The Arts and the Antiquarian Book Trade: The Inherited Past and a Viable Future

LUCIEN GOLDSCHMIDT

It is an honor for me to be standing here and to have a moment or two sharing with you some of my experiences and expectations.

The other day I received a liability insurance contract where it was stated that the insured was a corporation, indeed, my corporation. Then it said "occupation: amusement and recreation services." It surprised me, as the concept of amusement and recreation is not the steady companion of an antiquarian bookdealer, neither of myself nor of any of my colleagues. Let us see together how we reached the point where we are now.

The concept of looking purposefully for an old book is a fairly recent one. What had not been obvious before was noted with increasing concern in the seventeenth century, viz., that many useful, even indispensable books were not republished and that furthermore, censorship cast a widening net to destroy the books deemed impious or dangerous.

Two good texts on the creation of an ideal library were issued in 1633 and in 1680 respectively, by Gabriel Naudé and by Pierre Le Gallois. Naudé, who was ahead of his time, welcomed into his imaginary library not just the classical authors but those of his time as well, accepting orthodox and heterodox opinions. He also saw that in addition to the books there should be pamphlets, theses, broadsides and various ephemeral materials. For their purchases, the booklovers should employ two or three trusted booksellers. Only for the very great rarities should they visit them all. In all cases, the public use was of paramount value.

Lucien Goldschmidt is the former owner of Goldschmidt Rare and Fine Books, New York City. This paper was delivered at the 1986 RBMS Preconference in New York.

Nothing, he says, could gain "greater renown among the nations than to constitute fine and sumptuous libraries." In the same sense Le Gallois said that there was full agreement that "there is nothing more honorable and more worthy of praise than to form a library, particularly if it is not only for one's own knowledge but for the usefulness of a wider public." He adds that it is wrong to say that "this is a little matter; it only requires the knowledge of a bookseller." A successful librarian must have many gifts to put together such a library. Knowledge is needed to know the books and how to select them, care must be exercised in searching for them everywhere, and money is needed to buy them. In a meadow, he says, cattle will find grass, dogs will chase the hares, and the stork will pick the lizards. In a similar way, the scholars must find what suits them and their needs in a library accessible to the public. Both of these authors still assume the books should be collected for their scholarly merit. It is only in the eighteenth century, as Jean Viardot has shown, that bibliophily shows its elegant features. It immediately changes the values of the books, leading to the commercialization of the rare book.

Naudé and Le Gallois viewed the purposes of librarianship as being of cultural and even national importance. They had a quality much admired by the ancient Romans—"gravitas." The role of bookseller and librarian changed with the advent of the refined and esthetically pleasing book in the eighteenth century. It found forms similar to those prevailing today during the nineteenth century. By the time that Dibdin and Brunet studied and wrote, the world of booklover and bibliographer had settled on the basic principles governing their choices. This is why these works are still of value now. Henceforth, there were guideposts permitting the tremendous increase in activity during the nineteenth century. Each generation added new areas of research but along the paths already traced.

Let me speak briefly about an excellent and very successful bookseller of the nineteenth century, Damascène Morgand, and about a first-rate librarian, Archibald Coolidge. Morgand, born in 1840, at the age of 12 was placed as an apprentice with a bookseller in Rouen, where he remained five years. At the age of 17 he moved to Paris, becoming an employee of the large firm of Auguste Fontaine. After about ten years with Fontaine he had developed sufficiently to represent the firm and to make decisions at the auction sales. In 1875, now aged 35, he left his employer and with Charles Fatout as an associate, he formed the firm of Morgand-Fatout. In 1876 he began publishing the celebrated monthly Bulletin that ran well into the twentieth century. It is an amazing achievement; month after month it offered the most fascinating books well but soberly described, with some illustrations including often reproductions of woodcuts and sometimes fine bindings. At one point he hired a young man then aged 16, who later was his successor—none other than the great Edouard Rahir. Morgand died in 1898. Rahir carried on the tradition until his death in 1924.

