

GFL



German as a foreign language

Intersections: young people, literature and culture

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Background

This special internationally refereed edition of *gfl* developed out of two conferences on youth literature and culture organised for the Association of Modern German Studies by Susan Tebbutt, Astrid-Küllmann-Lee, Norbert Pachler and Ulrike Cohen. The first was held in November 2000 at the London School of Economics and the second in June 2001 at the Goethe Institut in London. Whilst looking at theoretical and academic aspects of the literature and culture of young people, the contributors also drew attention to practical aspects of working with such material in the secondary and tertiary sector. Reports on the two conferences are to be found on the AMGS website (<http://www.amgs.org.uk/>).

Thanks are due to the London School of Economics Language Centre (<http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/language/>), the Goethe-Institut London (<http://www.goethe.de/gr/lon/enindex.htm>), the Austrian Cultural Forum (<http://www.austria.org.uk/culture/>) and the Swiss Embassy in London (http://www.eda.admin.ch/london_emb/e/home.html) for their support in this venture. The majority of articles in the volume were presented at the two conferences, and the others were specially commissioned. All the articles have undergone various degrees of editing and revision for publication, and I would like to thank the *gfl* editorial board, the reviewers and the contributors for their constructive input to the editing process.

Intersections, young people, literature and culture

Before going any further, it is necessary to point out that the English terms 'young people' and 'children' do not correspond exactly to the German terms 'Jugend' and 'Kinder'. So when is a child not a child? When is a young person no longer young? One of the differences between the German and English-speaking world is that in the German-speaking world students tend to complete their degrees at a later age than their British or American counterparts, and thus arguably consider themselves 'young' for longer, since they tend not to 'settle down' so early! Clearly any definition of 'young

people' is highly subjective, since each person has both a chronological age and a mental age (the age they feel they are), and there may be a huge difference between the two.

Given how hard it is to define 'young', it should come as no surprise that there are no precise English translations for the terms 'Jugendliteratur' and 'Jugendkultur', because in German the words act as collective terms for the literature and culture of teenagers *and* very young children, whilst also being used as specialised terms relating only to the literature or culture of/for teenagers and young people (see Tebbutt 1994: 13-17).

Literature, as will become clear in this volume, and *Jugendliteratur* in particular, is not confined to the world of books. Magazines or broadsheets have always been part of the reading matter enjoyed by young people, and in the late twentieth century there are also other forms of accessing literary works. CD-ROMs, films, videos and cassettes may offer versions of works of literature, and the comparison and contrast of a book and film of the same work may offer additional insights into the strengths and weaknesses of each genre. Right up until almost the end of the twentieth century these 'intermedial' forms have not been recognised by academic researchers as worthy of examination in their own right.

It is not only intermediality which has been largely ignored until the twenty-first century. The world of young people has also been marginalized in German Studies, and few undergraduate modules treat the area with the respect it deserves. Burns' pioneering work *German Cultural Studies* (1995) does provide a historical analysis of the roots of high and low culture in Weimar Germany (1995: 37-52), and the importance of social change in the emergence of a multicultural society in the post-war period. There is a clear understanding here that there are different cultures associated with different classes, genders and ethnicities, but almost no account is taken of the cultures of different age-groups. Constrained by the space available and the width of the field of German Cultural Studies, Burns is only able to devote approximately one page to rock music from the 1970s onwards (1998: 312-313). In this *gfl* special edition Dave Robb (who is familiar with the music scene from a practical as well as a theoretical point of view) not only provides more up-to-date information but is also able to offer a differentiated analysis of the many issues associated with the playing and reception of techno.

Although Denham/Kacandes/Petropoulos' *A User's Guide to German Cultural Studies* (1997) does not include any chapters which deal specifically with youth culture or literature, Ortmeier, himself a political scientist, offers useful paradigms on interdisciplinary teaching with the case-study method (1997: 417-430) which could be used to pursue research into any of the areas presented in this *gfl* special edition. Ortmeier believes that case-study learning promotes the development of critical thinking, decision making and the application of theoretical concepts to practical cases, and a number of such applications will be explored in the course of the articles.¹

It is significant that very few Germanists are at present engaged in research relating specifically to the culture or literature of young people in the German-speaking world, and thus the following articles open up new avenues of research. The three main themes are:

1. Theoretical approaches to children's literature (Pachler and O'Sullivan)
2. The intersection of the historical and the contemporary (Vloeberghs and Steinke)
3. Magazines, CD-ROMs and music (Wörsching, Rosa and Robb)

1. Theoretical approaches to children's literature

At a time when the ISRCL (International Society for Research into Children's Literature) is gaining in status and there is an awareness of the intersections between the world of children and the world of adults, it is important to look at the study of *Jugendliteratur* and the options in terms of methods of analysis and evaluation.

