The quest for an Anglo-American copyright agreement was repeatedly thwarted throughout most of the nineteenth century, due to the effect of lobbyists and influence-peddlers on the American Congress. This meant that in the United States the question of international copyright was not decided on its own merits but rather by pressure groups who wielded great financial and private power upon the legislators.

The opposite was true in Great Britain, where Parliament was far more interested in the rights of authors and publishers and had already passed a number of statutes promoting international copyright. Copyright agreements, however, needed to be mutually agreed upon by both countries, and the United States would not reciprocate. In desperation, a group of British authors and publishers decided to play the game of politics American-style, and with great caution they raised enough money to defray the expenses of a secret lobby in Washington. A copyright treaty was duly signed by the Secretary of State and all that was required was Senate approval.

Authors, Publishers and Politicians describes these efforts to secure an Anglo-American copyright agreement. It explores the underlying causes of the failure of this quest, a failure which enabled literary pirates on both sides of the Atlantic to continue operations for a further forty years. It traces the effects this had on the writers and producers of books as well as their reading public. Few aspects of Anglo-American relations were untouched by the drama presented in this study. Its broader implications range from straightforward business transactions, official diplomatic manoeuvres, endless legal complexities, and clandestine political intrigue, to the peculiarities involved in book smuggling, newspaper rivalries and industrial espionage.

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James J. Barnes

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