted to Christine Battersby's historical research into the concept of the genius in *Gender and Genius* (London: The Women's Press, 1994).

9 Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 18.

fiction and criticism, as the novelist becomes critic of his/her own creative process or product. It is equally true though that the other half of the *Künstlerroman*'s genealogy comes from the aesthetic discourse on the sublime, one which remains as important as the 'self-reflecting structure' in many women's *Künstlerinromane* in the twentieth century. The writer's novel becomes the space for personal confessions and psychological introspection, social critique and cultural analysis, linguistic playfulness and narrative experimentation, or theoretical digressions about art and creativity. A *Künstlerinroman* may incorporate one or more of these discourses. Depending again on the specific preoccupations of the novel, it would take the shape of different genres; most often, it may have more elements of the *Bildungsroman*, if the interest lies in providing a kind of profile of the artist's early growth, development and background. Alternatively, this might not be the main feature, and the novel may focus on a specific period of the artist's life, or the conditions of possibility (or impossibility) for creative activity. The novel may or may not be autobiographical, whether or not it is shaped as a *Bildungsroman* of an aspiring writer, and despite the persistence of many critics to read them as 'portraits of the author'.

As a next step, I will briefly consider the main examples of how literary criticism in English has construed the genre study of the *Künstler(in)roman*, what my departures from this approach are and, finally, what the historical and philosophical significance of studying *Künstlerinromane* as participants in the Romantic *Künstlerinroman* genre can be. The last issue will be a concern running throughout this study as well as the special focus of the first chapter and the conclusion. From the many *Künstlerinromane* that have developed, I will be concentrating on a specific kind: that which has an aspiring female writer (of poetry or prose) as its protagonist, and which has been written by a female author. The condition of female authorship is required by the task of recognizing and appreciating women's neglected contribution to both the genre of the artist novel and the discourse of the sublime. Roberta Seret has called these novels *Künstlerromane*, to differentiate them from the related 'artist novels'; the former, Seret argues, emphasize 'the formation of the artist', while in the latter 'the protagonist is already a formed artist'.[10] However, as the terms translate into each other, I would avoid the proliferation of names, which tends towards infinite, restrictive subdivisions of genre. Certainly, what Seret describes as *Künstlerroman* does remain more faithful to the first German examples of the genre.

Seret's study purports to be a general overview of the *Künstlerroman*, whatever the specific art of the (male) protagonist. Seret states that 'observation of major characteristics becomes more important than establishing qualifying criteria for inclusion or exclusion', and that the final distinction of a *Künstlerroman* from other

10 Roberta Seret, *Voyage into Creativity; The Modern Künstlerroman* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), p. 5.

'overlapping' genres is a matter of 'the author's emphasis and ultimate purpose', without recognizing these as being actual criteria for 'inclusion or exclusion'.[11] However, this is the use they are put to in her study. My main disagreement with this is that Seret actually defines the *Künstlerroman* as a more or less autobiographical *Bildungsroman*.[12] Her understanding of the genre is prompted by a purely thematic reading (which again leads to statements of 'archetypal' *Künstlerromane*) of the protagonists' voyages, actual or metaphorical, in their development as an artist. The voyage motif is obviously one shared with the *Bildungsroman*. However, this reading literally cannot escape the confines of a character study, which focuses on the relation of the individual to society and not to the specific art. Although Seret recognizes the difficulties of generic distinctions, she does not stop to consider their potential interrelations. Thus, she excludes a number of famous *Künstlerromane*, such as Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*, because of the significance of the historical or philosophical dimensions, which are judged to distract from the developmental plot.

Künstlerinromane by women, however, began with Madame de Staël's *Corinne ou l'Italie* (1807), where the protagonist is already a recognized poet when she first appears in the narrative – though we are later given a retrospective narrative of her artistic prehistory. The first chapter of this book will show how *Corinne ou l'Italie* exemplifies the same trajectory as the one briefly outlined in Tieck's and Novalis's *Künstlerromane*, insofar as it moves towards the pursuit of art and the sublime and away from social conformism and integration.

Madame de Staël started visiting 'Germany' in 1789, and in 1804 August Wilhelm Schlegel, who had close and first-hand knowledge of Novalis's work (both having been part of the Jena group), joined her household. Though Madame de Staël could not read German by the time of her writing *Corinne ou L'Italie*, she had long begun studying German literature, art and philosophy. In *De l'Allemagne* [*Of Germany*] 1810–1813), Madame de Staël expresses great admiration for the work of both Tieck and Novalis. In her commentary, there are specific references to both *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen* and *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, admiration for the depiction of the artist, the peculiarly aesthetic perception of the universe and the prominence of infinity and the sublime.[13]

A distinguishing quality of the *Künstlerinromane* in this study is their adherence to Romantic discourse over and against narrative realism. Artist novels which do not include a discourse on or of the sublime often tend to remain at the level of the representation of what is known, seen, experienced in the mundane world of harsh realities without much interest in any varieties of 'otherness' with

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11 Seret, *Voyage into Creativity*, p. 5.

12 Seret, *Voyage into Creativity*, pp. 5, 6, 12.

13 See *De l'Allemagne*, eds. La Comtesse Jean de Pange and Simone Balayé, Book III, Chapter 28 (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1959), pp. 267–270 (on Tieck); and Book V, Chapter 9 (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1960), pp. 160–167 (on Novalis).

respect to the representable. That kind of artist narrative may be serious, introspective, ironic or parodic; however, it refers only partially to the Romantic *Künstleri(in)roman*.

