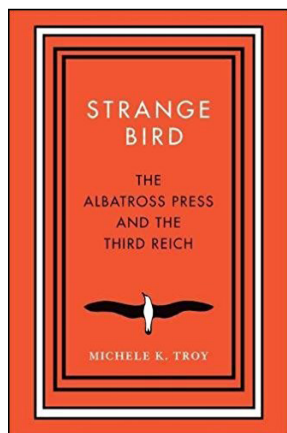


Michele K. Troy. *Strange Bird: The Albatross Press and the Third Reich.* New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press. 2017. 440p. Hardbound, \$40.00 (ISBN: 978-0300215687).



The paperback revolution in Europe and North America of the mid-twentieth century has received much written attention from journalists and historians. This publishing innovation opened up reading markets theretofore largely unserved, and it, in turn, spurred a social and intellectual movement the effects of which are still with us today. The unlikely precursor of the modern paperback was the German-based Tauchnitz Editions, active between 1840 and 1940, which comprised some five thousand titles of contemporary British and American literature, printed and distributed with copyright in continental Europe, for the use of international travelers and the educated public. It was a most successful venture, ultimately selling millions of inexpensive copies, which greatly benefited authors, publishers, booksellers, and readers alike. With their distinctive covers, these books have now become collector's items. Although there had been occasional

competitors over the years, it was not until late 1931, with the founding of Albatross Press, that the battle of survival began. And it is at this moment that Michele K. Troy, professor of English at Hartford University, decided to begin her fascinating tale.

Albatross Press was founded by an unlikely trio of seasoned European publishing professionals: Christian Wegner, who had been dismissed as the managing editor of Tauchnitz a year before; John Holroyd Reece, a British publisher of German Jewish descent, owner of Pegasus Press in Paris; and Kurt Enoch, the owner of a small Jewish Hamburg publishing firm. With editorial headquarters in Paris, funded by British capital, using the Milan printing facilities of Mondadori and the German marketing and distribution center in Hamburg, Albatross set out to compete with and ultimately conquer Tauchnitz in 1934.

These were not promising times for publishing in Europe. A deepening economic crisis and the rise of Hitler's national socialism and antisemitism in Germany proved to be serious obstacles. However, the editorial team managed to convince literary agents and publishers to allow them to sign up authors. The early Albatross list included names like James Joyce, Aldous Huxley, and Sinclair Lewis. Many more prominent authors would follow, and subsequently the Albatross catalog would contain some five hundred titles.

Juggling trade and copyrights across Europe's many borders was complicated enough, but the battles within Germany were fierce. On the one hand, the German government badly needed the foreign currency Albatross earned. Opposing political forces, however, tried to suppress supposedly subservient titles, especially those written by Jewish authors. Competition seriously increased when British publisher Allen Lane launched Penguin Books in 1935. Although intended for distribution within Great Britain, European exports of these cheap paperbacks of course were an important economic factor. As Hitler's military forces began to conquer Eastern and Western European countries in 1939 and 1940, Albatross' ability to maneuver borders and currencies diminished, and the company ultimately failed when Paris was occupied. However, the three principals survived the war, and the author continues to follow their fates and subsequent careers in Europe and the United States.

Meticulously researched in archives throughout Europe and supplemented by interviews with surviving participants and family members, the author creates a narrative that is at once suspenseful reading as well as very good history. It is a wonderful addition to international publishing history.—*Hendrik Edelman, Rutgers University*