Norbert Pachler gives a clear overview of the different approaches and attitudes to *Jugendliteratur* and the problems inherent in evaluating what makes a 'good' work. These debates are particularly important because students who are over the age of 16 may well be reading books in German which have a main target audience of much younger readers. The linguistic level of difficulty of the German language must be taken into account, but other more aesthetic, historical or literary criteria should not be thrown overboard, since students will react best to works which do heighten awareness.

¹ Strictly speaking, the article is not about 'German Cultural Studies' at all, but is useful in opening up the disciplinary boundaries.

Although the classics of German literature are still taught at many universities, many schools, colleges and universities are moving to introduce a selection of works of *Jugendliteratur*, be it in the form of fictional works, non-fiction works for teenagers or magazines, CD-ROMs or videos aimed at teenage markets. Given that students may be reading works which were not originally written with their age-group in mind, it is important that the lecturer or teacher sets out clearly how the texts are to be approached. In presenting the current debates on these approaches Pachler offers a range of angles from which the works can be viewed. As in all courses, a clear sense of the aims and objectives is crucial to the students' sense of achievement. They need to know why they are studying a text, what is expected of them, and how they should go about researching, and both students and teachers should find Pachler's explanation of the possible routes through *Jugendliteratur* very helpful.

Pachler also deals with the modern developments and intersections between the world of books and other media (see also Wörsching and Rosa's articles) and reminds us that young people today have grown up with magazines, television and CD-ROMs and may respond more enthusiastically if work on the traditional literary text is complemented by access to other media.

Emer O'Sullivan provides a wide-ranging introduction to her pioneering work in the field of comparative children's literature studies, illustrated by brief examples of case studies. This whole field has enormous potential in the world of *Deutsch als Fremdsprache*, since students of German as a foreign language generally spend at least a semester in a German-speaking country, where they are expected to conduct some research, usually into a topic of their own choosing. The translation or adaptation of works of English children's literature in German-speaking countries and the translation or adaptation of works of German children's literature in English-speaking countries is surely an area which students could explore during their year or semester abroad. Such studies could relate to linguistic, thematic or literary concerns. O'Sullivan shows very convincingly how much can be learned by a close comparison of two texts.

One other area which O'Sullivan explores is that of image studies (Steinke shows in her article how much there is to be learnt about the image of the GDR in works of children's literature), and here again there is scope for students to tackle a topic which concerns them personally. For example, a student of German and Spanish might choose to investigate the image of Spain in a work of German teenage fiction.

Image studies need not be confined to nationality issues, but could relate to any group which may be perceived by some as 'other', be it on the grounds of physical or mental disability, religion or gender (this overlaps with Wörsching's approach to the study of the representation of gender in advertising). Image studies could also relate to comparisons of the representation of children in old and contemporary texts.

2. The intersection of the historical and the contemporary

The *Association of Modern German Studies* exists to promote a forward-looking approach to German studies, whether the subject matter of the research is historical or contemporary, and **Katrien Vloeberghs** shows how it is possible to apply modern theories to the classics of German children's literature. Although picture-books are sometimes erroneously considered to be the easiest books for students of German as a foreign language, there is no doubt that illustrations encourage an interest in a text even before the text has been understood. Vloeberghs illustrates how an in-depth study of the role of the narrator can be extremely productive. This approach could be applied to a number of different picture books, and would ensure that students have clear objectives when they are reading or studying texts. A careful examination of different layers of meaning in picture-books can also help students appreciate nuances of meaning, which in turn will help with tasks like translation into English.

Whilst the intersection between the historical (e.g. the nineteenth century work of literature) and the modern (the new critical approach to literature) is immediately apparent, there is a blurring of boundaries when it comes to looking at contemporary works about aspects of twentieth century German history. There has been a tendency from the late 1980s onwards for students of German as a foreign language to take a somewhat simplistic approach to the study of works of socially critical *Jugendliteratur* on topics such as the Holocaust, the position of *Gastarbeiter* in society, or life in the GDR. When students are asked to write about what they learn about particular issues from the novels this unfortunately reinforces the idea that the works are merely transmitting factual information. They are, of course, works of fiction, and it is important to appreciate the ideology behind the narrative stance.

Gabriela Steinke makes this point very effectively in her article on the representation of the *Wende* in German children's literature. The study of the turbulent events leading

to the fall of the Wall forms part of almost every course on contemporary Germany today. Steinke shows how teenage novels dealing with these events need to be viewed with caution. Whereas it would be much more obvious that a German work set in Asia, Africa or Latin America was written from the perspective of the outsider, the differences between the East and West German perspectives in children's literature have not been explored before. Students might well apply Steinke's approach to adult literature and look at the differences in works produced at different points in time after the *Wende*. Steinke (like Vloeberghs) emphasises how important it is to analyse the narrative voice, and reminds us that young people do not like works which are patronising or too overtly 'instructional'.