In H.D.'s *Palimpsest* (1926), the modernist *Künstlerinroman* I explore in the third chapter, only the first of three narratives has an aspiring female writer as a protagonist, but all three novellas have an interest in some kind of writing, and are intrinsically interdependent intertexts. While all the examples of *Künstlerinromane* here depict at some point and for some length the struggling subjectivity of the aspiring female writer, their ties to Romantic precursors are reinforced by the metafictional discourse on or of the sublime, especially as it relates to writing. Therefore, Hélène Cixous' confessional poetic/philosophical essay 'La venue à l'écriture' ['The Coming to Writing'] is also read as a *Künstlerin* narrative which communicates, in a highly condensed form, the same *Künstlerin* problematic as the kind found in the metafictional discourse of the novels. 'La venue à l'écriture' introduces the reading of Christa Wolf's *Nachdenken über Christa T.* [*The Quest for Christa T.*] in chapter four, but is just as relevant to the reading of Marguerite Duras' *L'Amant* in the fifth and final chapter, and indeed to *Palimpsest*.

The close intertextual reading of Madame de Staël's *Corinne ou l'Italie* with Kant's writings on the sublime in the first chapter aims to illustrate the importance of this aesthetic discourse for the *Künstlerinroman*. After considering the influence of Kant, I turn my attention in this chapter to the impact of *Corinne* on Elizabeth Barrett Browning's epic *Künstlerinroman* in blank verse, *Aurora Leigh*. As a manifesto for both female authorship and the significance of aesthetics in modern society, *Corinne* thus occasioned an equally ambitious response; the two texts establish the *Künstlerinroman* in European literary history.

The theoretical theses on the sublime developed in the second chapter arise from and are implicated in the discussion of each novel's metafictional discourse. The theoretical intervention is meant to augur and synopsize the aesthetic discourse in the main studies of the next three chapters. Each of the three *Künstlerinromane* in what can be seen as the second part of the book exemplifies a relation to subjectivity, eros and death in terms of the theses on the sublime outlined in Chapter Two. Different theoretical texts are read alongside each *Künstlerinroman* in order to highlight distinct aspects of these theses. At the same time, the readings of the *Künstlerinromane* also investigate classic *topoi* of the artist novel, such as formative influences for the protagonist and narrative and motifs.

The novels' participation in the *Künstlerinroman* genre and their metafictional discourse on the literary sublime have gone, partly or wholly, unrecognized and unread. But the question is not merely to add to them this other generic name, as if to increase their status. The question rather is whether anything new, different or worthwhile emerges in the process of reading them in this manner; namely, from the angle of a *Künstlerin* problematic, which always entails a double and different reading from the purely thematic one. A double reading, or a reading that attends to

the metafictional dimension, fully allows the intra/intertextual dialogue – which is as much part of the novel as its fictional narrative – to take place. This manner of reading the *Künstlerinroman* genre has allowed the recognition of a very important and neglected contribution to the aesthetic discourse of the sublime. This, in turn, is what called for a special consideration of some of the problems of the (mainly Kantian) aesthetic discourse on the sublime, and the perhaps novel possibilities awaiting other understandings of the sublime, as they were suggested to me by the *Künstlerinromane*.

The reading of *Künstlerinromane* of this kind simultaneously supports, and is supported by, the argument that female subjectivity does not fit perfectly into the Freudian and Lacanian trajectory which perpetuates a male-biased paradigm. My argument on the subsequent pitfalls of uncritical psychoanalytic readings in relation to the sublime in women's texts is especially prominent in the final chapter, where I read *L'Amant*. Female theorists not adhering to these male traditions of thought have managed, with varying degrees of success or acknowledgement, to develop their own theories of subjectivity, the sublime and creativity.

According to Judith Gardiner, the theoretical models of women's identity – which she defines as fluid 'process' as opposed to the male stable 'product' – differ from the ones proposed by prominent male theorists of identity (Eric Erikson, Heinz Lichtenstein) because female experience is seen to differ on every count.[14] Many of Gardiner's insights – for instance, on empathic, relational identity and the primordial importance of the mother – overlap with the ones expressed in *Palimpsest*, *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, and *L'Amant*; however, they are often more complex and ambiguous than what Gardiner suggests. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland have found that 'apparent incongruities embedded in female plots' are usefully explained by 'feminist theories of gender difference', such as those of 'Nancy Chodorow, Dorothy Dinnerstein, Jean Baker Miller, Jane Flax and Carol Gilligan'.[15] These theorists focus on the mother-infant bond and pre-Oedipal relations in their approach to the construction of gender identity. However, I would not agree with their dismissal of Freudian theory as completely reducing psychology to anatomy, nor, especially, would I concede to their view of the *Künstlerroman* as merely 'a pattern of spiritual development in male heroes [...] virtually unavailable to the young woman in the nineteenth-century novel'.[16] This kind of feminist reading can dangerously 'overgenderize'

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14 See Judith Kegan Gardiner, 'On Female Identity and Writing by Women', *Critical Inquiry* 8.2 (1981): 347–361.

15 See the editors' introduction to a collection of essays on women's *Bildungsromane*, *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, eds. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1983), p. 9. As their primary focus is not the artist novel *per se*, the editors also admit to the great expanse of novels read as *Bildungsromane* in their book, mainly because of the genre's 'usefulness as a conceptual tool' (14).

16 Seret, *Voyage into Creativity*, p. 28.

genres to the explicit disadvantage of women's *Künstlerinromane* in order to make the feminist point about women's limited choices in (nineteenth-century) society.

Both feminist theorists and literary writers inevitably work from a position on the fringes of the male academic, artistic and professional communities: both within and outside them. This means that although their thinking inherits the age-old dominant structures and poetics, their differing positions are not irretrievable, nor ultimately defined by a male-oriented canon.

