ABSTRACT

TRANSCENDING GENDER: ON THE FEMALE ARTIST NOVEL

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By definition, artists used to be exclusively of the the male gender. The literary genre which since the end of the 18th century went by the name of ”artist novel”, or Künstlerroman, thus only depicted male protagonists. During the 19th century, a few female protagonists appeared in novels written by female authors. But a delicate similarity between the female characters in male artist novels and the female protagonists in female artist novels is apparent: the women die like flies.
Why is this? Well, in the first case of the male artist novel, it had to do with the artist needing a female muse. The best one was a dead one according to for instance Edgar Allan Poe, who claimed that a dead beauty led to the most sublime inspiration. In the second case of the female novel, the large quantity of deaths had to do with the fact that the artist calling could not be combined with love and marriage – for women. If the female artist still ventured to try out the equation, she broke down and died.
The female artist who wanted to remain alive had to forego having a family, which was the traditional ingredient in the contemporaneous construction of femininity. Thus she had to transcend her gender, both in relation to society and in her own self-perception. The theory and practice of this is often discussed in the female artist novel, which I aim to analyse in my paper.