

Challenging the script?

Transformation and education in GDR youth literature

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School of MLAL Research Seminar
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5.15pm
Venue: SG19

Within twelve months of the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989, Germany had been reunited and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) officially consigned to history. The speed of reunification, and the Unification Treaty's stipulation that the education system within the new federal states be rapidly aligned with West German models, drew a temporary veil over the many differences in education experienced east and west, not least by the first generation to come of age in the new Berlin Republic.

Education in its widest sense, whether informal or formal, within the family or state institutions such as the school, helps shape how individuals and societies perceive the world and their place within it, how they establish their value systems and determine what constitutes a life well lived. Literature, too, contributes to this education process, as it both informs, and is informed by, the culture within which it emerges. The literature of the GDR provides an interesting example of particularly purposeful creative writing: for forty years, it was strongly influenced by state cultural politics, yet, within twelve months, the societal framework which drove it had been dismantled, and the country and its culture subsumed into another, at once historically related yet ideologically opposed, national entity. GDR youth literature is particularly fascinating, in that it helped shape the societal values and priorities of nearly one fifth of the enlarged German population in their formative years and yet receives little critical attention.

Based on a range of GDR novels for young people which explore themes of transformation and education in both informal and formal settings, and drawing on Mander's interpretation of schema theory, this seminar examines the extent to which dominant scripts forwarded within GDR cultural policy may also be evidenced in literature for young people from the 1950s onwards and explores how these initially normative scripts are increasingly challenged in such literature, well in advance of similar critical developments in adult literature.

ALL WELCOME

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