The writer-character on whom the artist-narrative hinges provides a fable of creative subjectivity; creative because it has been, and is shown to be, perpetually, self-consciously and retrospectively a fictional creation. The autobiographical elements, whichever and however many they may be, will be of lesser interest or importance in themselves for this literary critical project. The issue in this study of the *Künstlerinroman* is not uniquely the forms taken by female subjectivity when it is represented, although these kind of questions are also addressed. Neither is this a quest for *the* Romantic or modernist artist heroine. Such a quest structures certain genre studies of the *Künstlerroman*, such as Maurice Beebe's *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts*,[17] and Linda Huf's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman*.[18]

Although other studies are in circulation, the *Künstler(in)roman* is not a fashionable critical object. Notwithstanding rare exceptions, it rarely attracts much interest in book-length studies. A short review of Beebe's and Huf's books, which form a kind of couple (his is male-oriented, hers is female-centred), is useful in this introduction because they illustrate the mode of literary criticism I am deliberately not performing. Beebe builds his study on the archetypal 'three themes' in the *Künstlerroman*; Huf builds hers on the 'three images' of the *Künstlerinroman*. I will point out what seem to me the shortcomings of this approach, although this is not to deny their interest or usefulness as literary histories. I will then again make clear how the model that I am proposing differs and what its advantages might be.

In the preface to his book, Beebe openly states that a survey study of this genre will reveal 'something about the *nature* of the artist in general',[19] and therefore, will also be 'a study of the artistic temperament, the creative process, and the relationship of the artist to society'.[20] Indeed, it becomes clear in his preface, but also in the 'Introduction', that he gives credence to a metaphysical category of the artist as a certain type of human being, set apart from the mundane lot by virtue of a creative, semi-divine *essence*. In his own words: 'there are ways in which artists, regardless of the art they practice, differ from nonartists, and in depicting these

17 Beebe, Maurice, *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts* (New York: New York University Press, 1964).

18 Huf, Linda, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1985).

19 Beebe, *Ivory Towers*, my italics, p. v.

20 Beebe, *Ivory Towers*, p. v.

ways the novelist is a valid spokesman for all creative men'.[21] Furthermore, it is a category with its own subdivisions depending on the particular medium the artist character employs. Again, each medium implies, and is the outcome of, a different personality type: 'the painter, for example, is likely to be more gregarious than the poet, and the ability to observe life clearly is obviously less important for the musician than for the painter or the writer'.[22] These differences, however, are then dismissed as a mere play of surfaces since, as far as the *Künstlerroman* is concerned, they are nothing more than fictional moulds into which the author pours his own self. For Beebe, the *Künstlerroman* must always ultimately be 'a self-portrait of his creator'[23] and hence, the fictional artist is quintessentially a literary man; or, to be precise, a novelist. Not only Beebe's arguments but also, and this is of more interest, his very vocabulary echo romanticized masculine Romantic theories of creativity. There is an emphatic choice of masculine nouns and pronouns in his generalizations about characters and authors, which combine with statements such as these to produce an overall uneasy effect: 'In fact, actual production is not a requirement for the artist-hero, for some of the characters I discuss are only potential artists, and a few are not identified as artists at all, though they are obviously surrogates for their authors'.[24] Obviously, the scope widens considerably by this declaration, while the criteria for making such recognitions suggest a questionable form of literary eugenics.[25] In coarse terms, genre recognition could become a kind of 'spot the author' game: if you can spot him/her, then it is a *Künstlerroman*. Or, perhaps it is an autobiography? It is more than understandable then how *Künstler(in)romane* soon disappeared into autobiography studies. Read as autobiography, they at least escaped the stigma of personality stereotyping.

If these are the more serious theoretical shortcomings of Beebe's study, the thematic readings of the novels contain their own pitfalls. Beebe recognizes three major themes that characterize all artist novels: 'the concept of the artist as a divided self, the equation of art with experience, and the conflicting ideal of detachment'.[26] Indeed, for Beebe, the three themes 'function together to form an

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21 Beebe, *Ivory Towers*, p. vi.

22 Beebe, *Ivory Towers*, p. v.

23 Beebe, *Ivory Towers*, p. v.

24 Beebe, *Ivory Towers*, p. v.

25 What Beebe's statement also recalls is a Romantic male appropriation of birth as a metaphor for creative production. The fertile imagination of the male author, origin of his genius, lends itself to his artistic character: a surrogate for his author who may or may not produce art but is always capable. His artistic character traits attest to this potential, which, in any case, is proven by the existence of the book by the author on whom he has been moulded. It is of lesser importance to discover what is specific to the literary genre, than to find out more characteristics of the author as *über*artist. This kind of criticism encouraged readings of *Künstler(in)romane* as products of an author cult.

26 Beebe, *Ivory Towers*, p. vi.

archetype of the artist novel'.[27] He defines the nature of the genre by them and even finds 'they assume the dimension of myths that may express universal truths'.[28] In other words, the split is caused because the protagonist is both 'special' (the artist dimension) and 'ordinary' (the man): one side will prevail, albeit uncomfortably, and so he will either see active social/worldly involvement as vital or as counter-productive to literary or other artistic practice.

