Introduction

In October 1889, *The Book Lover*, a monthly journal published by the New York bookseller William Evarts Benjamin, addressed the transatlantic book trade. It declared:

> No book importer can shut his eyes to the fact that the English book dealers and the American book buyers are yearly getting closer together. The English rare book dealer has the advantage over his American competitor in having the best market at hand to supply demand and less expense of conducting business. The American dealer has the client at hand, an apparent advantage which is largely discounted by the glamour which attracts the collector who proudly boasts he 'gets his books direct from London'.[1]

Although a more famous American bookseller, Dr Abraham Rosenbach, later traced the origins of American book collecting to *c*. 1840, the period from *c*. 1890 to the Wall Street Crash in October 1929 can be seen as its 'Golden Age'.[2] This era included the creation of collections by J. Pierpont Morgan (which on his death in 1913 passed to his son J. Pierpont Morgan Jr), Henry Folger, Henry Huntington, and Henry Walters, all of which became part of museums and libraries that bear their founders' names. In addition, Americans who are now less well-known created libraries that included rare books and manuscripts. The formation of these collections was facilitated by transatlantic networks of buyers, sellers, and dealers. Moreover, the decisions made by all those involved in the trade not only shaped cultural institutions but informed scholarship on rare books and notions of national and cultural identity. At auctions those with less disposable wealth, whether public libraries or private collectors, could only acquire what was not bought by the wealthiest. In addition, some rich collectors sponsored scholarship about items in their collections,

1 [untitled article], *The Book Lover*, 1(9), October 1889, p. 1.
2 A. S. W. Rosenbach, 'Why America Buys England's Books', *The Atlantic Monthly*, October 1927, p. 452.

enhancing the status and potential economic value of books, and consequently of themselves and their libraries. The relationship between America and Britain was presented in the contemporary press as particularly significant for the international book market. American demand and British supply created a successful trade. In contemporary sources the term English was often used synonymously with British. Yet although united by a common language and shared history, the import and export of rare books exposed tensions in both Britain and America around ideas of shifting economic and cultural power and the value of the past for the present.

In 1889 it was not obvious that a 'Golden Age' of American book collecting was nascent. At the end of that year, news reached America that the renowned London-based (Prussian-born) bookseller Bernard Quaritch was to send his son, Bernard Alfred (known as Alfred to distinguish him from his father) to America with an exhibition of what Quaritch called 'a peerless collection of books and manuscripts' for sale to the bibliophiles of America.[3] The response from American dealers was hostile. An article in *The New York Times* concluded that 'the general opinion among booksellers here is that Quaritch has brought nothing to this country which he could sell in England', and *The Collector* urged Americans to buy at American sales.[4] At the same time, one dealer was quoted as saying 'there are more American book buyers who are ignorant of what they buy than those who have a knowledge of books', observing that 'if the Quaritch sales should be successful there might be a boom in this peculiar trade. Whether it will be successful or not is a question'.[5]

Alfred Quaritch arrived in New York in January 1890 and set out his stock at the Albemarle Hotel in Madison Square.[6] Among his early customers were

[3] B. Quaritch, *Exhibition of Books & MSS by Bernard Quaritch of London* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1890).
[4] 'Quaritch's "Rare Books": Some Sharp Opinions from New-York Dealers', *NYT*, 26 January 1890, p. 14; 'Milking the Cow', *The Collector*, no. 5, January 1890, p. 39.
[5] 'Quaritch's "Rare Books"', p. 14.
[6] See also L. A. Morris, 'Bernard Alfred Quaritch in America', *The Book Collector*, special number for the 150th Anniversary of Bernard Quaritch (1997), 118–33; R. A. Linenthal, '"The Collectors are Far More Particular Than You Think:" Selling Manuscripts to America', *Manuscripta*, 51(1) (2007), pp. 131–42.

people who had previously bought books from the Quaritch firm, demonstrating that there were already collectors in the United States. These included Brayton Ives, William Augustus White, and Marshall Lefferts.[7] In New York Alfred met other collectors, notably the printing press manufacturer Robert Hoe as well as Norton Quincy Pope and his wife Abbie.[8] In 1884 Hoe and Ives had been among the founding members of the Grolier Club in New York (named after the sixteenth-century French collector Jean Grolier de Servières), which brought together a community of those interested in rare books. Yet recognising that wealth was not confined to the East coast, Alfred ventured beyond the New York community of bibliophiles, visiting Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia in search of new clients.

