Part III

SCHOLARLY AND CREATIVE ENGAGEMENTS

Chapter 22

SEYMOUR DE RICCI AND WILLIAM ROBERTS

RECORDERS AND ANALYSTS OF THE MARKET

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THE LATE NINETEENTH and early twentieth centuries were a golden age for the freelance chroniclers and analysts of the European art world. There was even a living to be had from writing for the journals, reviews, magazines, and newspapers that then proliferated.[1] The two men who are the subject of the present chapter were particularly successful in making their mark in this world, but they may be said to represent merely the apex of a much larger realm of art critics, reviewers and historians. They owed their success to their ability to write in an informed way on a range of topics: each must have written more than one article every week, and each was able to offer a range of pertinent facts to back up his judgment.

Seymour de Ricci had formidable talents that ranged widely and, when he chose, he went deeply into a variety of cultural fields: bibliography, especially historical, epigraphy, numismatics, art history (of almost all periods) and more.[2] Today he is best known for his *Census of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the United States and Canada*, published in three awkwardly sized volumes between 1935 and 1940. It does not quite meet all the standards set by later catalogues of medieval manuscripts such as those by the late Neil Ker, but for details of provenances of manuscripts and, quite simply, for the sheer scale of its scope—about 15,000 manuscripts, described in 2,343 pages—it is an astonishing achievement.[3] Sadly he fell ill and died when barely sixty, when he had really

1 See for example Helene Roberts, "Exhibition and Review: The Periodical Press and the Victorian Art Exhibition System," in *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings*, ed. Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982), 79–107.

2 Accounts of de Ricci have been given by E. P. Goldschmidt, "Seymour de Ricci, 1881–1942," *The Library* 4th ser., 24 (1943–1944): 187–94; Jean Porcher, "À la Bibliothèque Nationale: Le legs Seymour de Ricci," *BEC* 105 (1944): 229–33; and Nigel Ramsay, "Seymour de Ricci (1881–1942)," in *ODNB*.

3 For instance, the *Census* does not generally include the incipits (opening words) of texts. See Nigel Ramsay, "Towards a Universal Catalogue of Early Manuscripts: Seymour de Ricci's Census of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the United States and Canada," *Manuscript Studies* 1 (2016): 71–89.

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only scratched the surface of the task of preparing the *Census*'s projected successor, an equivalent compact census for Great Britain![4]

William Roberts is far less well known (see Figure 1.1).[5] An examination of his lifetime of bibliographic and journalistic activities will, however, show that these offer a useful parallel or foil to set beside those of de Ricci. Roberts was born in in 1862 and died in 1940; he did not go to university, his formal education having concluded with his time at Daniel's School at Madron, in Cornwall. He began writing about rare books and book-collecting in the 1880s, when he was in his twenties, profiting from the intense popularity that book-collecting was then enjoying. He cut his teeth as a reporter of book-world news when he held the post of editor of *The Bookworm*, a book-collectors' monthly magazine or review, from about 1889 until 1894, when its seventh and final volume was completed. He wrote several notes on general book-related news for every issue; more importantly, he also raised its scholarly standards, both by writing articles that had some original value (such as a series of accounts of contemporary collectors) and by attracting or commissioning such articles from others. It was here, for instance, in 1891, that Edward Burbidge first set out in a general way how he had been able to reconstruct the dispersed library of Archbishop Cranmer.[6]

Roberts's own articles, of which the longer and more significant ones were signed, became more detailed and filled with precise information of a sort that would appeal to readers with a bibliographic interest. Over time, his accounts of collectors also had more details of their printed books and, sometimes, manuscripts, and, increasingly, more about their medieval manuscripts. His portraits of the collectors Alfred Henry Huth and Henry Hucks Gibbs (later Lord Aldenham) are two cases in point.[7]

As medieval manuscripts rose in price, it must have become easier to justify giving more space to them. Virtually no mention was made of medieval manuscripts in the *Bookworm* in 1888 or 1889, but in 1892 Roberts wrote five pieces about them, one being a long review of J. H. Middleton's *Illuminated Manuscripts in Classical and Medieval Times*, and another a four-page article about three illuminated leaves that were in the Magniac sale at Christie's.[8] In 1892 and over the next two years he reported on the inauguration and first few meetings of the Bibliographical Society.[9]

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4 See Joan Gibbs, "Seymour de Ricci's 'Bibliotheca Britannica Manuscripta,'" in *Calligraphy and Palaeography: Essays Presented to Alfred Fairbank*, ed. A. S. Osley (London: Faber & Faber, 1965), 81–91.

5 A fulsome obituary was published in *The Times*, April 11, 1940, 8, and a short editorial note in *Notes & Queries* 178 (1940): 288. Use has also been made in this article of his entry in *Who Was Who, III: 1929–40* (London: Black, 1941), 1152.