The structural claim to an overall pattern justifying an archetypal artist narrative further produces the archetypal individual artist portrait, which is none other than James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. As Joyce's book is the definitive version of the artist novel and most perfect portrait of the universal artist type of man in Beebe's view, he allocates to him the fourth and final chapter of the second part of his study on four masters of the *Künstlerroman* (Honoré de Balzac, Henry James and Marcel Proust being the other three). Any mention (let alone study) of artist novels contemporaneous with or after Joyce is deemed redundant: 'Portraits of the artist after Joyce seem to follow the tradition already established without changing it in any important way'.[29] Although it is an untenable proposition and, furthermore, based on confusion between *Künstlerroman*, *Bildungsroman* and autobiography which does not do justice to literary historical formations, it seems inevitable to me that Beebe would reach this conclusion. Having established his own limits to the genre and then his preferences in what he considered the quintessential themes and personality type of the artist/author, all of markedly male-oriented norms, he traces the trajectory of the rise and fall of an artist cult beginning with Goethe and culminating in Joyce.

The problems of literary aesthetics and the history of a genre are not resolved, however, either by Derrida's dismissal of genre as outmoded and constricting or by selecting a single work, 'consider[ing] it as particularly "pure" [...] elevating it to the level of type' and then 'say[ing] that the "type" is realized there, the genre in its plenitude, and its history attained its ideal accomplishment'.[30] The 'definition' of a genre is only an abstraction which crucially depends on the history of its concrete realization in literary examples, no single one of which can ever reach generic 'perfection' or 'plenitude' since generic developments have no goal as such.[31]

A more important inaccuracy, however, is the distortion of Beebe's study

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27 Beebe, *Ivory Towers*, p. 6.

28 Beebe, *Ivory Towers*, p. 6. Each of Beebe's themes incorporates a number of conflicts by implication, and the knot of unresolved (or unresolvable) tensions that result from this combination of opposing forces in all three thematic categories provides the dynamic impetus that structures the *Künstlerroman* narrative.

29 Beebe, *Ivory Towers*, p. vi.

30 Karl Viëtor, 'L'histoire des genres littéraires', [1931], trans. from the German by Jean-Pierre Morel, in *Poétique* 32 (1977): 490–506, pp. 499–501.

31 This has to be particularly true of novelistic genres as, we must recall, prose fiction ('romance') was never subject to the problematic history of classical scholarship (which often showed exaggerated adherence to the ancient treatises on poetry).

because of the grave omission of all but four or five women writers' artist-novels. *Corinne* is mentioned only to be denigrated as a 'guide book'. In fact, the differences produced by the female position, even within the same tri-partite thematics of the Divided Self, the Sacred Fount and the Ivory Tower, would necessitate considerable re-adjustments of the basic conflicts of the artist's inner world and its relation to external pressures and symbolic structures.

Linda Huf's work on artist-novels by North American women writers undertakes such a study within Beebe's own parameters. It even goes as far as to echo his belief that women's artist protagonists, 'as self-portraits of their creators, are invariably surrogate authors'.[32] Huf's study would suggest that a reversal is sufficient to validate these 'truths' so that they may apply to female characters. She too finds an archetypal personality in women's portrayal of artists; one that is the direct opposite of Beebe's: 'the artist heroine tends to be stalwart, spirited, and fearless (or, to have traditionally "masculine" attributes) [...] artist heroines by women are athletic in build, skilled in sports, unshrinking in fights, able in mathematics, plucky in love, and daring in their sexual adventures'.[33] The first problem with this description is that it tends to overgeneralize the specificity of a female type of artist character in order to object to and expose the male bias which belies the 'objectivity' of Beebe's literary criticism. Rejecting male stereotypes of the artist is a laudable enough project; presenting merely the reverse of a dominant stereotype, however, may be considered problematic if not reactionary.

There is also another question arising from Huf's study. Is this really, as Huf claims, a representative psychological portrait of Anglo-American artist heroines in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? After all, the specific male 'artistic temperament' Huf targets is only the type Beebe prefers, fashioned upon his personal favourite, Joyce's Stephen Daedalus. Huf's consideration of women artists is even more limited than Beebe's, which made reference to European examples as well, since it purports to be a general study of American female artist novels by women. More glaringly questionable is her total omission of H.D.'s artist novels: *Her*, *Palimpsest* and *The Gift*.[34]

Beyond the selective nature of Huf's study of women's artist novels, what detracts most from its actual merit as both literary criticism and feminist revision is that it is ultimately dependent on the same theoretical framework as Beebe's. Since she is uncritical of his categories, her main concern is to 'fill' them with universal truths of her own, which could apply to the main conflicts, character traits and plot of the *Bildungsroman* type of artist narrative. To this extent, she achieves her ends,

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32 Huf, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman*, p. 1.

33 Huf, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman*, p. 4.

34 Could this omission possibly be because H.D. emigrated to Britain? Considering the trend of writers living in (self-imposed) exile, especially in early twentieth-century Europe, many studies which restrict themselves to national geographic boundaries may seriously compromise their conclusions.

but what is left is a central paradox. According to Huf, the only reason why women did not produce female artist-novels was their diffidence and fear of society's outcry (hence no 'black', if few 'white', women's artist novels) if they dared 'strike the grandiose pose which since the Romantic period has been expected of the Artist'.[35] Thus, the *Künstlerroman* is seen as a Romantic genre purely in that it requires an artist of 'Romantic' proportions; one whose airs she is critical of, whose conflicts wither in the face of his female equivalent's, but of whose egoism female artists need a 'healthy dose' in order to exist fictionally. Huf's study deconstructs itself because it provides a rudimentary examination of both the ideas and narrative construction of women's artist novels. Ultimately, we are left with the thught that women, too, can and will become 'Romantic artists' in their narratives one day.

Nevertheless, Huf's suspicion that 'women's artist novels are so unlike men's – and so like each other – that they must be supposed to have their own tradition and development'[36] can be demonstrated to a significant degree but will depend crucially on the understanding we have of 'tradition'.[37] It would, however, have to be within a different set of parameters and beyond the scope of Huf's own study. Within a more critical and theoretical literary framework, Huf's own descriptive, comparative analysis of women's artist novels – broadened to include other novels in the genre – could yield more interesting and useful insights into the issues and processes surrounding creativity, gender and artist narratives.[38] Huf, for instance, presents each of the five differences that distinguish women's from men's artist-novels as somehow self-explanatory, whereas each one could be identified as a point of departure for an examination of the above central issues which preoccupy the genre.