Although initially much of the culture and literature of the GDR was considered routinely pro-state and lacking in individuality and therefore as uniform as some of the prefabricated housing estates in which some of the heroes and heroines grew up, Steinke illustrates how it is possible to use an analysis of ideological positions in novels to point out how colonial the attitudes of authors often were.

3. Magazines, CD-ROMs and music

The articles on youth magazines, CD-ROMs and music produced by or for young people contain areas of overlap. The most significant element is the analysis of gender stereotypes used to promote products in teenage magazines and the gender issues raised with reference to CD-ROMs and techno music.

Martha Wörsching uses a combination of approaches based in gender, media, advertising and youth studies to give unusual insights into images of masculinity and femininity in advertisements in teenage magazines, a genre sometimes considered less worthy than the book. (It is important to remember that much literature for children was originally published in instalments.)

Students could easily use Wörsching's approach to conduct a comparative study of images of masculinity and femininity in English-language magazines for teenagers (see Schnittenhelm (1999) for an analysis of gender differences and education, and Williamson 1978 and Dyer 1982 for more general studies of advertising and communication). The world of advertising changes very quickly, which means that students could conduct very similar research to that done by Wörsching, and even if the

same magazines are used it is likely that the results would be very different. Obviously students can work with different magazines and may choose to focus not on gender, but, say, on images of old people.

Since much advertising is visual, such a study would also lend itself to the preparation of presentations using Powerpoint. It is now recognised that students of modern languages are now at a distinct advantage when it comes to looking for employment since they have so many 'transferable skills', and any opportunity to develop such skills should be grasped. Research into the world of German advertising could thus help students with their ability to summarise, use visual aids, and talk without many notes, skills which have applications far beyond the limits of German studies.

The last two articles relate to contemporary developments in youth culture. **Carol Rosa** explores the excitement and hazards facing the student of German who attempts to click their way round the world of the CD-ROM. With many German-language titles appearing every year on the market, Rosa's user-friendly guide gives ideas on the features which are most relevant to the non-traditional 'users' wishing to improve their German as well as have fun or broaden their horizons. Students and teachers might wish to compare and contrast books and CD-ROMs or analyse gender issues in adaptations of children's books.

Within the field of non-fiction CD-ROMS there are many which may be used as source material for project or course work, such as that relating to the Anne Frank House, and students may then be encouraged to research their topic further using the various search engines on the internet. Rosa points out that research has shown that CD-ROMs can actually have a very positive influence on children's attitudes to reading, and the same would apply to the attitudes of those students learning German as a foreign language, who may be more motivated to delve further if their first introduction in the German language to a particular subject area is via the 'fun' medium of the CD-ROM.

The final article examines the development of techno music in Germany and its relationship to the traditional stranglehold of American popular music in Europe. **Dave Robb**, himself a successful musician, has a close knowledge of the musical and theatrical dimensions of techno music, and points out that since 2000 the Berlin Love Parade has been 'exported' to other countries — the success or otherwise of these ventures could form the core of further research. Robb shows how it is possible to

combine historical, sociological and cultural studies to provide a multi-layered analysis of the musical scene. The question of the relationship between underground and overground movements in German culture is one which is hard to investigate from a distance, as Robb's study shows. Students wish to derive maximum benefit from their period of residence in a German-speaking country, and this is the sort of topic which lends itself to the ethnographic approach. An analysis of the relationship between producer and consumer of culture could, for example, be based on a series of interviews conducted with those involved.

For students of International Business there are further avenues to be explored relating to the commercial sponsorship of techno and other forms of German contemporary music or to the income generated by large-scale musical events such as the Berlin Love Parade.

Conclusion

The field of German youth studies is in its infancy. Given that publishers are reluctant to risk any publication which is not going to automatically have a huge readership, it is particularly important to use *gfl* as a medium for reaching a wide audience and introducing readers to the diversity of this field.

It is to be hoped that the special edition of *gfl* will spark off fresh debates and research, both within the traditionally defined limits of German Studies, and in the infinite spaces of comparative, interdisciplinary and intercultural studies. Whether students apply modern theories to classic texts or apply traditional methods of analysis to contemporary texts, there is much uncharted territory in the world of German-language *Jugendliteratur* and youth culture which remains to be explored by students of German as a foreign language. It is to be hoped that the ever-growing range of potential research projects and the opportunities presented by CD-ROMs and the internet to take this research further will increase motivation and allow students to acquire other transferable skills as they learn. Students are the best ambassadors for any course, and those whose range of competencies impress employers will encourage others to follow in their footsteps through the world of German youth literature and culture.

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Biodata

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