



Cooperation and Conflict: GDR Theatre Censorship, 1961-1989

Laura Bradley

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Despite all the evidence to the contrary, the authorities in the German Democratic Republic always denied that they practised censorship. In this fascinating new study, Laura Bradley explores how the authorities' denial affected the language and experience of theatre censorship. She shows that it left theatre practitioners doubly exposed: they remained officially responsible for their productions, even if the productions had passed pre-performance controls. In the absence of a fixed set of criteria, cultural functionaries had to make difficult judgements about which plays and productions to allow, and where to draw the line between constructive criticism and subversion. Drawing on a wealth of new archive material, the study explores how theatre practitioners and functionaries negotiated these challenges between 1961 and 1989. The chapters in Part I explore theatre censorship in East Berlin, asking how the controls affected different genres, and how theatre practitioners responded to the construction of the Berlin Wall, the Prague Spring, and the expatriation of Wolf Biermann. Part II broadens the focus to the regions, investigating why theatre practitioners complained of strong regional variations in theatre censorship, and how they responded to Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of glasnost and perestroika. By examining a range of case studies, from banned stagings to those that met with official approval, the book puts high-profile disputes back into context. It shows how censorship operated through human negotiation, illuminating the shifting patterns of cooperation and conflict that influenced the space available for theatrical experimentation.

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