6 E. Burbidge, "Archbishop Cranmer's Library and its Recovery," *The Bookworm* [4] (1890–1891): 209–14; supplemented by Burbidge at 335–36.

7 "Bookworms of Yesterday and To-day: Mr A. H. Huth," *The Bookworm* [3] (1889–1890): 225–31 (with anon. supplementary note at 327–28), and, in the same series, "Mr Henry Hucks Gibbs, MP," *The Bookworm* [4] (1890–1891): 193–97.

8 "Illuminated MSS" and "Illuminated MSS in the Market," *The Bookworm* [5] (1892): 289–96, 337–40. Both are unsigned but will have been written by Roberts in his editorial capacity.

9 His reports begin with one on its foundation on July 15, 1892, followed by an account of W. A. Copinger's inaugural address as its president: *The Bookworm* [5] (1892): 285–86, and [6] (1893): 57–59.

One has the sense that he was keen to make *The Bookworm* a "serious" bibliographic review; its cessation after the seventh year suggests that he found it impossible to carry enough readers with him.

In the 1890s Roberts also began writing about the world of paintings—the selling of paintings in the salerooms, and especially at Christie's—and the more specialized field of painters and engravers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Like de Ricci, he was what we might call a freelance, supporting himself by journalism and cataloguing as well as writing books about artists and book-collecting. He must have had some private means, however. Writing about the sale of the painter George Romney's library as part of the Romney sale at Christie's on May 24, 1894, Roberts commented that "Many of the books were presentation copies from the authors to the artist. I purchased several at the sale."[10] Like most freelances, Roberts depended on having one or two influential patrons or supporters: in his case, this seems principally to have been Thomas Humphry Ward.[11] Ward is today best known for having been married to the novelist who always called herself Mrs Humphry Ward, but he was a well-known and influential writer in his day, being the chief art critic for *The Times* from about Christmas 1880. He and Roberts collaborated on two books—a two-volume study of the eighteenth-century painter George Romney, in 1904, and a catalogue of the paintings belonging to J. Pierpont Morgan, in 1907. Their friendship must, I think, have gone back to at least 1895, when Roberts began as *The Times*'s saleroom correspondent. Roberts was not the paper's first chronicler of the saleroom, for he was preceded in such a post by George Redford, but he certainly made a great success of the role, and continued in it until the early 1930s.

Roberts lacked the social connections and financial clout of de Ricci, and indeed cannot be compared with him in scholarly or intellectual terms. He was a contributor to both literary and art journals and reviews, like the *Magazine of Art* and *Notes & Queries*, rather than to the scholarly journals where de Ricci featured so often. Gradually, however, he built up a reputation as an accurate and well-informed writer, and from 1903 he was a regular contributor to *The Connoisseur* (an art magazine that was not quite on the same scholarly level as, say, *The Burlington Magazine*, although each had the merit of paying its contributors). In 1912 he contributed eight entries to the *Supplement* to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, including the art dealers Sir William Agnew, Martin Colnaghi, and Sir Joseph Duveen.

Roberts's position was enhanced by three particular strengths. Firstly, his numerous studies of eighteenth-century artists and writings on their works gave him a general credibility as an authority on paintings and their attributions and authenticity, so that he could plausibly pose as an all-round expert on older paintings, including Old Masters. His position with *The Times* reinforced that credibility, even though his saleroom reports were unsigned, like all its employees' articles. *The Times* was the leading newspaper of record at that time, and only a few other papers, such as the *Daily Telegraph*

10 "George Romney," *Notes & Queries*, Ser. 9, 5 (1900): 426.

11 See John Sutherland, "Ward [née Arnold], Mary Augusta [known as Mrs Humphry Ward] (1851–1920)," in *ODNB*.

and *Illustrated London News*, then had a saleroom correspondent who reported on a regular, weekly if not daily, basis. Roberts's opposite number at the *Telegraph* was A. C. R. Carter, a rather more flamboyant character, but essentially another freelance writer on art and the salerooms. Carter was best known as the editor and compiler of a well-known reference work, *The Year's Art* (1894 to 1952), but he also wrote on art and on literary topics for the *Telegraph* for half a century, as well as contributing to *Apollo*, *The Burlington Magazine*, and the *Studio*.[12]

A further string to Roberts's bow was that early in his career he built up a very large collection of auction catalogues, for sales of both books and paintings. As early as 1900 he was able to say that he had "some" that were not to be found in the British Museum.[13] Like de Ricci, Roberts came to use his collection to great effect, to assess the way in which prices were changing for particular books and specific works of art and, more generally, to chart the history of paintings in the salerooms over the previous two centuries. When he reported for *The Times* on a sale of paintings, he was frequently able to add usefully to what the auctioneer had written about the principal lots' provenances and the prices for which they had been sold in earlier auctions.