Without being Plutarch, I would now propose a parallel life comparing Morgand with a significant American librarian. I am speaking of Archibald Cary Coolidge (1866–1928). He was a descendent of Thomas Jefferson, very bright and wealthy. He graduated *summa cum laude* from Harvard in 1887 and obtained a Ph.D. in history from Freiburg in Germany, in 1892. He did some diplomatic work in St. Petersburg and Paris. In 1893 he became an instructor at Harvard. He recognized early the absolute need for an important gathering of books at Harvard as tools for scholarship and a proper library building to house them. He admirably handled Mrs. Widener's desire to offer a building in honor of her son, who had died young, and who had had a great love of books. The Widener Memorial Library (1913) is Coolidge's monument as well as a reminder of young Widener. All of the interesting projects that were developed with the help of the Widener and its holdings can hardly be counted.

Both careers would now be very different. The interrelation of different countries of the western world, and the mobility of purchasers—whether they represent public institutions or whether they are private collectors—makes the continuity of contacts unlikely. Amateurs like J.P. Morgan who visited their dealers on Saturdays would not only wish to see objects to be proposed, but they would engage in conversations about the merits and faults of different editions, copies, and so on. Everything was much more centered and now it is centrifugal. The art scene now, in all its facets, is without a center and without principles of selection. The atmosphere was once, in the times of Morgand, Coolidge, and well into this century, that of a republic of letters (*la république des lettres*, as the French call it). If everything goes, there is no scale of values. If nothing is hideous, can there be anything beautiful? Without pressure there cannot be a created form. Without training it is not reasonable to expect quality expertise.

There is much divergence of opinion on the preparation for becoming an antiquarian bookseller. The exercise of the profession is a form of advanced training. It seems to me that to work for a seasoned bookseller at the beginning of one's career is invaluable. People say lightly, "I'll learn from my mistakes." The fact is that they don't learn enough that way. This is a case for the merit of delayed gratification. The first seven years of my professional life, working in two existing firms, laid the ground for my later efforts and development. I am grateful for it.

Once the young bookseller has mastered the essential facts of how books are located, bought, described and sold, it becomes necessary to plan ahead. We cannot write to a factory: send some more. Quickly, the bookseller faces a difficult truth: there is an evident lack of fresh supplies. For over 40 years now public institutions have intensively gathered collections, lots, or individual items. They have bought or received as gifts what had until then entered and left the market with the expectation of returning later once more.

There is a volume called "The Houghton Library, 1942–1967: A Selection of Books and Manuscripts in Harvard Collections." You note that the Houghton was built with a capacity for 250,000 volumes, and when it opened in 1942 it was half full. By 1949, it was nearly full. The available space was doubled in 1949, and today (that is, when the book was written in 1967), it is nearing its capacity of 500,000. While not increasing at the same rate now, books are given each year and some are even purchased.

The riches of the University of Texas, of the University of California, and its various branches, the great accretions of the Morgan, the Newberry Libraries, the rising bibliophile enrichment at the Beinecke or at the Lilly Libraries, tell the same story.

Lessing Rosenwald gave or left to the Library of Congress hundreds and hundreds of volumes and 22,000 prints or drawings to the National Gallery. Dannie Heineman's collection is in the Morgan Library, Robert Taylor's at Princeton, and Douglas Gordon, who died recently, left in his will his very fine collection of literature, much of it sixteenth-century poetry, to the University of Virginia, including also his celebrated set of Diderot's *Encyclopedia*, bound for Empress Catherine of Russia.

This trend is also visible in one of the newest subjects of collection. Mr. and Mrs. Walter Bareiss, the donors of 1,100 volumes of modern illustrated books, actually owned the most extensive such collection formed in the United States, which now enriches the Toledo Museum, as earlier Louis Stern gave his collection to the Museum of Modern Art. These van-loads of books have gone out of the market, and the consequence has been the rising value of what is left.