The first major difference of the psychological portrait of the female artist leads to questions of sexual stereotypes. Both Beebe's and Huf's archetypes of the artist are presented as 'special' personalities because of their mixture of masculine and feminine features. Both critics assert that a recognizable 'personality type' of woman or man will become an artist, but it is more likely that this repeated

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35 Huf, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman*, p. 13.

36 Huf, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman*, p. 4.

37 I take up this issue of literary tradition and the *Künstlerinroman* in particular and at greater length in the conclusion to this study.

38 An example of such a book-length study is Grace Stewart's *A New Mythos: The Novel of the Artist as Heroine 1877–1977* (St. Alban's, VT and Montreal, Canada: Eden Press Women's Publications, 1979). Stewart's study considers the influence and treatment of myths, especially ones relating to artists, on a set of women's 'Künstlerromane' in English. The problematic influence of the *Faust* myth (as it appears in Goethe) in these novels is juxtaposed with the more auspicious use of the Demeter/Persephone myth. The study is not so much an overall study of the *Künstlerinroman per se*, but an interrogation of myths of creativity supporting them (or not). Notwithstanding, the examination of the negative effects that prevailing myths of artistic activity and the 'artistic personality' have had on women is, undoubtedly, an issue of significant cultural value.

representation of the male protagonists as 'feminine' and the female ones as 'masculine' stresses the oppressive homogeneity and stereotyping of conventional gender models in their society. Is it not another dissident exposure of the *telos* of gendered social integration developed by the *Bildungsroman*?[39]

The second difference is in the conflict between art and life: Beebe's 'divided self'. For women, this is translated as a choice between procreativity and artistic creativity; for men, it is between sensual/sexual activity and general involvement with people or abstinence and isolation.[40] Both men's and women's conflicts of 'lifestyle' have to do, it would seem, with ambivalent desires and a theory of energy: either withdrawal of energy into the self increases the overall 'amount' or there is increase of energy from encounters with other people.

The third difference is the relation (or non-relation) of the artist character to others of the same sex. The importance of examining this aspect cannot be overemphasized for women's narratives, especially in view of Huf's readings of these relations between women writers and their friends or mothers, who not only do not lend themselves as role models but also actively discourage artistic activity. Together with the fourth difference of difficult relations to men (who, rather than being an inspiration or Muse as women are in men's *Künstlerromane*, are downright unsupportive, and even obstacles when in love with the artist heroines), this is the cause of Huf's saying that women have needed to give birth to themselves again in order to become artists. There are a few exceptions to the otherwise generally valid last two differences. Amongst the *Künstlerinromane* written in English, for instance, H.D.'s *Palimpsest* specifically includes a male Muse in the first narrative, while much of the direct or indirect hindrances from men are subject to positive reinterpretations and reversals.[41]

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39 This is a feature common to men's *Bildungsromane* at least. In *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), Rita Felski points out the modifications and reversals which differentiate women's *Bildungsromane*. Rather than end in marriage and acquiescence to social norms, the female protagonist takes these as starting points for oppositional developments. 'The goal of the protagonist's journey and the text is an identity which is more or less explicitly defined in terms of a notion of broader female community, and it is this which can be said to identify the genre as distinctively feminist' (138). These features of oppositional *Bildung* are also shared by women's *Künstlerinromane*; nevertheless, it has just as much to do with the oppositional stance taken by the Romantic *Künstlerroman* to the *Bildungsroman*.

40 Susan Gubar offers an exploration of the importance of childbearing and the scientific discourses on reproduction in some *Künstlerinromane* in 'The Birth of the Artist as Heroine: (Re)production, the *Künstlerroman* Tradition, and the Fiction of Katherine Mansfield', *The Representation of Women in Fiction; Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1981*, eds. Carolyn G. Heilbrun and Margaret R. Higonnet (Baltimore, Maryland and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).

41 A notable exception to the unsupportive male role is Friedrich Schlegel's *Lucinde* (1799), in which there is mutual support and inspiration between Julius and

Finally, what Huf deems the 'radicalism' of women's artist novels turns out to be that the woman artist is also an enemy to herself, compelled to hate herself (rather than indulge in narcissistic self-love) precisely for choosing, or even thinking of choosing, to be an artist. The reason for this is that she feels she must reject her 'womanhood' as a result. Although the 'radicalism' of this aspect is not explained by Huf, I presume it lies in the explicit textualization of the suffocating constraints of gender stereotypes, which virtually dictate against (public) artistic activity. In the *Künstlerroman*, no such direct antithesis is said to be made between 'manhood' and artistic practice.

This is a brief outline of the difficulties and the possibilities which I find unexplored by Huf's exposition of the five differences between male and female artist novels. Another limitation of Huf's discussion is that all five differences are aspects of character or character relations. No attention is given to the language or narrative construction of the novel, apart from the purely referential work on the three main images that recur in women's novels. These are images of monsters, of entrapment and of flight. Huf ascribes a symbolic meaning to these prevalent and recurrent motifs but, as Freud said of the interpretation of dream images, this alone is inadequate. The radicalism of women's narratives may well lie in the language of these images and the movements of metonymy and metaphor in the narration. Huf's work does not reflect on the linguistic constitution of subjectivity nor especially on the positive inscriptions of gender interrelations and intertextual references to other women's artist novels.