Roberts made sure that he enjoyed close relations with Christie's, which at that time was the leading English saleroom for the more important paintings, and especially Old Masters. In 1897 he published a two-volume history of Christie's and the principal sales that it had held. This was accomplished with the aid of many months' study of the firm's own set of catalogues, supplemented occasionally by his own collection—from which he gave some catalogues to Christie's to make good its gaps.[14] It is evident from his saleroom reports that he was at particular pains to write up the sales held by Christie's: it was evidently a two-way relationship. If he saw the firm as failing in its responsibilities, however, he was ready to be openly and bruisingly critical, as over its sale in June 1895 of the Henry Doetsch collection, where he commented on the catalogue's "superfluous preface and pedigrees more or less imaginary;" "the annals of picture sales cannot furnish a fiasco so deservedly complete as that which attended this sale."[15]

12 *Who Was Who,* V: 1951–60 (London: Black, 1961), 188.

13 "Catalogues of English Book Sales," *Notes & Queries*, Ser. 9, 5 (1900): 429–31 and 490–92, and 6 (1900): 22–24, 83–85 and 142–44; also separately printed as *Catalogues of English Book Sales* ([London]: 1900), in an edition of twenty-four copies. The list is arranged alphabetically, by name of book-owner.

14 *Memorials of Christie's: A Record of Art Sales from 1766 to 1896*, 2 vols. (London: Bell & Sons, 1897).

15 William Roberts, "The Picture Sales of 1895," *The Nineteenth Century* 38 (1895): 466–73. For further comment on this sale see Gerald Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste: The Rise and Fall of Picture Prices, 1760–1960*, 3 vols. (London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1961–1970), 1:199–200; and cf. A. C. R. Carter, *Let Me Tell You* (London: Hutchinson, 1940), 51–52.

Roberts and de Ricci Compared

It should be clear from this that de Ricci and Roberts had a great deal in common. As professional or full-time freelance writers in the book and art worlds they had contemporaries who followed very similar paths. George C. Williamson, for instance, followed a career trajectory that was extremely close to those of both men. De Ricci and Roberts were exceptional, however, in their use and even, one might say, their dependence, on older saleroom catalogues. Beginning early in his life, de Ricci formed a collection which came to number 80,000 or more. He was always looking out for copies of catalogues that were annotated with prices and the names of buyers. His daughter Jacqueline once told me that he would readily buy a whole box of catalogues if it contained even just one or two that were usefully annotated in that way. He bequeathed his entire collection to the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris and it is now almost all consultable there today, the only exceptions being some hundreds that have been given away by exchange, as duplicates.[16]

Roberts disposed of some of his catalogues, for book sales, to de Ricci, in about the early 1930s, and so these too are now in the Bibliothèque nationale. His bound-up set of catalogues of sales of paintings was sold in the auction of his library held shortly after his death by Sotheby's, on July 22–23, 1940, as part of lot 116, described as "a very fine and extensive collection of sale catalogues of Paintings etc., some of great rarity, especially English, French and American Sales, dating from the 18th century to the present day, many bound up in cloth according to year (a stack)." The purchaser, for £54, was Zwemmer, perhaps acting for the dealer-collector Martin B. Asscher, from whom they subsequently passed to the art historian E. K. (later Sir Ellis) Waterhouse; certainly, a 144-volume set (comprising 5,150 catalogues) which had been part of this lot was acquired by Waterhouse and later came from him to the Paul Mellon Centre, London.[17] From these, it is easy to see what use Roberts made of his catalogues: like all his books, they were liable to be repositories for notes, some made many years afterwards, newspaper cuttings, and other clippings and so forth, as well as letters received in connexion with sales.[18]

For de Ricci, sale catalogues served in a slightly different way. They were to be used to the full, indeed, filleted or gutted for their information; but after they had been read and details had been extracted of what they had to offer by way of information, they could be put aside. For de Ricci, what mattered most was his files of notes derived *from* the catalogues, rather than the catalogues themselves.[19] If one looks at his collection of

16 For instance, a few dozen are in the Huntington Library, San Marino.

17 I am extremely grateful to the Library staff of the Paul Mellon Centre, Bedford Square, London, for letting me consult this set of bound-up books and detached papers. Most of the catalogues are of sales by Christie's.

18 *Catalogue of Printed Books…Which will be Sold by Auction…22nd of July, 1940* (London: Sotheby & Co. 1940), title page: "very many of the Books contain Newspaper Cuttings, Notes or Reproductions."