Although generally disappointed by his lack of sales, Alfred's trip was partially redeemed by Theodore Irwin of Oswego's purchase of the Golden Gospels (described in Quaritch's catalogue as an eighth-century manuscript on purple vellum) with only a small discount from the asking price of $12,500/£2,500.[9] In addition to manuscripts, which were written by hand and therefore unique items, Quaritch took rare printed books to America. These included a Psalter printed by Fust and Schoeffer in 1459, marketed by Quaritch as 'The second book printed with a date; the second book from the press of Fust and Schoeffer; the costliest book ever sold, as well as one of the most beautiful' and priced at $26,250.[10] The early printed books also

[7] London, Bernard Quaritch Ltd., letters from B. A. Quaritch to B. Quaritch, 27 January 1890 and 29 January 1890; see also Rosenbach, 'Why America Buys', p. 455; C. L. Cannon, *American Book Collectors and Collecting from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1941), pp. 152–4, 147–50, 329–31; D. C. Dickinson, *Dictionary of American Book Collectors* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp. 179–80, 199, 335–6.

[8] London, Bernard Quaritch Ltd., letters from B. A. Quaritch to B. Quaritch, 5 February 1890 and 19 February 1890; C. Ryskamp, 'Abbie Pope, Portrait of a Bibliophile', *The Book Collector*, 33(1) (1984), pp. 39–53; M. E. Korey and R. Mortimer, 'Fifteen Women Book Collectors', *Gazette of the Grolier Club*, 42 (1990), pp. 86–8; Morris, 'Quaritch in America', p. 188.

[9] See Morris, 'Quaritch in America', pp. 194–5; the manuscript is now New York, Morgan Library, M.23.

[10] Quaritch, *Exhibition of Books*, p. 6.

included one produced by Johannes Gutenberg, whose Bible would become one of the most sought-after books of the twentieth century, and works by the first English printer; William Caxton. Books printed before 1500, known as incunabula, survive in relatively small numbers, making them particularly appealing to collectors. Quaritch's other offerings included illustrated books, bindings, English literature, and Americana. Of the 457 catalogued items, 289 were dated to before 1600 (most of the rest being Americana), and material of this era (rendered rare because limited material survives from that period) will be the focus of this Element.

In 1902 the Grolier Club published *One Hundred Books Famous in English Literature*, of which fourteen had been printed before 1600. Such publications provided potential shopping lists for unimaginative collectors. Two of the works could have been bought from Quaritch's 1890 exhibition: John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* published in 1483 (offered by Quaritch for $1,250), and William Langland's *Piers Ploughman* published in 1550 ($52.50, with four leaves wanting), while further titles could have been obtained in different editions. The perceived need for the Grolier Club's list suggests a growing interest in the rarities of English literature, but also collectors' need for guidance, a role often filled by dealers like Quaritch. However, even in 1890, Alfred found his American visitors unexpectedly demanding, carefully inspecting the books and asking questions.[11] This echoed a story in *The Book Lover* which quoted an 'English rare book dealer' as having declared: 'Our English collectors don't pretend to be so careful and painstaking'.[12] Yet in 1890 Bernard Quaritch sought to reassure a despondent Alfred, urging him to 'Persevere, my dear boy, you are sowing now seed for future harvests', a prediction which was to prove accurate.[13] For example, although Alfred only sold two medieval manuscripts whilst in America, at least a further nine of the manuscripts in the exhibition later returned to the United States.[14]

[11] London, Bernard Quaritch Ltd., letter from B. A. Quaritch to B. Quaritch, 27 February 1890; Linenthal, 'The Collectors', p. 135.

[12] [untitled article], *The Book Lover*, 1(9), October 1889, p. 1.

[13] Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. Lett. c. 435, f. 106.

