

Michele K. Troy. *Strange Bird*. The Albatross Press and the Third Reich



Michele K. Troy. [*Strange Bird: The Albatross Press and the Third Reich*](#). New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017. xiv, 423p., ill. ISBN 9780300215687. US\$ 40.00.

In the 1930s, Albatross Press was simultaneously the largest provider of English-language paperbacks in Europe and a publishing enigma. Their output was modern books, printed in English, in Nazi Germany, and distributed throughout Europe by a firm based in Hamburg and Paris with British funding and Jewish ties. No wonder Michele K. Troy's interest was piqued when she first encountered an Albatross edition at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris.

In *Strange Bird*, Troy proceeds to uncover the peculiar history of the publisher, which stumped Nazi officials and, in its heyday from 1932 to 1939, helped establish modern British and American authors on the continent. Until now, this peculiar history was largely ignored, except for the historical anecdote of Albatross being a precursor to Allan Lane's Penguin Books. Its history is so complex and intricate in part because Albatross does not have an archive to its name – its traces are scattered across Europe in over two dozen libraries and archives. Troy's book thus bears similarities to a detective story of sorts – though the writing is much better and more compelling than that of an average historical thriller.

The book begins with the story of the Leipzig-based publisher Tauchnitz, founded in 1841, and its reactions to the news in 1931 that a newcomer in the publishing industry was poised to invade their area of specialization: English-language books for European readers. The first advertisement for Albatross books dates to February 1932, published in the German trade journal *Börsenblatt*. The choice of authors for the inaugural list – Joyce, Huxley, Lewis, Deeping, H. Walpole and Crawshay-Williams – illustrates the type of literature the Albatross team had in mind: edgy and modern, not the classics one would have expected. Selling at 1.80 Reichsmark, these colorful paperbacks cost less than an average German book, let alone a translation (cf. 55). And the packaging was color-coded by

genre – pre-dating the popular Penguin color-coding.

Troy's disentanglement of the connections between Tauchnitz and Albatross lead the reader to an unbelievable tale of deceit and strategy, proving once again how important personal history and experience are for actors in the publishing industry. Troy is also good at painting the bigger political picture, positioning Albatross and Tauchnitz in a teetering, insecure Europe constantly on the brink of war. The Nazi government's publication of a list of forbidden and "Un-German" authors and books, the book burnings in May 1933, and the rapid *gleichschaltung* of the German booksellers and publishers association (Börsenverein des deutschen Buchhandels) could have put an end to both Albatross and Tauchnitz, with their international outlook and cosmopolitan readership. Nevertheless, foreign literature, especially British and American authors, remained highly popular among German readers in the 1930s, even under Nazi rule. Troy shows how Albatross Press dealt with the challenges, exposing Nazi officials who tolerated Albatross for financial and other reasons, before and during the occupation of France.

Troy's book is simultaneously a good read, meticulously researched, and a lasting contribution toward a more nuanced understanding of censorship, publishers and readers in 1930s Europe.

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