19 Goldschmidt, "Seymour de Ricci," 192–93.

sale catalogues in the Bibliothèque nationale, it is only comparatively rarely that one finds his own handwriting in them, other than perhaps the prices or names of buyers.[20] (His practice was different where published catalogues of collections were concerned: these he would annotate liberally.) Should it be said that de Ricci was more disciplined in his use of sale catalogues?

De Ricci and Roberts used the information that they derived from sale catalogues in rather varying ways. For de Ricci, the provenance information that he extracted from them was material to be brought to bear in tracing the history of specific printed books and manuscripts through the salerooms. As he observed in the *Census of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the United States and Canada*, every medieval manuscript in North America had come from Europe and so, by definition, was likely to be traceable in the sales records of Europe. Consequently, if he inspected every manuscript *in situ* in the United States and Canada and made careful notes of all the inscriptions, coats of arms, dealers' and auctioneers' marks and numbers, and all else that had been added to its pages and binding, he then "only" had to marry this up with what he had extracted from his and other sets of sale catalogues and dealers' catalogues to arrive at a re-created but highly reliable hypothetical or reconstructed history of each such volume.

This was the de Ricci method, it might be said, and to a greater or lesser extent he deployed it in much of his work, throughout his life: it was the perfect way, as he saw it, to catalogue printed books and manuscripts at long range. We see it in his early works, such as his censuses of Caxton's printings (1908) and Gutenberg's Mainz Bibles and other works (1911), and, to a considerable extent, in his ever-useful Sandars Lectures of 1929, *English Collectors of Books & Manuscripts (1530–1930) and their Marks of Ownership*.[21] This last is exactly what it professes to be: a survey of individual collectors and how they had their books bound or otherwise indicated their ownership, and the subsequent fate of each collection. De Ricci hardly steps back to consider broader changes in taste or fashion or in the strength or otherwise of the market: that was not his intention.

Roberts was not such a born cataloguer of books, even if he was a natural annotator. He was, however, well able to step aside from reporting on individual sales to take a wider look at the market. For *The Times* he would often note the prices that paintings had fetched in the past, as well as who had owned them—information that was not necessarily given in the sale-catalogue. He was also able to see in prices some indication of how the market was moving; as he once wrote, nothing shows changes in taste so clearly as the prices achieved by modern art, contemporary and not-quite-contemporary. That led him to produce essays, replete with tables of prices, which he published year by year on each preceding season's sales, in a succession of art-world annuals and journals, such as the *Magazine of Art* and, later, *The Connoisseur*. It is tempting to see this approach to the art market as having been shaped by his experience of watching trends in prices in

20 His practice did perhaps change in the last few years of his life, when he took to entering the later owners of manuscripts that might feature in his projected Census of medieval and Renaissance manuscripts in British libraries, known by its working title as Bibliotheca Britannica Manuscripta.

21 Seymour de Ricci, *English Collectors of Books & Manuscripts (1530–1930) and their Marks of Ownership* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930).

the book market: the sums paid in the saleroom for books are of course far easier to compare than those paid for paintings, but many of the same basic factors are always at work. In 1901 Roberts published an account of "The Present Rage for Mezzotints" in which he included two tables of prices. This exemplified his approach admirably and the subject-matter could be said to represent a halfway house between the two markets: that for old, rare, and private-press books and that for Old Master, British, and Modern paintings.[22]

Book-Collecting in the 1890s and Subsequent Decades

Roberts's approach to the market and its prices seems to have been novel. He brought to the art world the price-watching of the book world. Public interest in particular sales of works of art and antiquarian books and early manuscripts had long been enormous, if the sale was seen as significant and high prices were achieved. Such, for instance, were the Strawberry Hill sale, of Horace Walpole's collection, in 1842, the sale of Ralph Bernal's collection of works of art etc. in 1865, and the Hamilton Palace sales, which included many of the printed books and manuscripts collected by William Beckford, in 1882. Many newspaper columns were filled with details of the prices fetched by individual lots in these and other high-profile sales. At a less newsworthy level, sales of manuscripts and, to some extent, antiquarian books, commonly featured in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for as long as this monthly remained a significant repository of antiquarian, literary and social news, until about the 1860s. The scholarly world naturally took a keen interest in the movement of manuscripts and rare books, and after the *Gentleman's Magazine* had abandoned that element of its coverage, such periodicals as *The Athenæum* made some effort to offer similar reports.

Paintings formed part of a separate world, however: it was a newer, more popular world. Writing in 1907, Humphry Ward suggested that it had received a crucial impetus when the Royal Academy held the first of its exhibitions of Old Master paintings, in 1870.[23] Certainly, the interest in sales of Old Masters grew rapidly in the late nineteenth century, and the appointment of George Redford as Saleroom Correspondent of *The Times* was one manifestation of that. In 1888 he published a two-volume treatment of *Art Sales*. The first volume offers accounts of major sales of paintings and works of art, with many examples of prices realized, while the second is a minutely detailed record of individual paintings' prices, as reached in the salerooms.[24] However, it does not attempt to offer any analysis or discussion of the market or changing fashions.