[14] These manuscripts in America are now: Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, MS Ludwig IX.20; New Haven, Beinecke Library, MS 402; New York, Columbia

Although Alfred Quaritch was underwhelmed by America in 1890, the rare book trade between Britain and the United States grew exponentially over the next four decades. By the end of the century the Quaritch firm received regular commissions from America. Bernard Quaritch died in 1899, leaving the business to his son, and from 1901 Alfred made annual trips across the Atlantic, until taken ill in New York in 1911.[15] The rare book trade was part of a broader investment in libraries and cultural institutions for America. In 1901 *The Chicago Tribune* reported another record year for philanthropy, with $15,388,732 given to libraries, much of it by Andrew Carnegie (who also sponsored libraries in Britain).[16] In this era the American rare book market was driven by a few extremely rich individuals including Hoe, Morgan, Huntington, and Folger, supported by a growing number of collectors with smaller purses. This, in turn, encouraged the growth of businesses that specialised in importing books from Europe, such as those of the Stevens, Sabin, and Denham families, as well as of specialist booksellers in America, including George D. Smith and Rosenbach.[17] In 1914 the London-based (Polish-Lithuanian-born) dealer Wilfrid Voynich followed in Alfred Quaritch's footsteps, bringing an exhibition of books to the United States, which he took to Washington, Baltimore, New York, Philadelphia, Minneapolis, Cleveland, and Chicago. In addition to courting individuals, Voynich exhibited his books at museums and galleries, selling illuminated manuscripts to The Art Institute of Chicago.[18] Business was good enough that Voynich opened an office in New York, making regular trips to

University, Plimpton MS 111; New York, Morgan Library, M.8, M.23, M.43, M.95, M.125, M.179, M.946; San Marino, Huntington Library, HM 1104.

15 London, Bernard Quaritch Ltd., American Customers Book; C. Q. Wrentmore, 'Foreword', in *A Catalogue of Books and Manuscripts Issued to Commemorate the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Firm of Bernard Quaritch 1847–1947* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1947), pp. xv–xvi.

16 'Donations Outstrip All Previous Years', *The Chicago Tribune*, 1 January 1901, p. 22.

17 See D. C. Dickinson, *Dictionary of American Antiquarian Bookdealers* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998).

18 'Coming Exhibitions', *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago*, 9(6) (October 1915), p. 78; 'The Voynich Collection', *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago*, 9(7) (November 1915), p. 97; 'Illuminated Manuscripts', *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago*, 10(2) (February 1916), p. 144.

Europe to obtain more stock.[19] Likewise, American collectors continued to seek books in Europe, and London remained the centre of the increasingly international rare book trade.

Book auctions and sales of whole libraries (*en bloc*) were reported in the press on both sides of the Atlantic, albeit often with different emphasis. In 1902 the London *Times* lamented the sale of the library of the Briton, Richard Bennett, to an anonymous American, while in response *The New York Times* named the purchaser as Morgan, observing 'Mr. Morgan's library is rapidly becoming the most valuable private book collection in the world'.[20] In 1911, the decision to auction Hoe's library in New York irritated European dealers, who nevertheless crossed the Atlantic for the sales. Yet Hoe's executors were justified as Smith, acting as Huntington's agent as well as buying for his own stock, in competition with Morgan and others, paid large sums for books, setting a new record of $50,000 for a Gutenberg Bible.[21] According to one American newspaper, this prompted 'renewed lamentations at London, Paris and Berlin over the unconscionable rapacity of the American millionaires who are robbing Europe of its treasures of art and antiquity and even its treasures of literature'.[22] In Europe, such attitudes were underpinned by the idea that as none of the books had been made in America, collectors there had less claim to them than Europeans, whilst American authors celebrated their nation's contemporary wealth and power.

The record price for the Gutenberg Bible was reported in the British press, but London papers still managed to champion British dealers, for example noting that 'Mr. Quaritch secured one exquisite Horae [Book of

[19] Papers from the New York office are preserved at the Grolier Club, New York; see also J. W. Thompson, 'Wilfrid Michael Voynich', *Progress of Medieval Studies in the United States and Canada* (1931), pp. 90–2.
[20] 'Pierpont Morgan and Caxton', *NYT*, 5 July 1902, p. 21.
[21] See D. C. Dickinson, 'Mr. Huntington and Mr. Smith', *The Book Collector*, 37(3) (1988), p. 374.
[22] 'The Most Wonderful Bible in the World', *The Buffalo Sunday Morning News*, 14 May 1911, p. 19.