Another problem: where are the antiquarian dealers to show their books? You can no longer walk around the streets of New York City, from the 40's to the 60's, as you could in my time, and have a chance to see some forty-odd dealers with varied and thoughtful selections in their respective fields. Of all of these dealers or their successor firms maybe seven are now in existence. The others have moved away or died away. Some new ones have been set up but most are found in distant locations. Formerly, you could walk in and look. Not only is there "no free lunch" in the States, as the saying went, there is hardly any free looking, either. Not only New York had stocks that filled entire buildings. Leary's in Philadelphia, or Long's in Columbus, Ohio, had floor after floor of antiquarian works. And let us not forget Dr. Rosenbach and his remarkable stock both in New York and in Philadelphia. Even more powerful assemblages could be traversed in London (Tregaskis, Pearson, Maggs, Quaritch, Francis Edwards); in Leipzig (Hiersemann, Harassowitz); in Paris (Lucien Dorbon, Auguste Fontaine, Vrin); in Vienna (Gilhofer and Ranschburg); in Berlin (Friedländer); in Munich (Jacques Rosenthal and Ludwig Rosenthal); in Florence (Olschki); and in Frankfurt (Joseph Baer). Today, even the greatest stocks,

as for example, H.P. Kraus, do not lend themselves to a similar inspection. But in general, there are no anciently-constituted holdings. By comparison, I was still able to visit Honoré Champion in Paris in the late 1940s and came upon books, new, untouched, that had been issued by the publisher Franck, a firm that Champion had absorbed long before. These volumes had thus stayed waiting for their first purchaser for 100 years. Today we know of books remaindered six months after their appearance. Harvard University Press even pulped the unsold copies of that marvelous catalogue of sixteenth-century books compiled by Ruth Mortimer, a book that could well have been sold had they cared to do so.

The absence of such emporia and the impossibility of seeing a many-layered stock in one place, one dealer's building, was the precondition for the rise of book fairs. The book fair also has introduced a pushy restlessness into a normally low-key pursuit. The three-day duration brought with it the "now or never" atmosphere that characterizes auction sales. No doubt, the book fairs are here to stay and they provide chances for comparison and cross-fertilization in an otherwise depleted market.

This brings us back to the general question of the availability of materials. When I began working in this field in 1930, there was an oversupply and hesitant demand. The stocks of the booksellers were large and because of the depression, whole collections were for sale. The auction houses were weak and fittingly modest. At the Hotel Drouot there were avalanches of books. In some cases one could find even in the baskets that were sold as one lot, positively rare and desirable items.

The situation has been reversed over the years, especially in the period that began with the end of the Korean War in 1955. Now after thirty years the books to be found are the object of struggle and competition. The owners (no longer at the edge of insolvency) can drive hard bargains. The number of booksellers has increased and the auction houses have become powerful.

Now a word about auctions: one of my colleagues has always pointed out that it is a strange sleight of hand when the auction houses claim that you can do no better as a vendor than placing your material on the block and that at the same time—incredible, isn't it?—no buyer can purchase materials more favorably than at auction.

For reasons that are easy to understand but entirely promotional in nature, there is the rule that such sales be glittering, studded with star items, and of the sort that newspaper articles are written on them. If then you compare book auctions in England, in Germany, in France, and in the United States, you see four very distinct systems. These auctions are cousins to one another, but their features are dissimilar. In the British sales there is still much material from country houses, from noble families and from the collectors, but in some fields as music, ballet, and the theatre, or colorplate books, the lots are the accumulation of

careful digging for months on end. In the German auction sales, which are fragmented over many cities from Hamburg to Munich, and from Berlin to Heidelberg, the auctioneer must provide catalogues including thousands of items to make sure that attention will be paid. As the cities where these sales are held lack a healthy local clientele for most of the cases, the sales must be inflated to crowded assemblages so that twice a year bidders can be gathered from all over the country and perhaps from abroad. It is not a healthy state of affairs because there is not enough really fresh material available for the many competing houses.

The French system is still the most conservative and the catalogues often represent material that has just entered the market. That is also why the sales are of such different length. Some auctions consist of only around 100 items, some near to 500, but there are no twice-a-year, 6,000-lot sales as in Germany.

The American auction sales have diminished in number. While there are still some collections sold, as for example, the modern illustrated books offered last November at Sotheby's, or the James Gilvarry collection sold by Christie's in February, most of the auctions are collages made of some fine items held together by a good deal of glue. They are not the natural outpouring as they once were not so very long ago.

