Father and Daughter across Europe: The Journeys of Clara Wieck Schumann and Artemisia Gentileschi in Fictionalised Biographies

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Abstract

German pianist Clara Wieck Schumann and Italian painter Artemisia Gentileschi were both tutored by their fathers from an early age and made their mark as great European artists. Their art took them both across the continent, where they met many other famous historical persons. Their lives have not only been recorded in biographies but have also been retold in several novels, or ‘fictionalised biographies’. The fictionalised biography is an interesting hybrid genre, placed somewhat uncomfortably between historiography and the art of fiction, which permits it to disregard certain expectations raised by so-called ‘factual’ biographies (e.g. that authors should strive for ‘objectivity’ or ‘truthfulness’). The relationship between fact and fiction can thus be re-negotiated, following the author’s ideological inclinations and their imaginative closure of historiographical gaps. Beginning with some general remarks on fictionalised biographies of ‘exemplary women’, this paper then examines Janice Galloway’s Clara (2002) and Susan Vreeland’s The Passion of Artemisia (2002), focusing on the complex father–daughter relationships that Clara Wieck Schumann and Artemisia Gentileschi undoubtedly experienced, and which offered the authors ample ground for a critique of historical gender relations and hierarchies. The analyses will concentrate on the heroines’ journeys in Europe. The paper examines the ways in which the two fictional rewritings of historical women artists’ lives foreground gender aspects and make use of the narrative privileges of fictionalised biography to project contemporary feminist ideas onto historical characters and events, and explores the function of the featured European locales with regard to the protagonists’ personal development in the novels. The heroines’ ventures into foreign lands are revealed to function as an impulse towards a changing perception of their fathers as well as themselves.

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Julia Novak is a lecturer of English Literature at the University of Vienna and founder and artistic director of Vienna Lit, a literary society dedicated to the promotion of literature/s in English. She has written a book on reading groups, Gemeinsam Lesen: die Buchgruppe als soziales Phänomen und ökonomische Triebkraft (2007), and a book entitled Live Poetry: An Integrated Approach to Poetry in Performance (2011).
Read this essay on Artemisia Gentileschi. Come browse our large digital warehouse of free sample essays. Get the knowledge you need in order to pass your classes and more. Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1653) Considered one of the most important artists of the Baroque movement in Early Modern Europe, Artemisia Gentileschi, had to prove herself and break down the boundaries for a woman in a male dominated field. Artemisia was born in Rome on July 8, 1953 to Orazio and Prudentia Monotone Gentileschi, who died when the artist was only twelve years of age. Orazio, upon learning of this horrible crime committed against his daughter filed an injury and damage lawsuit against Tassi, which is clearly documented in the transcripts of the seven-month long trial. Father and daughter were once again working together, although helping her father was probably not her only reason for traveling to London. Bissell, R. Ward. Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art: Critical Reading and Catalogue Raisonne. Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000. ISBN 978–0271021201. Christiansen, Keith and Judith W. Mann. Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001. ISBN 978–0300090772. Garrard, Mary D. Artemisia Gentileschi: Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art. Princeton University Press, 1989. —. Artemisia Gentileschi. Princeton University Press, 1991. ISBN 978–0691002859. —. Artemisia Gentileschi Around 1622: The Shaping and Reshaping of an Artistic Identity. Today, Artemisia is a magnet for feminist scholars and the subject of three fictional biographies, a film, a play, and an Italian tour package. Stops in Rome include the Gentileschi house and studio where she was raped at 17 by her father’s co-worker, who was tried and sentenced to exile. The public trial overshadowed Artemisia's art career, but she persevered. Orazio Gentileschi (1563–1639) trained and promoted his daughter and for a time eclipsed her in fame. But today, few know him except connoisseurs. This first in-depth survey of the Gentileschi family lets their paintings speak