Hours] with microscopic illuminations for only $975'.[23] Moreover, London was not running short of books. The year 1911 also saw the start of the sale at Sotheby's in London of the library of Henry Huth and his son Alfred Henry, a process that took eight years, while sales of parts of the enormous library amassed by Sir Thomas Phillipps in the nineteenth century were held at Sotheby's throughout the period 1890–1929 and beyond.[24] In the twentieth century Quaritch's commission books included many pages of entries from American clients including Huntington and Folger for these sales. By 1914, Smith ventured onto the London market, sending triumphant reports of his large expenditure to the American press. After the auction of the Earl of Pembroke's library in 1914, at which Smith reportedly spent $100,000, *The New York Times* claimed that the '"Squeal of English" at Losing Treasures to Americans Amuses Him'.[25] Not content with creating a stir in London's auction rooms, Smith bought part of the library of the Dukes of Devonshire *en bloc* in 1914 and that of the Earls of Ellesmere in 1917.[26] Although there were some expressions of regret in the British press, these were tempered by the economic reality that the money was extremely welcome to the British sellers.

The close relationship between the British and American participants in the book trade, publicised in *The Book Lover* in 1889, found another expression in 1925, in a pair of articles that sought to nuance the standard narratives about the trade. The first, written by Henry Mencken and published in *The American Mercury* in January 1925, argued for greater empathy with the English, who were parting with their treasures.[27] He argued that books made in England should remain there, where they were more likely to receive study and where they would find buyers if Americans

23 'The Hoe Library Sale: Keen Competition', *The Times*, 3 May 1911, p. 5; for the Gutenberg Bible see *Westminster Gazette*, 1 May 1911, p. 4.
24 See A. N. L. Munby, *The Dispersal of the Phillipps Library*, Phillipps Studies 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).
25 'Pembroke Books Fetch $194,680', *NYT*, 27 June 1914, p. 3.
26 F. Herrmann, *Sotheby's: Portrait of an Auction House* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1980), pp. 125–6.
27 H. L. Mencken and G. J. Nathan, 'Clinical Notes', *The American Mercury*, January 1925, p. 57.

did not inflate prices. Moreover, Mencken suggested that 'this inordinate hogging of books [. . .] must have, in the long run, an evil effect upon British-American relations'. In response, Clement King Shorter, writing in the British paper *The Sphere*, produced counterarguments. As a collector, who might want to sell, Shorter was pleased that Americans were raising the price for rare books. Moreover, he declared 'My own feeling with regard to book-collecting is that we are one people', suggesting that he saw books as potentially playing a role in international relations by reinforcing the cultural power of a shared heritage. Shorter also claimed that a 'great many of the books sold to America come back to England'.[28] This may have been optimistic, but it was echoed by Rosenbach, who in 1927 argued that the British could buy back their books from shops in Philadelphia, New Orleans, Minneapolis, and San Francisco, incidentally evoking a much wider geographical spread of the trade than had been described by either Alfred Quaritch's 1890 tour or Voynich's travels in 1914–1915.[29]

In contrast to the abundant supply of rare books at auction in Britain, fuelled in part by a series of Settled Land Acts in the 1880s that made it possible for individuals to apply to the Court of Chancery to sell items that formed part of an entailed estate, in the 1890s manuscripts and early printed books were less common in American sales.[30] Moreover, when such items did appear, typically in New York or Boston, the prices raised were low. In 1891, the sale of Ives' library raised $124,366.25, well short of the estimated $160,000 that Ives had spent on his books.[31] In particular, the Pembroke Hours, a fifteenth-century illuminated manuscript which sold for $5,900, had cost Ives $10,000.[32] The sale of Augustin Daly's library in 1900 was

28 C. K. S[horter], 'A Literary Letter: The Solidarity of Book-Collecting', *The Sphere*, 10 January 1925, p. 38.
29 Rosenbach, 'Why America Buys', p. 459.
30 See P. Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 123–4; M. Purcell, *The Country House Library* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), pp. 250–2.
31 'Some Costly Books', *The Buffalo Commercial*, 10 March 1891, p. 7.
32 'Costly Books at Auction', *The New York Sun*, 7 March 1891, p. 3. The manuscript is now Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1945–65–2.