It is perhaps true for all four types of sales that a hefty percentage of very expensive items reaches the sales rooms. A dealer who expects to turn over the value of his stock once a year cannot readily invest substantial sums of money for just a few star items. The interest rates of the past few years have made that impossible. At the same time the purchasers have become more erratic. There never were many Philip Hofers, or Lessing Rosenwalds, or Clifton Barretts who would spend a good part of their adult lives learning, discovering, and acquiring the elements of their great vision. The persistence that allowed Donald and Mary Hyde to form their Johnson collection leading to considerable scholarly attainments is certainly out of the ordinary. The question is now, are there other younger collectors who will do as well? Is there now developing in our midst a successor to these outstanding connoisseurs? The danger is that speed wins out. What can you really feel for a collector like Mr. Gaines who has barely assembled some fine drawings and already chucks them into an auction the coming November? The Leonardo that was pictured in the *New York Times* this past week he has owned for less than two years, I believe. This is not a collection; it is an operation.

As new customers appear, so do new subjects of investigation and collection. Sometimes you wonder where were these works while no one wanted them. In a mysterious way they surge forth from their hiding places and occupy their place when the time seems to call for them. This is very striking for photographs and photographically illustrated books which could practically not be

given away. It is also true about many other subjects as, for example, the history of science and the history of intellectual innovations; the study of the Geisteswissenschaften, of urbanism and architecture, of Baroque literature and illustrated books, and so on. Could one not seriously read in esteemed surveys that the illustrated book of the sixteenth century was worth studying and that, after the abysmal hiatus of the seventeenth century, the art of the eighteenth century again deserved attention? This bizarre misreading has evaporated.

Some subjects obviously are entirely new, and it takes years to make them widely respected. In 1948 I produced a catalogue describing sources and books on cubism, expressionism, dadaism, surrealism, etc. The subject was still novel and we were fortunate that Paul Eluard was kind enough to write a very brief note to serve as an introduction. This note has been reprinted in the collected works of the poet. Looking at this catalogue, you see that a large number of the books were still worth less than $20, including a good many below $10. Even the most sanguine observer could not have anticipated the great demand in which these books would be thirty years later.

This game of now I see you, now I don't, also works in the opposite direction. In the 1920s and 1930s, when English novels in parts, particularly Dickens, were the collectors' highest aim, you could wander around in New York and see such copies in a great many book shops at Scribner's, at Gannon, at Rosenbach, at Maurice Inman, and so on. Where are they now? Some have found their home in permanent libraries, but the others, I sense, are just waiting for a better day when their status will once again become faddish. What about all of the books on theology? Now that no groundswell for them can be detected they wait in attics, in cellars, in garages, in warehouses, but you see very few if you scan the shelves of the antiquarian dealers or in their catalogues.

Of some other subjects you can sense that there is a growing appreciation. While natural history books have long been in demand, because of their illustrations, say the wooducts of the sixteenth century that are found in the zoological works of Gesner or the fish book of Rondelet, the taste for such publications grew immensely in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The natural history of Buffon took twenty-four years to publish its principal twenty-four volumes with about 1,000 plates. Thereafter the publications became ever more ambitious, peaking with Redouté and Audubon.

These books did not concern themselves with the world as we see it today. They offered images of species. They did not anticipate the wholesale destruction of species. Virgin forests were forever, but we know now how threatened they are and how short-sighted were many policies that dealt with them. Ecology is the reason why we now hope to be more prudent, and books on ecology are bound to be much more in demand, in the same way as space travel has become an acceptable subject. Take note: the British Interplanetary Society issues a jour-

nal. The annual bibliography of the March 1986 issue records 572 books and papers on interstellar travel covering just the year 1985. It would seem to be an acceptable topic.

Photography entered the world of books in ambiguous ways. It is a document and as such it becomes more documentary as time passes. What was obvious and not worthy of mention to the contemporaries becomes a matter of surprise or research to those of later generations. Portraiture of the 1850s was more often than not a full-length standing or seated figure, where now a face or a bust would seem appropriate. Susan Sontag has said, "a major source of their aesthetic value is precisely the transformations that time works upon them . . . all photographs are interesting as well as touching if they are old enough." This is true the more our fashion and habits change, the more archaeological the works seem to be if confronted with the sights of a later age. This explains also the much greater readiness of the younger generation to be concerned with the history of photography.