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22 "The Present Rage for Mezzotints," *The Nineteenth Century* 50 (1901): 257–64.

23 T. H. Ward, introduction to William Roberts, *Pictures in the Collection of J. Pierpont Morgan, at Prince's Gate & Dover House, London: English School* (London: privately printed, 1907).

24 George Redford, *Art Sales: A History of Sales of Pictures and other Works of Art, … Including the Purchases and Prices of Pictures for the National Gallery*, 2 vols. (London: Bradbury, Agnew & Co., 1888). "Issued to Subscribers Only, at Five Guineas." The notices of sales reprinted from *The Times*, from 1859 to 1888, in vol. 1:157–453, are doubtless all by Redford.

The antiquarian book market offered scope for an alternative approach to the question of prices and their increase or decrease: clearly, it was, in principle, reasonable to compare the differing prices fetched by copies of the same edition of the same book at public auctions. A flurry of publications about the "rare" or antiquarian book market came out in the 1890s, Roberts himself putting together a book called *Rare Books and their Prices: With Chapters on Pictures, Pottery, Porcelain and Postage Stamps* (1895), based largely on articles which he had published in a couple of literary reviews.[25] This was a fairly slight work and comprised a set of discursive accounts of various sales and comments on changing fashions in collecting. Soon, if not already, however, he must have realized that the study of book prices on a more systematic basis had a value of its own. Gustave Brunet had shown the way in his work on the French book and art markets, *Curiosités bibliographiques et artistiques: livres, manuscrits et gravures qui, en vente publique, ont dépassé le prix de mille francs; tableaux payés plus de cinquante mille francs* (1867).

In England, Brunet had an imitator for the book market from 1888 onwards, in the form of *Book-Prices Current: A Record of the Prices at Which Books have been Sold at Auction*, listing what were deemed collectible books, from the 1886–1887 season onwards. This was put out by *The Bookworm*'s publisher, Elliot Stock, and, more successful than *The Bookworm*, established itself as an annual, sold by subscription; it continued to be published until 1948. Over the four years 1896 to 1899 it had a rival in the form of the slightly more ambitious series of four substantial annuals edited by "Temple Scott" on *Book Sales of 1895*. Scott's arrangement was sale-by-sale, each sale having an introductory paragraph; after the first year, he gave buyers' names as well as the prices fetched, and he also added a good many useful notes on individual books. In the fourth volume he provided tables of prices fetched by different publications of Robert Louis Stevenson and Kipling and the productions of the Kelmscott Press over each of the four years. Scott's total lists of books were greater than those of *Book-Prices Current*: 5,695 entries in the first volume, as many as 6,883 in the second, 5,673 in the third and a still considerable 3,939 in the fourth.[26] The series was then terminated: its appeal to the dealers and collectors at whom it was aimed cannot have been sufficiently wide to make it a profitable venture.

A successor nevertheless soon sprang up, in the form of *Book-Auction Records*: this was first published in 1903, for the 1902–1903 season, and continued to be published to 1997.[27] Neither *Book-Prices* nor *Book-Auction Records* included more than a tiny number

25 See "Rare Books and their Prices," *The Nineteenth Century* 33 (1893): 952–65; "The First Edition Mania," *Fortnightly Review*, old ser. 61 (=new ser. 55) (1894): 347–54; and cf. "Classic–Collecting. A Comparative View, 1775–1893," *The Bookworm* [7] (1894): 25–29 (on the Greek and Roman classics).

26 Temple Scott (i.e., J. H. Isaacs), *Book Sales of 1895* (London: Cockram, 1896); and similarly titled volumes for 1896, 1897 and 1897–1898, the last being published in London by George Bell & Sons and in New York by Macmillan, 1899.

27 The first volume was originally issued as *Sale Records*; it was then republished, for a slightly different time-period (October to September) as *Book-Auction Records*. Quarterly and then annually, it continued to be produced until vol. 95 (1997).

of manuscripts, however. Roberts wanted to do something slightly more ambitious. As early as 1897, in his *Memorials of Christie's*, he wrote that his aim was not to rival or duplicate Redford's work; rather, he looked back to, and to some extent modelled his *Memorials* on, Charles Blanc's two-volume book *Trésor de la curiosité, tiré des catalogues de vente* (1857–1858).[28] That was for paintings alone, however. Roberts must have wanted to move back into the world of books. He achieved this in 1918.

