

Literature and Film of the German Democratic Republic (in English)

OLLI@Berkeley, Winter 2017

Mondays, January 23-March 6, 2017, 10:00 am - 12:00 pm (no class on February 20)
University Hall 41B

Two Germanys developed after World War II, each with its own politics, literature, and culture. In this interactive seminar, we'll explore popular East German literature and film of the 1960s and '70s and discuss its dynamic, magical, marginal, social critical, realistic and subversive subtexts. How did authors and filmmakers represent ambiguities and complexities of the socialist German Democratic Republic (GDR), the "place of wondrous things," as Irmtraud Morgner put it so eloquently?

We'll study autobiographical narratives by East German women of diverse generations, read excerpts of GDR's classical novels, such as Christa Wolf's *They Divided The Sky*, Irmtraud Morgner's *The Life and Adventures of Trobadora Beatrice*, and Jurek Becker's *Jacob the Liar*. We'll also watch Frank Beyer's filmic version of *Jacob the Liar*, which became an international success, and enjoy Heiner Carow's cult film *The Legend of Paul and Paula*.

Format

I highly recommend that you study assigned texts in preparation for each session (approximately 50 pages per week). Conducted in English, this seminar is comprised of close reading and discussion in small groups, short lectures and facilitated whole group discussions. I will make weekly handouts with background information and guiding study questions for reflection as well as additional resources available to the class. A course reader (hard copy) will be available in December 2016 and may be purchased for \$15 plus tax at Instant Copying & Laser Printing, 2138 University Ave, Berkeley, CA 94704, Telephone (510) 704-9700. For more information, please contact marion@gerlindinstitute.org.

January 23 Women's Voices in GDR Literature

Based on interviews spanning the 1970s to 1990s, we'll read excerpts of autobiographical narratives by East German women of diverse generations. The interviewers/authors let the women speak for themselves, making an effort to bridge the cultural, social and historical gaps between East and West Germans.

Maxie Wander. "Ute G., 24, Skilled Worker, Single, One Child." In *Daughters of Eve: Women's Writing from The German Democratic Republic*. Trans. and ed. Nancy Lukens and Dorothy Rosenberg. Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska Press, 1993. Pages 39-48. Print.

Irene Böhme. "Women and Socialism: Four Interviews." In *Daughters of Eve: Women's Writing from The German Democratic Republic*. Trans. and ed. Nancy Lukens and Dorothy Rosenberg. Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska Press, 1993. Pages 169-177. Print.

Elisabetta Covini. "Cos'è cambiato per le scrittrici dell'ex Germania est." in *Leggere Donna*. Italian literary magazine, Number 43, March-April 1993. Translated as "All Quiet on the

Literary Front" in *Connexions* 42 (1993): 17. Print.

Mindy Ridgway. "Christina Schenk, German Parliament Member: A Lesbian Socialist in a Capitalist Bastion." *San Francisco Bay Times*. June 2, 1994: 8, 10, 47. Print.

Claudia Schaab and Marion Gerlind. "A Lesbian Leftist Takes a Turn in Politics. An Interview with Christina Schenk." *Connexions* 45 (1994): 28-29, 36-37. Print.

January 30 Christa Wolf: *They Divided The Sky*

First published in 1963, in East Germany, *They Divided The Sky* tells the story of Rita and Manfred, a young heterosexual couple, living in the new, socialist, East Germany, whose relationship is tested to the extreme because of the differing political positions they hold and by the Berlin Wall, which was built on August 13, 1961. We'll study an excerpt of the novel and watch clips of the film.

Christa Wolf. *They Divided The Sky* [*Der geteilte Himmel*]. Trans. Luise von Flotow. Ottawa: U of Ottawa Press, 2013. Pages 3-50.

Der geteilte Himmel [The Divided Sky]. Dir. Konrad Wolf. DEFA, 1964

February 6 Heiner Carow's Cult Film *The Legend of Paul and Paula*

Carow's tragicomic East German film is based on Ulrich Plenzdorf's novel *Die Legende vom Glück ohne Ende* [The legend of never-ending happiness]. *Paul and Paula* was extremely popular in the GDR, but, due to its political overtones, it was nearly not released. It is considered one of the best-known East German films.

Die Legende von Paul und Paula [The Legend of Paul and Paula]. Dir. Heiner Carow. DEFA, 1973

February 13 Jurek Becker: *Jacob the Liar* (Novel)

Born in Łódź, Poland, in 1937, Becker survived the German occupation and concentration camps and grew up a German in the GDR. His first novel, *Jakob der Lügner* [*Jacob The Liar*], originally published in 1969, follows the life of the Jewish protagonist Jacob Heym in the ghetto of Łódź during World War II. Jacob, sent to the ghetto's infamous police station, overhears radio news reporting about the approaching Red Army, filling him with hope of liberation. Miraculously, Jacob is released and, figuring that nobody would believe him if he tells them a German officer let him go, pretends to possess a (forbidden) radio...

Jurek Becker. *Jacob The Liar* [*Jakob der Lügner*]. Trans. Leila Vennewitz. New York: Arcade Publishing Inc., 1996. Pages 1-47.

February 27 Frank Beyer: *Jacob the Liar* (Film)

This award-winning East German-Czechoslovakian Holocaust-related film is based on the novel of the same name by Jurek Becker. Never expected to be a commercial hit in cinemas, it was first aired on TV. It was seen by millions of viewers in the GDR and became an international success. Beyer's film was exported to twenty-five foreign states, a rare achievement for an East German film. It was bought by distributors in West Germany, Austria, Greece, Italy, the United States, Iran, Japan, Angola and Israel, among others.

Jakob der Lügner [*Jacob the Liar*]. Dir. Frank Beyer. DEFA, 1975.

March 6 Irmtraud Morgner: *The Life and Adventures of Trobadora Beatrice*

First published in 1974, *Life and Adventures of Trobadora Beatrice* is the story of Beatrice de Dia, a woman troubadour of twelfth-century Provence whom Morgner recreates with the help of characters and motifs from mythology, literature, fairy tales, medieval tapestries, and fantasy. Unhappy with the misogyny of the Middle Ages, Beatrice makes a pact with Persephone to sleep for 810 years, in order to wait for a time when women's equality will have been realized. After a rude awakening in France in 1968, a visiting journalist urges Beatrice to visit his native land, the GDR, assuring her that it is an ideal country where women are truly free and emancipated.

Irmtraud Morgner. *The Life and Adventures of Trobadora Beatrice as Chronicled by Her Minstrel Laura: A Novel in Thirteen Books and Seven Intermezzos* [*Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura: Roman in dreizehn Büchern und sieben Intermezzos*]. Trans. Jeanette Clausen. Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska Press, 2000. Pages 1-52.