

1993

## Jay Rosellini: Wolf Biermann

Carol Anne Costabile  
*Pennsylvania State University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/gdr>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

---

### Recommended Citation

Costabile, Carol Anne (1993) "Jay Rosellini: Wolf Biermann," *GDR Bulletin*: Vol. 19: Iss. 1. <https://doi.org/10.4148/gdrb.v19i1.1085>

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in GDR Bulletin by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact [cads@k-state.edu](mailto:cads@k-state.edu).

in the overnight mobilization of a vast portion of the population previously uncommitted. One senior history professor and loyal party member talked about attending his first demonstrations in September and October and reported, "I was terribly troubled -- all the contradictions I had long carried around with me suddenly surfaced...I simply *had* to expose myself, because I had to stand up in front of my students and tell them what my own position was."

The final message is sadness. Both long-time oppositionists and countless little people who were mobilized in the heady days of Autumn six months later experienced a level of frustration equal to their cynicism under Communist rule. "The degree of powerlessness toward what is being done 'up there' is now very comparable to what it was before." The vote proved to be a poor substitute for activism: those who had overthrown the government had scant role in the political parties imported from the West to guide the new electorate. We were the people, but no longer.

Sensibly edited and introduced, these interviews help explain why Communism failed, why a free democratic East Germany did not replace the discredited old regime, and why the East became an economic colony of the West. It preserves the conflicting voices of the participants in a major historical event, and is likely to become a staple for college courses for years to come.

Max J. Okenfuss  
Washington University

Rosellini, Jay. *Wolf Biermann*. München: Beck, 1992. 169 pp.

No one was more captivated by the events in East Germany in 1989 and 1990 than Wolf Biermann. This *enfant terrible* of the German-speaking world saw the inequities of the East German political system come to an end. But Biermann also saw his world crumble. Because of Biermann's role in the world of pop culture, it is appropriate to re-investigate him now that Germany has united.

Jay Rosellini presents an in-depth re-examination of Biermann's life and works. Rosellini justifies his choice of Biermann by arguing that "*der Zeitraum 1960-1990 als ein geschlossenes Ganzes betrachtet werden kann*" (7). In his examination, Rosellini concentrates on Biermann's biography, choosing to examine his life in *stages*. After a brief introduction, Rosellini introduces some controversial facts about Biermann's life in the GDR. He mentions Biermann's connection to the *Stasi*, which began with his role as a *Stasi-Spitzel* shortly after the uprising in June 1953. Rosellini asserts that Biermann was even proud of this *Stasi* activity.

Rosellini describes the period from 1965-1976 as the years of isolation. During this time Biermann was very productive artistically. His works were, however, prohibited in the GDR and it was only through smuggling tactics that his songs could reach their intended audience. Despite Biermann's popularity with GDR citizens, Rosellini questions the extent of Biermann's influence. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the majority of GDR citizens rejected Biermann's type of democratic socialism in the free elections.

The facts surrounding Biermann's expatriation and the writers' petition have been well-documented. Rosellini does, however, choose to reassess the situation, noting that the decisions of the SED were never equitable. Their policies continued until 1989 and this undermined the solidarity among the writers.

Rosellini argues that, following his expatriation, Biermann found it difficult to fit in. His politics did not conform to Western thinking. In *Preußischer Ikarus*, Rosellini asserts, it becomes clear that Biermann can only find a political home in the GDR.

In his works from the 1980s Biermann turns his attention to artistic development. Rosellini notes this trend particularly in *Affensfels und Barrikade*. Here Biermann turned to the "classics," a trend that Rosellini interprets as a move from the "low" to the

"higher" arts. Despite this artistic trend in his works, Biermann remained politically active.

The resonance with his audience. His works had become outdated. The question remains, what does the future hold for Wolf Biermann? Jay Rosellini opts to leave this question open, asserting in his last sentence: "Mit weiteren Kontroversen ist zu rechnen" (153).

This monograph is an essential tool to any Wolf Biermann scholar. Rosellini does a thorough job of re-examining and re-evaluating Biermann's life and works up to 1991.

Carol Anne Costabile  
The Pennsylvania State University

---

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### CALL FOR PAPERS

The *GDR Bulletin* would like to invite scholars and readers to submit papers for publication in the *Bulletin*. For the upcoming issues we would like to concentrate on the following themes:

1. GDR Cinema
2. Minorities in the GDR
3. Feminism in the GDR
4. GDR Literature after the GDR

Any other topic on GDR literature, culture and history is welcome as well.

Manuscripts should conform to the *MLA Style Manual* (1985). Please submit manuscripts as hard copy and on diskette (3.5", Word Perfect, MS Word.)