Roberts's "Notes on Sales" in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 1918 to 1931

In addition to his reporting on sales of works of art for *The Times*, from 1918 until 1931 Roberts was also the saleroom correspondent for its weekly literary review, the *Times Literary Supplement*. This proved to be the ideal outlet for his bibliographic interests, and it was in this capacity that he may be said to have produced his best work. He was by no means limited to writing about book-sales: it is clear that he was given a free hand to tackle anything that he deemed relevant to the readers' interests. In different weeks he wrote reviews of books and catalogues that were of more-or-less strictly bibliographic interest, surveys of auctions and book-dealers' catalogues, reviews of exhibitions, and much that fell into no clear category. To take as a sample just a few of his articles that were published in 1925, he covered sales of literary portraits over the previous year, the publication of an Index Bibliographicus (of periodicals) by the League of Nations, the sale of books and typescripts from the library of Joseph Conrad, the sale—or rather, failure to sell—of the Cardigan manuscript of Chaucer's poems (now Austin, University of Texas, Harry Ransom Center, HRC MS 143), the sale by Hoepli in Florence of part of the stock of printed books and manuscripts of the scholar-dealer Tammaro De Marinis, the publication in English of the works of Hans Christian Andersen, sixteenth-century English editions of the works of Honoré d'Urfé and the cuttings from medieval manuscripts that had been collected by William Young Ottley.[29]

Often, Roberts explored sidelines and gave details that went far beyond what a mere reading of the book under review would have yielded. For instance, it is clear from his notes on an exhibition in Paris by Messrs Maggs of printed works by the French poet Ronsard that he was in close touch with de Ricci, who had overseen this show and must have given him background information; likewise his notes on the sale of historic books from the library of the Royal Society included discussion of the Society's disposal to Quaritch in 1892 of books that had once belonged to the Nuremberg humanist Willibald Pirckheimer.[30]

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28 Charles Blanc, *Trésor de la curiosité, tiré des catalogues de vente*, 2 vols. (Paris: Renouard, 1857–1858).

29 *TLS*, January 15, 1925, 44; June 4, 1925, 388; February 26, 1925, 144; March 19, 1925, 207 (and cf. April 16, 1925, 272 for the Chaucer being unsold at £2,700); May 7, 1925, 320; February 5, 1925, 92; June 25, 1925, 436; and November 5, 1925, 724.

30 *TLS*, March 12, 1925, 176, (April 30, 1925), 304 (and cf. 346 for a report on prices fetched at the sale on May 4).

Roberts also felt freer to introduce a more personal note than he would ever have done in *The Times* itself—or than one can imagine de Ricci ever doing in any of his discussions of sales. Thus, when reviewing the nine-hundredth catalogue of the dealer James Tregaskis, he remarked on how the firm had been founded by Mrs Mary Bennett (later Mrs Tregaskis), one of the first women booksellers to attend auctions in London (creating "almost as much sensation in bookselling circles at the time as women auctioneers [had] caused on entering the rostrum during the Great War"), and how "Mrs Bennett found an excellent friend and customer in Mr Yates Thompson, who caused many pleasant things to be said of her pluck and business abilities in the *Pall Mall Gazette*."[31]

With time, Roberts became more adventurous, readier to look at the market as a whole. Late in 1919 he published a survey of "Art and Book Sales During and After the War," in a serious literary and political journal, *The National Review*.[32] Here, for perhaps the first time, he brought together his two main fields of interest, paintings and books, and looked at their markets over the five years from 1914 to 1919, in France, the US and, just a very little, Germany. Manuscripts, medieval and later, feature here, too. There were sales of manuscripts from the collection of Sir Thomas Phillipps in these years, as well as of the Alfred Morrison collection of autograph letters and historical documents. In looking at the 1918–1919 season and its remarkable strength, Roberts commented that "It is revealing no secret in stating that Messrs. Christie's season was ended with the biggest turnover in the history of the firm," while he thought that "that of Messrs. Sotheby's must be well above the average." At Sotheby's the first two portions of the stock of W. J. Leighton the bookseller fetched £17,096, a further selection from the Phillipps library fetched £9,207, while twenty-eight manuscripts and two printed books sold by Yates Thompson on June 3, 1919 realized £52,360 "in one short afternoon."[33] Roberts singled out from the Yates Thompson sale the Hours of Jeanne de Navarre, which Lord Ashburnham had bought for 70 guineas in 1847, and Yates Thompson had bought for about £500: it was now sold for £11,800, "by far the highest amount ever paid at auction in this country" for a manuscript.[34] The record remained unbroken until the sale of the Bedford Psalter for £33,000 ten years later, in July 1929.

The rise in prices of medieval manuscripts had perhaps rekindled Roberts's interest in the world of manuscript books. He was sufficiently struck by a "superb" manuscript of the *Roman de la Rose* (now Morgan Library, M.948), executed for François I of France ca. 1520, and with a full-page portrait-miniature of the king receiving the book from the scribe, which reached £2,100 in the sale of part of Lord Vernon's library, June 10, 1918, that he wrote a long letter to the *Times Literary Supplement* in which he established its saleroom history.[35]

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31 *TLS*, June 4, 1925, 388.