These issues, I would therefore argue, cannot be adequately recognized without attention to what has been called the metafictional dimension of the text. My approach differs precisely in attributing key importance to this dimension of the *Künstlerinroman*; for what such a reading reveals is moreover the principle distinction between this genre and the various related and often overlapping novelistic forms: the *Bildungsroman*, *Entwicklungsroman*, *Enziehungsroman*, autobiography and memoirs. Readings of the *Künstlerroman* genre have focused on the various character traits of the artist protagonist, and then extrapolated from these the variations of narrative form. Instead, I will be attending to these novels' metafictional discourse as an aesthetic discourse on the sublime. This discourse, I argue, is not coincidental, but has been constitutive of the Romantic *Künstlerinroman* with a writer protagonist since Madame de Staël's *Corinne ou L'Italie.*

Overtly metafictional novels are based on the double and oppositional principle to construct 'fictional illusion' with one hand and to expose it with the other.[42]

Lucinde, the two painters married to each other. Nevertheless, in the (unfinished) *Maler-(in)roman Lucinde*, Julius is the main concern and Lucinde is his Muse in the developing Romantic religion of art and love.

42 Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 6.

The metafictional dimension of the *Künstlerinroman* is not, at least primarily, one which 'lays bare its condition of artifice'.[43] Although it is characteristic of many postmodernist novels to expose or to even explode narrative conventions, fictitiousness and artifice and their relation to life, and though literary self-consciousness is pervasive in much literature (not only of the twentieth century), the *Künstlerinroman*'s most defining metafictional discourse has a different agenda. The metafictional discourse on the sublime, by which I claim it is to be recognized, is a *metaliterary* language. It is interested in its own aesthetic production, and in subjectivity in relation to the sublime, more than in questions of fictionality: hence its (re)production of the language of aesthetic discourses on the sublime. *Künstlerinromane* do not only create a fiction and 'simultaneously [...] make a statement about the creation of that fiction'.[44] It is more precise to say that they create a fiction, usually of the development of an artist (a writer in our case), which also leads them to make (subjective) statements about the creation of all literature. What does it mean (for something) to become writing, (for someone, a woman) to become a writer? These questions are central to *Corinne ou L'Italie* and *Aurora Leigh*, but become even more explicit in *Palimpsest*, *Nachdenken über Christa T.* and *L'Amant*. Because the metafictional cannot be dissociated from the fictional discourse of the *Künstlerinroman* without incurring great losses of meaning and ultimately without losing its socio-historical traces, I will be reading them together, through each other.

So much is the *Künstlerinroman* informed by metafictional discourse that Gayle Greene has studied the 'feminist *Kunstlerroman*' as 'the most developed form' of 'feminist metafiction'.[45] However, Greene essentially identifies the genre as 'feminist *Künstlerroman*', acknowledging the early twentieth-century 'versions' of it from Grace Stewart's study, but seeing 'its fullest expression during the second wave of feminism'.[46] This focus on exploring a specifically 'feminist *Künstlerroman*' (in English) that exploits metafictional devices to revise realist and male-oriented fictions and conventions differentiates her study clearly from the one undertaken in this book. Although we both recognize the great importance

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43 Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 4.

44 Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 6.

45 Gayle Greene, *Changing the Story: Feminist Fiction and the Tradition* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 9. Greene studies a set of (English, Canadian and American) 'self-begetting novels', ones which end with the protagonist about to write the novel at hand; furthermore, the protagonists are already professional writers whose 'interrogation of narrative convention is the correlative of their efforts to live unconventionally' (Greene, pp. 16, 17). Greene considers their 'Künstlerromane' feminist, despite their authors' (with the exception of Margaret Laurence) refusal to identify their work or themselves as feminist. The rationale for their novels being feminist is that they overtly engage in destabilizing and reshaping fictional conventions (via 'metafictional devices') 'in a way that is related to gender' (Greene, pp. 1, 25).

46 Greene, *Changing the Story*, p. 9.

for feminist criticism of female writers' participation in the *Künstler(in)roman* genre, a different historical and geographical scope is ascribed to women's production, and different criteria are formulated for generic recognition. On the other hand, these differences may also have to do with the particular strand of the *Künstlerinroman* we are interested in. For me, it is the Romantic novel of becoming a writer which maintains its metafictional discourse on the sublime; for Greene, it is the twentieth-century Anglo-American feminist novel that deploys postmodernist metafictional strategies of disruption and revision. More to the point, Greene's study considers the feminist metafictional genre of the *Künstlerinroman* to have been an active political force which had 'vision' and '*changed people's lives*' but to be a finished phase since the eighties.[47] In accordance with my understanding of the *Künstlerinroman*, feminism of the 1960s/70s would only have been one kind of dominant discourse that was manifest in the genre's metafictional discourse. The fading of this kind of feminist discourse in no way narrows the *Künstlerinroman*'s interest for feminist critics. Greene defines her work as 'gynocritical': 'it reads women writers in relation to one another and in relation to history'.[48] Though this is an elliptical and innocuous version of Elaine Showalter's term, I nevertheless would hesitate to describe the present study as an example of gynocriticism.[49]

It may all finally be a matter of dispute about what is considered to be at stake in the *Künstlerinroman*. Because *Künstlerinromane* are read, more often than not, in isolation, they are usually read purely as *Bildungsromane* and/or often, in turn, as thinly disguised autobiographies. It would appear that failure to attend to the *Künstlerinroman* as a genre detracts attention from the intricacies of the text. As a modern genre, it is best described as inclusive rather than exclusive. In effect, *Künstlerinromane* invariably rely on other dominant and popular genres of their time in order to take shape; there is always one dominant genre by which the *Künstlerin* narrative is shaped; however, this co-existence is subject to interactive transformations. None of the participating discourses or genres suffers reduction from this 'generic' reading, whether it be sage discourse, confessional, (auto)biographical or *Bildung* genres, as my readings aim to demonstrate.[50]

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47 Greene, *Changing the Story*, pp. 27, 193.