Photography is also an artistic creation when it testifies to a vision of the world, without being self-assertive or predatory. This vision is thought to create esthetically arresting images, revealing perhaps an essence that is not readily perceived by the ordinary observer. In this sense it does not matter so much what equipment and techniques are used but what the photographer can survey while keeping alert his sense of wonder.

Photography in the third place is the servant of trade and promotion. It sells and it challenges. It perishes faster than a butterfly. Only the subject it shows should be noticed, not the means by which that image was produced. There should be as little personality as possible.

All three forms can be found in the books, either those photographically illustrated—a development that essentially lasted from 1844 (the *Pencil of Nature*) to 1914 (the volume *Sur le prélude a l'après-midi d'un faune* of Baron de Mayer), or those with photo-mechanical illustrations after photographs. Increasingly, in more recent periods, accounts have been produced bringing back or showing for the first time the many developments in that field. All the bases are covered, poetry and novels, travel books, portraiture, trades and industry, science, and little by little, the fine arts. There were government surveys of architectural monuments, military surveys, and in the depression, an inventory of how the deprived coped under the circumstances. The greatest of all of these changes is the role of the illustrated book. Antiquarian booksellers in the nineteenth century worked in categories already established before.

Take a copy of the library catalogue of the Duc de la Vallière issued in three volumes by de Bure in 1783. It runs to over 5,000 items and ends on over 400 pages of tables or index. There is no separate division for illustrated books but over 1,000 titles for theology, 200 for law, 950 for science and art where some

illustrated books are found such as medical, natural history, iconology, methods of draftsmanship or some portfolios of prints. There follows the second volume with literature and the third with history, while the illuminated manuscripts are summarily listed. For example, in the 1486 edition of the Chivalry novel of Fierabras all it says about the illustration is "woodcuts." For the great work showing sixteenth century-machinery by Ramelli, it just says "fig." In the case of Fuchs' botany of 1542, the author goes all the way and says "*figures coloriées*." What this indicates is that the plates were perceived as minor and the artists' names are never mentioned.

In the nineteenth century, the bibliophiles discovered the potential for finding illustrated books, particularly of the eighteenth century, and for adding to them early states, proofs, autographs, drawings and so on. This mood for extra illustrated sets became quite powerful both in England and in France, but weakened in our century. You have all seen a set of Dibdin extended from three to, say, nine volumes by adding over a thousand prints, drawings, and autographs. It was fattening, not improving.

As always, over-abundance and ripeness brings about a reaction towards purity and the austere joys of untampered copies. Now the books were expected to be in their first form and some collections or librarians were asking for uncut copies in boards or temporary wrappers rather than for the same works well-bound and with appropriate provenance.

Concurrently, respect for past tastes weakened. There grew up hostility to historical consciousness. In 1880 say, the architects were eclectic and found no problem in mixing norman-saracene, romanesque, gothic, and other styles that they liked. For that reason, the architects of the great mansions built for the Vanderbilts, whether in New York at Fifth Avenue and 52nd Street, or Biltmore near Asheville, North Carolina, ransacked the past for their turrets and caged staircases, for fluted entrances and the semblance of moats. It was understood that such conspicuous borrowing would dramatize the resulting edifice.

A society in which such reverence was bestowed on historic styles necessarily selected and produced books where the techniques of reproduction might be of recent invention, say chromolithography, but the matter on hand was historically sound and could be counter-checked with the increasingly large body of reference material. For that reason, when the *livre de peintre* began its victorious development around 1893–1894, it resolutely aimed at originality and at a reflection of the best of young contemporary esthetics. These young artists and their young publishers rejected historicizing. It was felt that the Owen Jones and the Pugins had had their day and that innovation would clear the air. With the illustrated editions breaking new ground, the improved techniques gave a great boost to the long-neglected field of art history. These books were given resonance by the reproduction in half-tone or in colors of the subjects under discussion. The

works of art no longer were seen in naive and untrue outline (which lost all pictorial values) or in glistening chromos but in adequate properly-toned plates.