32 "Art and Book Sales During and After the War," *The National Review* 74 (1920): 375–87.

33 "Art and Book Sales," 378.

34 "Art and Book Sales," 383. The Hours are now BnF, NAL 3145.

35 "The Vernon MS of the 'Roman de la Rose,'" Letter, *TLS*, July 11, 1918, 325. Even by the then

The Sale of Printed Books and Manuscripts to the United States of America

Given its importance in the book and art markets, it was perhaps inevitable that both de Ricci and Roberts were drawn to involvement with the US and its leading collectors and dealers. Each perhaps began his connexion with its collectors by preparing a catalogue for the most prominent collector of the day, J. Pierpont Morgan; but Morgan was based in London for much of the time in the early twentieth century, keeping part of his collection there until the repeal of US customs duties on works of art in 1909.[36] Both de Ricci and Roberts went to the US for what might be called professional reasons, Roberts as early as 1915,[37] possibly staying for a year or two; de Ricci first in 1918, but then more or less annually thereafter, for a few weeks or even months.[38]

De Ricci was a cosmopolitan figure in every way, of mixed Italian-Irish-English-French origins and upbringing, steeped in European culture of all centuries, and at home in half a dozen languages. He is unlikely to have seen any harm in the sale of English—or French, German, Italian or Hispanic—books or manuscripts to the US. He enjoyed close social relations with certain US dealers, such as A. S. W. Rosenbach, and temperamentally he may be guessed to have felt at home there. Roberts, by contrast, for all his love of French eighteenth-century history, books and works of art, was more the archetypal Englishman who felt that what had entered English collections ought to stay in English ownership: he clearly felt pangs of regret that so much was crossing the Atlantic, presumably never to return. On the other hand, like Bernard Berenson, Hofstede de Groot, and W. R. Valentiner, he was perfectly ready to act as one of the advisers of Joseph Widener in the formation of his important collection of paintings (now partly in the National Gallery of Art, Washington).[39]

Every painting is unique, and there have at all times been more objections to the export of oil paintings than to the export of printed books. It was in response to the

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standards of Sotheby's, the attention given to provenance in the Vernon sale catalogue was remarkably slight.

36 De Ricci produced three rather thin catalogues of collections of antiquities purchased *en bloc* by Morgan (*Germanic Antiquities* and *Merovingian Antiquities* (both published in Paris: Berger, 1910) and *Gallo-Roman Antiquities* (Paris: Berger, 1911)), as well as a substantial *Catalogue of Twenty Renaissance Tapestries from the J. P. Morgan Collection* (Paris: Renouard, 1913). Roberts's catalogue of *Pictures in the Collection of J. Pierpont Morgan* included Dutch, Italian, French and Spanish paintings.

37 He was in Philadelphia at the start of March 1915 when written to by James B. Townend, of *American Art News*. Paul Mellon Centre, Roberts Collection, letter inserted in Christie's sale catalogue of the Sheffield Portraits etc., December 11, 1909.

38 If Roberts was the author of the unsigned article "Book Collecting in America," published in *The Bookworm* [6] (1893): 71–78, then it might be inferred that he went there as early as 1892 or at least at the start of 1893, since this article gives the impression of being based on first-hand knowledge.

39 W. G. Constable, *Art Collecting in the United States of America: An Outline of a History* (London: Nelson, 1964), 119.

outflow of artistic masterpieces that the National Art-Collections Fund was set up in 1903.[40] Manuscripts are in a different category of course, but here it may be noted that the sales of the Bridgewater Library and archives of the Earl of Ellesmere (1917), the Battle Abbey charters and archives (1923) and the vast archives of the Duke of Buckingham, of Stowe House (1921)—all bought by Henry Huntington, although the latter acquisition was made only in 1925—were followed by the passing of legislation that was specifically intended to check the removal from England of manorial documents (court rolls and also account rolls), on the basis that these might form part of the proof of title to real property.[41]

Roberts seems not to have been troubled by American purchases of medieval English manuscripts, but he did from time to time remark on the acquisition of English paintings by American collectors and occasionally he even commented—as if disapprovingly—on the presence of US and Continental dealers in the London salerooms.[42] As early as 1895, when writing about the sale of the Henry Doetsch collection, with its many over-restored and over-catalogued works, he remarked that "It is a relief to know that many of these pictures have gone to America."[43] Given that eighteenth-century English portraits were both at the height of collecting fashion as well as being one of his particular specialities, it was perhaps inevitable that he would find cause to lament the consequences of that fashionability, even as he seized the opportunity to profit from his expertise in such paintings.