48 Greene, *Changing the Story*, p. 25.

49 I share Toril Moi's reservations and objections to the humanist and anti-theoretical aspects of Showalter's term in her book *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990). Furthermore, I believe the term to have become redundant or even anti-productive for a feminist perspective today, though it may well have been enabling at first.

50 A more general approach to the *Künstlerinroman* is demonstrated in *Writing the Woman Artist: Essays in Poetics, Politics and Portraiture*, ed. Susan W. Jones (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991). The essays collected examine a wide variety of *Künstlerin* narratives, whether novels, autobiography or poetry, with protagonists of different arts. The texts are read from different critical and thematic angles. Neither the

The interest in a study of the *Künstlerinroman* today lies otherwise than in a methodical reading of as many individual examples as possible in the hope of such an overview producing a set of homogeneous common traits, with universal truths for women writers. This is why the novels chosen here are disparate (not belonging to the same era or place), a selection which discourages the idea of a homogeneous group often implied by national boundaries but still reveals influences and common traits in the generic preoccupations. The project is to allow the *Künstlerinromane* to be studied alongside other theoretical texts (of a philosophical or psychoanalytic tradition) written by both men and women. The purpose of this is not for the theoretical texts to provide an interpretive framework but, as will become evident, to illustrate the more productive and illuminating readings such a dialogue could generate for both theoretical texts and *Künstlerinromane*. Analyses, arguments and theories encountered here do not pretend to be automatically valid for all (Romantic) *Künstlerromane*. Where the novels make significant allusions or display significant affinities to other *Künstler(in)romane*, this will be mentioned and briefly discussed. There will therefore be no general 'poetics' or 'aesthetics' to be extracted from these women's novels with female protagonists. Neither the poetics of these *Künstlerinromane* nor their aesthetic discourse is generalizable to all *Künstler(in)romane*; each novel produces its own poetics, which is inextricably linked to its particular discourse on the sublime.

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essays nor the editor's introduction considers the *Künstlerinroman* from the perspective offered here, of its conjunction with the aesthetics of the sublime, precisely because of the diversity of texts which have different aesthetic and literary affiliations. What also distinguishes the collection from this study is that the form and genealogy of the *Künstlerinroman* are not considered, but more or less taken for granted. The shared basis of the texts is simply their female artist protagonist and female author.

Chapter 1

The Sublime Subject of *Corinne ou L'Italie*

Corinne, the female genius protagonist of Madame de Staël's *Künstlerinroman*, *Corinne ou L'Italie* (1807) is asked early in the novel which of her poetry she prefers: 'those which are the work of reflection or of instantaneous inspiration?'[1] The language which Corinne makes recourse to in her response is precisely the modern language of the aesthetic discourse of her age.[2] Here we have an Italian-English heroine in a book written in French, promulgating German philosophical aesthetics for the understanding and appreciation of the arts. The occasion for her reflections is an informal 'interview' by her friends and admirers during a social *soirée* at her house, which in the novel is a meeting place for enthusiasts of the arts and for Italian patriots. These digressions where Corinne engages in short speeches and discussions on art, aesthetics, poetics, culture and politics are indeed the rule informing the novel. Corinne concludes her lengthy consideration with the following observation:

> Enfin je me sens poëte, non pas seulement quand un heureux choix de rimes ou de syllabes harmonieuses, quand une heureuse réunion d'images éblouit des auditeurs, mais quand mon âme s'élève, quand elle dédaigne de plus haut l'egoïsme et la bassesse, enfin quand une belle action me serait plus facile: c'est alors que mes vers sont meilleurs. Je suis poëte lorsque j'admire, lorsque je méprise, lorsque je hais, non par des sentiments personnels, non pour ma propre cause, mais pour la dignité de l'espèce humaine et la gloire du monde.[3]
>
> [Finally, I feel I am a poet, not only when a felicitous choice of harmonious rhymes or syllables, when a felicitous reunion of images dazzles the listeners, but when my soul is uplifted, when it disdains from the highest

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1 Madame Germaine Necker de Staël, *Corinne ou L'Italie* (Paris: Édition Gallimard, 1985), p. 84.

2 By the time of the publication of *Corinne*, Madame de Staël had written a significant and influential work of literary scholarship, *On Literature in its Relations with Social Institutions* (1800). This book was original in considering literature from a comparative perspective and in relation to social and political formations; what is more, it spoke for a new, modern poetics, encouraging writers to abandon classicism. *On Literature* firmly qualifies de Staël as an important literary critic seeking the development of a more 'genuine' French literature. Soon, however, she is to enhance her views by making an intellectual pilgrimage to Germany in her thirst for greater learning and enlightenment. In preparation for the later study *On Germany* (1813), she conversed and corresponded with, amongst others, Charles de Villers, the 'author of a scholarly study of Kant's philosophy' (Renée Winegarten, *Madame de Staël* [Leamington Spa: Berg, 1985], p. 60).

3 Madame de Staël, *Corinne*, p. 85.

> point egoism and lowness, briefly, when a beautiful act would be more effortless: that is when my verses are best. I am a poet when I admire, when I feel contempt, when I hate, not out of my own personal sentiments, not for my own self, but for the dignity of humankind and the glory of the world.]