By the 1920s and 1930s, dealers like Maggs Catalogue 500 or Gumuchian (children's books, bindings) made the illustrations an integral part of their work. There are catalogues now where the description is anemic, but the plates are full of life and color. Perhaps, this is only fitting in a period where the image has become so powerful. From the cradle to the coffin, many of our fellow citizens learn about the world at large from the pictures that appear on television. The meaning of such pictures is obviously less clearly defined than a text using precise terminology. An image allows far more interpretation than a well-reasoned statement. Its intellectual impact is fuzzy. The image does, however, command the attention of the many.

It is with this in mind that the coffee table book, the expensive illustrated volume, has become omnipresent. We wonder where this avenue leads us. Once you have lifted the Abbeville Press opus on the Sistine Chapel, the limit has been reached. You couldn't lift anymore.

The next step from the coffee table art book, rarely read and only occasionally used, is the valuable volume in the investors' vault. Here is a new problem that has arisen in our time. Banks used to feel no confidence in either the book trade or the art trade. They were suspicious of our purposes and of our capacities. This is no longer so. Without the help of the banks there would not be the dazzling multiplication of values for colorplate books illustrating birds and flowers, trips to distant shores, and the views of cities cheerfully romantic. Without the banks (in all likelihood), no one would have carved up the 276 original drawings of Oudry for the "Fables" of La Fontaine. After all, they had stayed together from 1774–1973, that is, 199 years of protected splendor, before they were uprooted by a bank-controlled knife.

One more example: 468 original watercolors on pure vellum executed by Redouté for his work on the lily family (1802–1816). They had been bound in sixteen volumes by Lefèvre and Bozérian. They were offered at auction at the sale of Eugène de Beauharnais' library in 1935. You have all read that they were sold again in November of last year for $5,500,000 in an operation that was utterly distasteful but that again could not have occurred without the help of the banks. The change in the market becomes even more evident when you remember that in 1939 the then owner of this stupendous collection, the late Erhard Weyhe, offered me this set for $25,000. There was no ready buyer to be found, and he held onto it. Now they are loose and their pristine condition will run all of the risks faced by decorative wall coverings.

What does it take for an object to move from the normal market into the empyrean? A great historical document, a Shakespeare quarto, the Audubon birds—everyone knows what power they exert. The vault beckons. New topics

are added including some books illustrated by painters, even some photographers—or a Daguerre of Edgar Allan Poe—or the top photographically-illustrated book. All of them must however be obviously star items. The weight of their being obvious is what makes them great.

The set of Roberts on the Holy Land, six volumes, 1842–1849, in the preferred hand-colored form, has thus risen from $2,000 to $70,000 or over $100,000 in the short space of fifteen years. This is the fate of the unassailable investment.

These facts must be considered if we hope to keep the world of antiquarian books in its proper place. Unless there is a radical change we can expect that the vault-keepers will hold on and perhaps even enlarge their segment of the market. At the same time, a problem has arisen on the other flank. There have been conferences on information technology where speakers predicted the end of libraries. I read in the *Library Association Record* of October 1985 that libraries had many functions, principally to provide access to information. If people can obtain information at home on their own terminals, they might prefer that electronic future to their present conditions. A feasibility test is underway for the possible use of satellites in the transmission of documents. Others have even suggested that not only libraries, but publishers, could become unnecessary if there were direct channels from authors to users. I do not propose to go into details about such anticipated innovations. But I might mention how relatively perishable tapes are. Lawyers and doctors have found that information thus stored has been erased without anyone having ordered the erasure. We do not know how long the life span will be of information thus recorded. What we know, however, is that books printed in the fifteenth century are fully as legible now as they were when Gutenberg or Koberger, Jenson or Aldus watched over their production.

This does not, however, allow us to sit back. The teaching of information skills, the establishing of internationally agreed standards, and the building of a self-service information network are certainly necessary. There is a program in France to install 100,000 microcomputers in the schools by 1988. Imagine what the combined result of such early exposure might portend. Yet, not everything that is scientifically possible can be translated into what is humanly or economically feasible. It suffices to say that these two zones of potential trouble exist and that it would be in the interest, I think, of all of us who are present here to try to stake out a middle ground. There the life of the mind would still be nurtured by the actual books read or consulted as before, allowing our private communication with the best or the average or even the worst that humanity has noted down in millions and millions of pages throughout recorded history.