Conclusion

Men like Roberts can easily be disparaged as mere amateurs who posed as professionals, commentators without real expertise, men who lacked the connoisseurship to distinguish the fake or restored work of art from the genuine, and were akin to literary hacks. Brian Allen once wrote of Roberts that he was ready to authenticate any painting for £5.[44]

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40 The National Art-Collections Fund added illuminated manuscripts to its remit within the next quarter of a century. In 1920 it gave £1,000 to the British Museum towards the cost of a twelfth-century illuminated manuscript of Bede's Life of St Cuthbert (BL, Add. MS 39943), and in 1929–1930 it helped the British Museum in the purchase of the Luttrell Psalter and made a crucial last-minute gift of £10,000 towards the cost of the Bedford Psalter. See D. S. MacColl ed., *Twenty-Five Years of the National Art-Collections Fund 1903–1928* (Glasgow: Glasgow University Press, 1928); and Chapter 27 in this volume.

41 See e. g. Roger Ellis, "The Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts: A Short History and Explanation," in *Manuscripts and Men: An Exhibition of Manuscripts, Portraits and Pictures, held at the National Portrait Gallery, London…1969* (London: HMSO, 1969), 1–36 at 20–21. The Law of Property legislation of 1922–1924 placed all manorial documents under the oversight of the Master of the Rolls, and thus of the Public Record Office.

42 For instance, in his article in *The Times*, November 1, 1919, headlined "Old Masters Bought by Americans. New York Dealers in London." This prompted letters from Robert Witt, vice-chairman of the National Art-Collections Fund, and others.

43 "The Picture Sales of 1895," *The Nineteenth Century* 38 (1895): 466–73.

44 Brian Allen, "Paul Mellon and Scholarship in the History of British Art," in *Paul Mellon's Legacy:*

That is surely unfair. Roberts lived at a time when the reading public wanted something more than dealers could offer, by way of cataloguing and more general publication: there was a burgeoning demand for writings about the art of the past and for detailed reports of the contemporary art market, and only freelance writers like him could fill the gap. In England at least, the curatorial staff of art galleries and museum were generally discouraged from writing about the art market and, especially, the trade. The same was true of the leading libraries, headed by the British Museum: their more senior staff were expected to engage in "literary" activities (such as involvement in the Bibliographical Society) and to distance themselves from dealers. Nor were the curatorial staff of art galleries and museums numerous enough at this date to undertake the kind of writing that Roberts and his like produced, for instance about collectors and collections.

There are more positive things to be said about de Ricci and Roberts, too. In England and the US, both men developed a fresh line in their writings. Each man was highly capable, accurate, and reliable, and just as de Ricci achieved a near-miracle of compression in his cataloguing of medieval and Renaissance manuscripts, so too can Roberts be credited with raising the standard of writing about the art and rare books market to a new level. Each man, too, believed passionately in deploying all the resources that a deep and wide-ranging bibliographic expertise could bring to bear on the documentation of works of art of all types and periods. Sale catalogues offered the crucial underpinning for much of their work, but they were also awake to the possibilities offered by archival materials. Roberts, for instance, used the account books of the dealers Annoot and Gale (of Bond Street) to explore the prices paid for both paintings and French furniture in the 1850s and 1860s,[45] and the stockbooks, day-books and other papers of the leading dealer in paintings, John Smith, to draw attention to their value for provenance research, while also stressing that ninety percent of the firm's purchases were unprofitable, failing to find a buyer.[46] In his readiness to use and draw attention to the value of archival materials of this sort, Roberts was blazing a trail and may even be said to have been ahead of de Ricci. Both men, however, can be said to share the credit for ensuring that provenance research would be seen as an integral element of art historical research, and that this needed to be underpinned by the study of auction catalogues.

A Passion for British Art. Masterpieces from the Yale Center for British Art, ed. John Baskett et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 43–53 at 45.

45 "Collecting as an Investment," *Connoisseur* 7 (1903): 44–50. These he compared with the prices paid at Christie's, February 20–21, 1903, for Sir Edward Page Turner's collection—partly acquired from Annoot and Gale.

46 "The John Smith Business Books," *Apollo* 27 (1937): 158–60; this was preceded by a short article, "Art History in the Ledger: A Dealer and his Clients," *The Times*, December 15, 1936, 17. Roberts's article in *Apollo* was seemingly his last significant publication. He had been bequeathed the Smith archive earlier that year, and had immediately given it to the Victoria & Albert Museum. See Charles Sebag-Montefiore and Julia I. Armstrong-Totten, *A Dynasty of Dealers: John Smith and Successors, 1801-1924: A Study of the Art Market in Nineteenth-Century London* (London: Roxburghe Club, 2013), 30, 428.