



Michele K. Troy, *Strange Bird. The Albatross Press and the Third Reich*. Yale University Press 2017, 440 pp., 30 b/w illus., ISBN 9780300215687. \$40,-.

Book history is a broad discipline. Once again, this becomes clear in the long-awaited study of the interwar German publishing house Albatross Press by the American scholar Michele K. Troy. In its heyday, from 1932 to 1939, the Albatross Press made affordable reprints of D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow*, Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* and other English-language literary titles available to its continental European readers. Albatross was founded by John Holroyd-Reece, Max Christian Wegner and Kurt Enoch. They chose the name 'Albatross' because the word can be found in the same form in many European languages.

Troy's book brings to light not only the history of this publishing house during a fraught period but also and in considerable depth, the founders' legal and diplomatic backgrounds. Furthermore, Albatross participated in a product innovation initiated by another German publishing house, the Tauchnitz Editions: the modern and inexpensive paperback. This study represents a welcome supplement to Lise Jaillant's, *Cheap Modernism: Expanding Markets, Publishers' Series and the Avant-Garde*, Edinburgh University Press, 2017.

In 1932, John Holroyd-Reece, together with Max Christian and Kurt Enoch, founded the Albatross Press in Hamburg to sell British and American paperbacks in non-English-speaking countries. Despite the apparently English name of the principal founder (Reece was in fact a phonetic variant of

Holroyd-Reece's actual name, Rieß) and the publishing house offering books in English, technically speaking Albatross was a German company. Michele Troy devotes significant attention to the many mysterious aspects of Albatross and not without reason. To begin with, Holroyd-Reece is a difficult character to gauge. In addition to being a publisher, he was a diplomat and a translator and he acquired funds for his publishing house largely from British Jewish businessmen by a not entirely transparent route involving a holding company in Luxembourg.

The author of this book states it literally: 'Albatross turned out to be no less of a mystery.' Indeed, how was it possible for this German business, founded a year prior to Hitler coming into power, to function as a propaganda machine for British and American ideas? Albatross's concept was commercially attractive, but ideologically the company exerted an intellectual influence across all of Europe that cannot be overstated. How did Albatross secure these liberties? Nothing, moreover, suggests that the publishing house sought to achieve this ideological effect or even considered it to be relevant

Holroyd-Reece was probably a spy Troy writes, suggesting he spied for both sides. Evidence is lacking, but the suggestion is certainly plausible. Thanks to his British mother, he was perfectly bilingual and his capacity to communicate with the Allies as well as the Nazis at least offers an explanation for the fact that the Nazis were so lenient towards Albatross, both administratively and politically.

This book makes clear that although Albatross competed for acquisitions with the many publishing houses in exile, operating in Europe at the time, it was exceptional because its primary goal continued to be making a lot of money. And in that, it was successful. In part this was because British and American publishing houses had entirely neglected the market consisting of an English-language readership in Germany, France and all those other European countries. Albatross developed a new book format (18.1 cm × 11.1 cm.), set up a second office in Paris and, in order to keep the cost down, had most of the books printed in Italy.

Troy has written what would be called a rich book, at times too rich, too detailed and following too many tangents of this incredibly interesting history. When, for example, she addresses Nazi attitudes toward reading, she says the detective was despised by Nazi ideologues as much as it was loved by German readers. This may well be true; however, it is too generally stated. Hitler's ideas about books and about reading were, for example, quite different from Himmler's. Detectives were never officially banned, with the exception of *British* detectives, and those not because they were detectives. Yet, these are unimportant criticisms of an otherwise impressive book. Troy spent years

visiting many archives in various countries, spoke with surviving contemporaries and her ambition to tell a good story is evident throughout. She continues to be intrigued by the mysterious Holroyd-Reece until the very end of the book. When she visits his Parisian pied-à-terre in 12 Rue Chanoinesse, she ponders, standing at the door, about all those who might have entered. Businessmen, women in love with Reece, the French secret service (who did not go in), wondering ... what are all these Germans doing here? From behind that door, too, Albatross France was sold during the occupation, mostly to Allen Lane, who had brought Penguin Books onto the market a few years earlier. Later Lane hired Kurt Enoch, one of the founders of Albatross, to be vice-president of the American branch of Penguin. Albatross's legacy, its publishing strategy, can be found above all in Penguin; its reputation also depends, however, on various imprints bearing the name Albatross still active today, even if they have nothing to do with the interwar publishing house. Troy's book is a beautiful edition; the illustrations, cover and photographs, too, bring to life the history of this important publishing house.

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