In effect, Corinne's answer has transposed the terms of the question from which poems are better to what *attitude of mind* corresponds to her sense of 'being' a poet. This sense creates a temporary identification of herself as poet which although clearly not grounded on the mere production of beautiful poems is validated by poetic writing of the highest order.

Corinne was written after Madame de Staël's *sojourn* in Weimar, where she sought out and learned from the eminent German writers and philosophers of the time. Thus, *Corinne ou L'Italie* has its roots in both French Enlightenment, of which Madame Germaine Necker de Staël was a genuine product, and its supercession in Rousseau. Rousseau's work exerted a great influence on the young Germaine. Her first published work was *Lettres sur Jean-Jacques Rousseau* in 1788. Considering how German Romanticism was first to take up and develop Rousseau's Romanticism, it is not surprising that she looked there instead for the most exciting and important European aesthetic activity of the time.

In her book on Madame de Staël, Renée Winegarten states that '*Corinne* remains one of the greatest myth-making books of all time'.[4] The myth alluded to is that of the *female* 'genius', who is at the same time a *belle souffrante*, for the novel could not otherwise accomplish the mythic union of genius and femininity. Corinne dazzles her lover Oswald, the Scottish gentleman, with her poetic genius and erudition, but despite her acclaimed womanly charms and his coming from the land of Ossian, she must lose him to her foil, Lucile, Corinne's younger sister. Lucile has understanding and intelligence without troublesome independence and keen judgement. She is beautiful but innocent and, most of all, her husband would be the centre of her universe. The poetic genius Corinne, on the other hand, requires the public sphere as a platform and stage to speak and act.[5]

Is this need for a public mere narcissistic exhibitionism, as Ellen Moers

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4 Winegarten, *Madame de Staël*, p. 87.

5 Battersby is deeply sceptical about using the term 'genius' for the ends of feminist aesthetics. *Gender and Genius* presents a critical historical study of the misogynous genesis and use of the term from Roman antiquity to the present in an attempt to trace the lack of recognition accorded to significant art by women throughout Western, at least, European history. A knowledge of the historical meanings attributed through the ages is judged essential as many of these persist in our symbolic vocabulary today. Battersby concludes that of the 'five separate strands in our modern usage of the term "genius" [...] only *one* [...] can be utilised for feminist ends' (*Gender*, p. 225). This is the one least 'contaminated by past usage', in which it is either a 'personality type' (Romanticism), 'a specific mode of consciousness' (pre-Romantics), a form of (sexual) energy, or a 'potential for eminence' (from the early eighteenth century to modern IQ tests); all these bear ineradicable essentialist elements (*Gender*, pp. 225–226).

suggests, or a realistic condition for 'genius'?[6] Christine Battersby puts forward what can perhaps be an unbiased, pragmatic notion of genius which, if one must employ the term, would not exclude women: 'A person's cultural achievement is evaluated and assessed against an appropriate background of artistic genres and traditions. The genius is the person whose work (a) marks the boundary between old ways and the new within the tradition, and (b) has lasting value and significance'.[7] Of course, Battersby recognizes that there are practical conditions for even this being possible. Who will be making these evaluations and with what models from tradition? How and by whom will 'lasting significance' be measured? Issues of creativity bound up with the descriptive (or essentialist) meanings rather than the performative (or pragmatic) attached to the term 'genius' are abandoned by Battersby as too fraught. In *Corinne*, the portrait of genius contains both romantic glamour and the Romantic defence against social marginalization of the non-conformist individual. Her poetic genius is also corroborated in a performative sense: she has great learning and appreciation of the arts; she has made a plethora of creative contributions to the literary arts and this work is highly esteemed by the Italian people and professional critics. The degree to which genius is evaluated by performative criteria is first of all evident in the scene in which

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6 Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1976). Moers alternately praises and castigates *Corinne ou L'Italie*; though devoting an entire chapter to the far-reaching influence of the novel on subsequent female writers, she also levels stern and almost puritanical 'reprimands' for the extravagance of the plot and its heroine, thus missing entirely the novel's affiliation to the romance tradition. For instance, the insistent representations of the public acclaim and enthusiasm for Corinne is likened to the exaggerated praise for 'amateur entertainment girls are required to provide in the domestic circle' because Germaine too, as 'spoiled child' had 'an Oedipus complex of such dimensions as to stimulate Napoleon's derision, but also [...] a lifelong greed, as reflexive as that of a salivating dog, for the food of applause' (Moers, p. 197). Even if we decide to proceed with such a 'psycho-biographic' reading of the novel, we would have to be more thorough and so include the complementary information of how this 'beloved father, who disapproved of feminine self-expression [...] would call the little girl scribbling her first essays "Monsieur de Sainte-Escritoire" (Lord Holy-Desk)' (cited in Karyna Szmurlo, 'Germaine Necker, Baronne de Staël [1766–1817]', eds. Eva Martin Sartori and Dorothy Wynne Zimmerman, *French Women Writers* [Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1991]). Indeed, the entire attitude of Moers' attempt to 'try to take Corinne seriously' is summed up by this introductory statement: '*Corinne* stands alone in Mme de Staël's *oeuvre*, in its silliness as in its enormous influence upon literary women' (Moers, p. 174). Nevertheless, the traces of Corinne are pursued from George Eliot's Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss* and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* to the writers Fanny Burney, Hannah More, Mary Berry, Maria Edgeworth, Kate Chopin, Charlotte Brontë, Letitia E. Landon, George Sand and Willa Cather; indeed any writer is examined who claims the influence or mere reading of *Corinne*, and finally any text where there is a female character who is an artist. For this work of historical scholarship, we can only be indebted to Moers, the 'repayment' of which also demands attention to its drawbacks of literary insight and context.

7 Battersby, *Gender and Genius*, p. 226.