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Courage, Emma: You Can Read Two Feminist Magazines Each Month in the Federal Republic of Germany!

By Sandra Abelson Zagarell

Emma—a traditional German name, a name which sounds "round and energetic," but transforms tradition in the direction of "Amazon" and "ema/ncipation," according to Alice Schwarzer, the magazine's founder and publisher. Courage—for the seventeenth-century German writer Grimmelshausen's heroine, whose experiences transfigure her from camp-follower to a self-sufficient woman who fights for her rights with joy and humor. These are the names of the Federal Republic of Germany's two feminist magazines. Courage, published in West Berlin, was begun in June 1976; Emma, located in Köln, in February 1977. Each is about sixty pages long, costs three marks (about $1.50), is staffed exclusively by women, and is intended for feminist readers. Why are there two? Are there significant differences between them? Is there room for both?

At first, the predictable overlap in subject-matter is dis­couraging: both have many articles on women working, women in history, sexuality, lesbianism, motherhood, and so forth. But clear differences can be traced in their origins and their intentions. Courage's trial edition announced it as a publication founded by women active in the autonomous women's movement to provide a medium "by and for women" with the goal of expanding the movement. Emma, Schwarzer explained in her first column, is an undertaking by women journalists fed up with the restrictions and antifemale bias they have encountered in the established male press; its intention is to offer the female reading public a feminist magazine produced by professionals.

For Emma, apparently, the distinction between an amateur political publication and a professional magazine suffices to differentiate the two. When I asked Alice Schwarzer how she felt about the existence of two magazines, she likened Courage to a self-help group and Emma to an organization of trained doctors, stressing the need for both. Her analogy is most useful if one sees Courage's intimate connection with the women's movement as a characteristic which makes the question of amateurism irrelevant, and accepts Emma's insistence on its own professionalism as a valuable point of departure. Since I too feel that there is a need for both, I shall try to avoid entanglement in their disputes with each other, and shall present the strengths of each by describing them separately.

With its first issue, Emma fulfilled its founders' ambition to publish a professional feminist magazine with wide appeal. Its cover featured a color photograph of four of its staff members and advertised an article by Alice Schwarzer on male bias in Germany's courts, an interview with actress Romy Schneider, and pieces on housewives with unemployed husbands and on the "modern Amazons" of reunited Vietnam. In her editorial column, Schwarzer announced Emma's determination to compete successfully in a market monopolized by the male-owned press. She defined the magazine's feminism as wholeheartedly devoted to the goal of "joining the fight against the degradation of and discrimination against women, and against oppression in general."

This first issue's format and contents established a model consistent with the dual goal of competing in the media market and maintaining a feminist perspective. Several aspects are superficially reminiscent of the conventional women's magazines: interviews with prominent women, a girls' page, an occasional page criticizing fashion or discussing cultural images of women. Other features range from a "Pasha of the Month" award to analyses of Germany's new divorce law or of drug-dependency among women, to book and film reviews and selections from women's writing. The focus on successful professionals is evident in interviews with the famous; conversely, "My Occupation," a series of readers' reports, is critical of typically "female" jobs—saleswoman, hairdresser, secretary. Articles on women's unemployment, striking women factory workers, and women farmers stress women's difficulties and strengths. The magazine's engaged feminism makes itself strongly felt in articles on witches, women in history, rape, and prostitution, and in a long feature on lesbianism with several personal histories. Finally, Emma's direct ties with the women's movement are reflected in an ongoing series on women's self-help projects, and in announcements of current feminist activities inside and outside Germany.

The 200,000 copies of Emma's first issue were sold out immediately; publication has been maintained at 150,000 copies per month for some time, and Alice Schwarzer estimates a steady readership of one million. Emma has developed loose connections with Ms., which it partly resembles, has achieved impressive breadth—and has consistently remained very responsive to its readers. Indeed, readers have forced Emma to back down on two important matters within the past few months. First, the July 1978 number's announcement of plans for an issue written entirely by men provoked such a barrage of protest that by October the plans had to be shelved: Emma has now asked readers for more "responses" to the project. Second, the appearance of an ultra-masculine cowboy in a back-cover Marlboro ad supposed to run for at least three issues created so much fury that the October 1978 number was the first and last to sport the ad. The Marlboro man was named November's "Pasha of
the Month,” and Schwarzer wrote a column yielding to readers’ criticism and thanking them for their continued support.

