

Contents

Title Page	i
Copyright Notice	ii
Dedications	iii
Acknowledgments	iv
Abstract	v
Table of Contents	vii
I. <i>Introduction</i>	I
Provocative Words	2
Literature Review	11
II. <i>Biermann and the GDR, or: the Trouble with Conflict</i>	22
Brief Biography of Wolf Biermann	23
Cultural Politics in the GDR	27
Biermann and <i>der Bitterfelder Weg</i>	36
<i>Der Berliner Brautgang</i> : a sense of betrayal	44
The first <i>Lyrikabend</i> and its aftermath	47
The necessity of dialogue	52
Dialectics and the problem with conflict in the GDR	56
III. <i>Bänkelsang: Subversion in Low Culture</i>	60
History of an anti-hierarchical folk tradition	62
Censorship	75
<i>Bänkelsang</i> in the 20th Century: an Established Trade	79
Literature and <i>Bänkelsang</i>	82
Introduction of the into <i>Bänkelsang</i> 20th century literature	89
Frank Wedekind (1864-1918) and the <i>Bänkelsang</i> in German <i>Kabarett</i>	94
Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) and the transformation of <i>Bänkelsang</i> into a vehicle for social criticism	103
Political and Social Criticism in the traditional <i>Bänkelsang</i>	115

IV.	<i>Biermann and Tradition</i>	118
	Brecht's influences	118
	The influence of <i>Volkssprache</i>	120
	Biermann and the <i>Bankelsang</i> tradition	133
	Change of tone, 1963-65	147
V.	<i>Denial of Dialogue: Anger and Aggression in Biermann's Songs</i>	157
	Bakhtin and the SED: Dialogism vs. Monologism, Dialect(ics), Alterity	157
	Biermann's efforts to establish a dialogue with the Party	163
	Refusal to accept the invitation to the dialogue	168
	Grotesque Realism vs. Socialist Realism	175
	Relativization of Authority	181
VI.	<i>Resignation and Resilience: Searching for the Meaning of Existence</i>	191
	The tone that characterizes Biermann's work to this day	191
	The full meaning of the carnivalesque	192
	Dialectical positioning	193
	Melancholic songs	203
	Optimistic songs	212
VII.	<i>Conclusion</i>	221
	<i>Works Cited</i>	226

ABSTRACT

WOLF BIERMANN:

POETRY, *VOLKSSPRACHE* AND EAST GERMAN CULTURAL POLITICS

HEATHER LEE FLEMING

FRANK TROMMLER

This dissertation contends that Wolf Biermann has received an enormous amount of public attention, both positive and negative, not only because of the sensitive issues he addresses but also because of the perspicuous language he uses, and therefore provides a close reading of the language of his songs and poetry until 1976. His work has been analyzed with a view to his political stances, yet these examinations fail to explain why he has had such a powerful effect on the German public. Using the traditions and language of the *Volk* to dismantle the strictures of hierarchy in order to facilitate change in society. Biermann's method of provocation is a linguistic technique he developed in the early Sixties during the difficult period of de-Stalinization in the GDR. Since his folksy use of language is founded in tradition, this dissertation also traces one strand of literary history that informs Biermann's work: the *Bankelsang* and its incorporation into 20th century literature as a stage for social criticism and protest of injustice. Bertolt Brecht, Frank Wedekind and the German Expressionists figure prominently in the literary appropriation of this tradition that dates back to the sixteenth century. Biermann's use of folksy language and lyric forms prompts a reading of his work via Mikhail Bakhtin and his theories of the carnivalesque. Biermann is often interpreted as a destructive cynic, but does he really only intend to destroy existing conditions, or is the dual nature of the

carnavalesque retained in Biermann's art? That is, is it both destructive and reviving? This dissertation concludes that his program contains both aspects. Direct and even vulgar language functions in Biermann's work as an attention-getting vessel constructed to convey his message in a way that is often uncomfortable but can not be missed, unequivocally exposing contradictory attitudes and prevailing hypocrisies in society. His program elucidates problematic social and political constellations by destroying deceptive jargons with the plain language of the common people and offering alternatives for a better future.