hailed by the American press as proof that New York was now 'a better market than London', but failed to attract European buyers.[33] Strikingly, both Irwin and Lefferts chose to sell their collections *en bloc*, in 1900 and 1901 respectively, through the New York dealer George H. Richmond rather than risk auction sales.[34] The Hoe sales in 1911 and 1912 were significant in raising prices comparable with Europe, but supply in America continued to be much smaller than that available in Europe.

The growing trade in New York employed a glamour lacking from London's business-like auction rooms. John Carter described the extraordinary setting of American book auctions:

> American sales were held in a very different style from London's: usually in the evening, with a fashionable crowd at any important dispersal; comfortable chairs, and uniformed staff calling bids for the auctioneer; a spotlight on the lot selling, which is reverently displayed on a dais (no passing round the table); in short, an atmosphere eminently conducive to the painless extraction of that extra bid.[35]

In 1912, an American commentator incisively described the setting of a sale at the Anderson Auction Company as 'more like a theatre than a place of business, perhaps more like a church than a theatre'.[36] In contrast, photographs of Lord Amherst's sale at Sotheby's in London in 1908 showed dealers and collectors packed into a small room around the horseshoe-shaped table, many having to stand. The American settings for auctions contributed to the idea that the acquisition of rare books

33 'Daly Book Sale Results', *The New York Sun*, 22 April 1900, p. 17.

34 'Big Sale of Rare Books', *NYT*, 30 March 1900, p. 14; *A Check-List of the Library of Mr. Marshall C. Lefferts [. . .] Purchased and for Sale by George H. Richmond* (New York: no publisher, 1901).

35 J. Carter, *Taste and Technique in Book-Collecting: A Study of Recent Developments in Great Britain and the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), p. 131.

36 G. Burgess, 'The Battle of the Books', *Collier's Magazine*, 10 February 1912, p. 17.

and art works was a social, aesthetic, and cultural activity as well as a financial one.

In the 1890s the trade worked on the basis that £1 was equivalent to \$5. However, following Britain's departure from the gold standard in 1919 the exchange rate fell to below \$4 to the pound, and although the pound recovered by the end of the decade, buying books in London became very good value for Americans immediately after the First World War.[37] In addition, books 'which shall have been printed and bound or manufactured more than twenty years at the date of importation', were exempt from American import tariffs.[38] The date of books was not always straightforward to determine as old books were often rebound. On Alfred Quaritch's second visit to America in 1891 his father wrote to confirm 'all the bindings are above 20 years old of the books & MSS. shipped to you'.[39] Similarly, the lists of books brought to New York by Voynich detail which are in old bindings, new bindings, and 'secondhand bindings which have been made within the last 20 years'.[40] This Element ends with the Wall Street Crash in 1929, which triggered a global economic depression, underlining how important the American economy had become.

Reflecting on the book trade in 1924, a writer for the British magazine *The Tatler* remarked: 'It would be interesting to know if there is any difference in the value of *objets d'art* in their original settings and when they are transplanted'.[41] A short study like this one cannot hope to discuss every rare book that crossed the Atlantic in this period or every person involved in the trade. Rather than attempting a comprehensive history, this

[37] See A. O'Neill, 'Prices and Exchange Rates', in G. Mandelbrote (ed.), *Out of Print & Into Profit: A History of the Rare and Secondhand Book Trade in Britain in the Twentieth Century* (London: British Library, 2006), pp. 333–5.
[38] J. M. Carson, *The Tariff Act of 1890, compared with the Tariff Act of 1883 and the Mills Bill* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1891), p. 42.
[39] Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. Lett. c. 435, f. 151.
[40] New York, Grolier Club, Wilfrid Voynich Papers, London House Invoices, 1921–23, list of Rare Books and Manuscripts to be sent on the SS. Baltic, 14 October 1922, dated 12 October 1922.
[41] 'The Letters of Evelyn', *The Tatler*, 16 April 1924, p. 93.