*Emma*'s interest in journalistic flexibility has combined with its sensitivity to the abuses of the established press to produce what has been, to date, its most prominent activity. In July 1978, Alice Schwarzer and nine other women, among them film director Margarete von Trotta and psychoanalyst Margarete Mitscherlich, took the magazine *Stern* to court for denigrating and insulting all women with its frequent front-cover displays of semi-nude women. As anticipated, the women have lost the case. They have had to pay both sides’ legal fees, plus a sum set by the court as the “worth” of the case, but they have sparked much public discussion and mobilized much support; *Emma*, which came up with the idea and covered the trial at length, is proud of having used its feminism and professional talents for the benefit of women in general.

If *Emma*’s interaction with its readers is unusual, *Courage* has an even more flexible and uncommon relationship with its audience. In the “Internal Affairs” page of the first issue, the ten founders explained that they all work in groups connected with either the Woman’s Center or the Lesbian Action Center in Berlin, and that, as a publication dedicated to the women’s movement, *Courage* wants contributions from its readers on all subjects. They proclaimed, “Taken as a whole, the magazine will be a common learning process for all women who take part and are interested,” and promised an open editorial session before the publication of each issue.

*Courage* has fulfilled its promise as an open, experimental, reader-oriented magazine. Sixty-six percent of its material is sent in by readers. The open editorial sessions have been replaced by more manageable monthly meetings (for “questions, suggestions, criticism”) on the second Sunday after the appearance of each issue. The “Internal Affairs” page reports on the magazine’s inner conflicts, and airs disputes and discussions with other organizations in the women’s movement. *Courage* wants contributions from its readers on all subjects. They proclaimed, “Taken as a whole, the magazine will be a common learning process for all women who take part and are interested,” and promised an open editorial session before the publication of each issue.

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*Courage*’s commitment to the autonomous women’s movement conditions editorial policies as well as organization. Aside from being closed to men’s articles and personal notices, it exercises strict control over all advertising, rejecting, for instance, ads for records by Frank Zappa and by “The Virgin Sperm Dancer” in October 1978. It also holds itself aloof from both traditional political parties and the left. Generally, the magazine concentrates directly on women’s experiences, past and present, national and international.

*Courage* can be shrill and polemical. Nevertheless, the figure of *Courage*, the feisty, witty woman warrior, clearly remains the magazine’s ideal. Though her interests are many, she is well organized. Each issue is structured around an average of eight subjects, an approach which gives “point” to the many contributions from readers and can allow for several perspectives on individual topics. “The Woman’s Movement” appears in every issue, and includes extensive movement news, a calendar of events, and many readers’ letters, as well as reports and analyses of such events as the women’s “summer university” held annually in Berlin since 1976. “Culture” (reviews and literary excerpts) and “Society and Politics” are also constants. “Society and Politics” usually centers on the activities of little-known women, like those involved in the anti-atomic energy plant campaign in rural Lichow-Dannenberg, or on such legal and social issues as Germany’s very conservative abortion law. “Medicine” also appears regularly, and sections on “Continuing Education” (with a nationwide schedule of courses of interest to women), “Work,” and “Lesbians” are frequent.

*Courage*’s success has been dramatic. The 5,000 copies printed of the trial edition in June 1976 have become 70,000 by November 1978, and the magazine claims 120,000 readers. There is much indication that, like *Emma*, it has a broad public. Although it began in Berlin, and was subtitled “Berlin Women’s Magazine,” it has been distributed throughout the Federal Republic since January 1977, and it is now available at newsstands in Austria and Switzerland. Appropriately, it changed its subtitle to “Aktuelle,” or “Topical!” Women’s Magazine a few months ago. Who are its readers? In a survey published in the November 1978 number, *Courage* discloses that they tend to be young—80 percent are under 30—but that they do not all cluster around the university. A third have never attended an institution of higher education. Nor are most of them feminist activists: 56 percent work in no woman’s group or woman’s center, a proportion that the editors find disappointing but understandable in light of the fact that 15 percent of the cities in which *Courage* readers live have no woman’s center.

*Courage*’s survey also reports that the two other magazines its readers most often look at are *Der Spiegel*—and *Emma*. If the first attests, once more, to the readers’ range, the second tells us that German women are supporting two feminist magazines. American readers, like many German women, may find that the two balance each other nicely. Taken together, *Courage* and *Emma* are excellent sources of information on the German women’s movement, on German women’s lives, and on women’s responses to German politics, culture, and society. That both magazines also provide emphatically political perspectives and more international approaches than many American publications may also be of interest to American subscribers.

Sandra Abelson Zagarell holds the doctorate in Victorian literature from Columbia University. Fluent in German, for the past five years she has been teaching literature and pedagogy at Berlin’s major teachers’ college.

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To subscribe to *Courage* or *Emma*, write to:

*Courage*, Bleibtreustrasse 48, 1000 Berlin 12, annual subscription 42.00 marks.

*Emma*, DPV, Wendelstrasse 27, 2000 Hamburg, annual subscription 40.80 marks.