

Recensie

Susanne Krones, *'Akzente' im Carl Hanser Verlag: Geschichte, Programm und Funktionswandel einer literarischen Zeitschrift.*

Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009. 556 p.

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In what is a fluid and fragmented field, the periodical 'biography' is one of the more familiar genres of periodical scholarship. Recounting the life and times of a single celebrated journal, these book-length periodical histories make a significant contribution to literary and cultural history. But there are recurrent weaknesses too. Their coverage of the field is inevitably selective: entrenched academic preferences and considerable practical benefits often favour short-lived, avant-gardist periodicals. And their conceptual underpinnings are frequently underdeveloped: the result can be largely chronological and descriptive accounts, uncritical to the point of hagiography. In this context, Susanne Krones's ambitious study of the (West) German literary journal *Akzente* promises much. Given the role played by *Akzente* in the German literary field since its foundation in 1954 and given its under-representation in the scholarship, this detailed archival study of the journal over the first fifty years of

its history is long overdue. More intriguingly, the author promises in her introduction to sketch out a theory of the literary periodical, her sharp and concise summary of the limitations of the existing German-language scholarship suggesting a rather more rigorous conceptualisation of periodical history than is typical for the genre. Krones goes on to outline her preferred theoretical model, a derivation of Luhmann's systems theory and its application to the publishing field. By contrast, Bourdieu's cultural sociology is ruled out, somewhat curiously, because of its perceived intentionality.

The foundation of Krones's study, and its principal strength as a piece of scholarship, is the presentation of primary material held in the editorial archives of the journal's three long-serving editors, Walter Höllerer, Hans Bender, and Michael Krüger. That archival material is presented in detail, often through quite lengthy quotation, in the first of the three main parts of the book, a chronological history which devotes individual sections to the pre-history of the journal and to its foundation, before looking in turn at the editorships of Höllerer and Bender (1954-1967), Ben-

der (1968-1975), Bender and Krüger (1976-1980), and finally Krüger alone (1981-). In its capacity to illuminate the processes of periodical production and management, this rich archival material provides genuine insights for the periodical scholar. In particular, the three concluding and synthesising chapters devoted to the editors themselves tell us much about the unique challenges of the editorial role and the multiple and contradictory dispositions it demands of the post holders. Drawing on their own socio-cultural networks and reconciling the established values of the journal with their external and complementary roles as academics, critics, and publishers, the story of the *Akzente* editors reveals much about the often elusive recipe for editorial success. The last of the seven sections in this first, historical part of the book takes a different approach, treating in individual chapters some of the essential generic components of the periodical as a publishing form: its typography and design, its finances, its paratextual elements, and its contributor networks. Here, Krones has selected some archival gems: Höllerer's reflections (353), for example, on possible changes to the journal's cover design which reveal telling differences between the periodical codes of the US and German fields; or the detailed income and expenditure breakdown undertaken in the early 1960s (358-60) which lays bare the capital exchanges involved in publishing a literary periodical. It is just a shame that these chapters are given so little space, little more than an addendum to the otherwise lengthy and chronologically structured sections in the first part of the study.

The next two parts follow the pattern established in this final section of part one, eschewing the chronological approach for a thematic one. In the second part, Krones seeks to reconstruct the programme of the journal through short sections exploring such issues as the genre of contributions to the journal, the compositional principles of individual issues, and the function of the journal as a site both for international literary exchange and for exchange between East and West Germany. In the third part, the terms of the analysis are broadened further through an attempt to consider *Akzente* against the changing function of the literary periodical over the course of its history. Again, valuable insights are offered, but unfortunately there is little space in which to develop them in a systematic manner. One wonders what is to be gained, for example, from a chapter treating the 'long poem' as a case study in the interaction between programme and practice in the literary periodical (487-89), when that chapter is restricted to two pages. Indeed, such is the disparity between the first part, which covers around 350 pages, and the two subsequent parts, which are given only 70 pages and 30 pages respectively, that it is difficult to read the book without a sense that the author has simply found herself running out of space – no mean feat in a book of this length. Of course, here Krones is a victim of the sheer volume of material generated by a literary journal over a period of 50 years, and this even without detailed analysis of the literary-aesthetic dimension of the journal. A more selective, synthesised, and balanced structure would surely have yielded a more satisfying read and a more

convincing application of Krones's theory of the literary periodical.

There is no doubting the contribution made by this significant and timely history of one of the more important German literary periodicals of the twentieth century. Krones's authoritative and comprehensive study fills one of the more obvious gaps in our 'biographical' knowledge of the German periodical field. Where the study is perhaps less successful is in its theoretical contribution, the largely chronological structure of the first and most substantial part failing to do justice to the systems theory which apparently underpins it, but which often seems to be absent in a more straightforwardly empirical account. The separation of more generic and theoretical sections from the chronological and historical analysis in what is a curiously imbalanced overall structure does little

to help. And given Krones's professed theoretical suspicion of individual historical agency and intentionality there is an unresolved tension in a book that takes the individual editor as its major structuring principle. Indeed, it is something of an irony that Krones's study ultimately does so much to aid our understanding of the editorial role, a product of the strength of the original empirical material which this new book makes available. For that reason alone, and notwithstanding any theoretical and structural shortcomings, it will act as an extremely valuable point of reference for those of us who continue to explore the field of literary periodicals.

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