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Introduction

THIS STUDY STUDIES THE STUDY. It investigates how Renaissance humanists created an intimate healing place of the soul—the *studiolo*—as a personal library of self-cultivation and self-fashioning. Cocooned within its four walls (or, if you're Montaigne, a circular tower), the *studiolo* was an aperture through which you contemplate the world and a retreat wherein you cultivate the self. In order to know the world, one must begin with knowing the self, as ancient philosophy instructs. In order to know the self, one ought to study other selves too, preferably their ideas as recorded in texts. And since interior spaces shape the inward soul, the *studiolo*—the diminutive of *studio* in Italian—became a sanctuary and a microcosm. The study thus mediates the world, the word, and the self.

As idea and infrastructure, the *studiolo* enacts a basic hope of humanism: to reach out and commune with the voices of the past. In an evocative letter written by Machiavelli in 1513, the disgraced writer finds himself fallen from the apex of power. He's been rusticated to his family villa outside Florence. In the day, he's bored. He takes walks in the countryside, catches some birds, loiters with the villagers, plays cards at the local tavern. But nothing compares to the thrill of what he does at the end of the day:

When evening has come, I return to my house and go into my study [*scrittoio*]. At the door I take off my clothes of the day, covered with mud and mire, and I put on my regal and courtly garments; and decently re clothed, I enter the ancient courts of ancient men, where, received by them lovingly, I feed on the food that alone is mine and that I was born for. There I am not ashamed to speak with them and to ask them the reason for their actions; and they in their humanity [*umanità*] reply to me. And for the space of four

hours I feel no boredom, I forget every pain, I do not fear poverty, death does not frighten me. I deliver myself entirely to them.¹

W.E.B. Du Bois must have been thinking about Machiavelli when he writes in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903):

I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not. Across the color line I move arm and arm with Balzac and Dumas, where smiling men and welcoming women glide in gilded halls. From out the caves of evening that swing between the strong-limbed earth and the tracery of the stars, I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what soul I will, and they come all graciously with no scorn or condescension. So, wed with Truth, I dwell above the Veil.²

Du Bois's evocation is as riveting as any Italian humanist's: his conversations with authors—dead and white—are possible and necessary because they all share a pursuit of truth that is beyond any historical divide or racial schism. He finds in books a transhistorical *umanità* that offers him horizons of thinking beyond the limits of segregation and bigotry that beset his country. Du Bois and Machiavelli alike find friendship and equanimity in the classics instead of elitism and exclusion. Books offer them an escape, a temporary detachment from the stupidity of the times.

The idea of the library as a place of refuge reaches back to antiquity.³ In a letter, Pliny describes in loving detail his villa by the Bay of Naples. His favorite place of all is his library: it “catches the sun on all its windows as it moves through the heavens” and contains the books “which I read and read again.”⁴ In this he heeded the caution of Seneca: “What is the point of countless books and libraries when their owner can scarcely read their labels in a lifetime? . . . It is much better to entrust yourself to a few authors than be misled by an abundance of them.”⁵ Cicero, amidst his busy political life, devotes considerable energy to the care of his books. He possesses multiple libraries across his Palatine house in Rome and his villas in Antium and Tusculanum.⁶ He hires a dedicated librarian: “After Tyrannio has arranged the books for me, a soul seems to have been added to my house” (*mens addita videtur meis aedibus*, *Att.* 4.4a.1). (This seems to be the source of the commonplace “a room without books is a body without a soul.” He also wrote to a friend, “If you have a garden and library, you have everything you need,” *Fam.* 9.4.) It seems only fitting that his personal bibliotheca serves as the setting for the latter parts of his work *On the Ends of Good and Evil* (*De finibus bonorum et malorum*). The dialogue is set in his library in his sprawling villa, nestled within a complex of courtyards,

fishponds, groves, and gardens—an ideal place for pleasant philosophical dialogues between friends, real and imagined.

In the Middle Ages, the monastic cell—the *cubiculum*—was the place for reading, prayer, and contemplation. The *scriptorium* was a place where scribes copied and illuminated manuscripts. The *bibliotheca*, holding pagan and sacred texts, constituted the archive of the known world's knowledge. From Augustine onward, the Christian tradition posits that reading is a dialogue with God. Petrarch marked a change: in his practice, reading becomes instead a dialogue with the voices of antiquity. In the 1330s, in Vaucluse, a remote valley in southern France, he constructed a little villa with a small study, in modest imitation of the ancients. While there were already private studies in the Burgundian courts and the papal palace in Avignon, Petrarch was one of the first to construct one unattached to any institutions.⁷ “Meanwhile here I have established my Rome, my Athens, and my spiritual fatherland [*patriam ipsam mente*],” he wrote. “Here I gather all the friends I now have or did have, not only those who have proved themselves through intimate contact and who have lived with me, but also those who died many centuries ago, known to me only through their writings.”⁸ Petrarch inaugurated the idea of reviving classical antiquity as a transhistorical conversation between the living and the dead. The studiolo thus becomes a sort of chronotope, an ingathering of time and space, where perception of the past, present, and future accelerates or dilates at the will of the reader. In their tiny corners of the world, Petrarch, Machiavelli, and Du Bois each in their own ways conjure a utopia of friends, binding together the far and near, the long-ago and recent past into the plenitude of the here-and-now.

The tradition of the library as a refuge continues with Michel de Montaigne, whose special hideaway was a circular tower in his estate, located some thirty miles from Bordeaux. (You can still visit it today; fig. I.1; pl. 2.) On the ceiling beams of his library, Montaigne has ancient maxims and biblical proverbs inscribed in Greek and Latin. These inscriptions form a sort of architectural commonplace book, a thesaurus or databank gleaned from his vast readings that he would redeploy in his writings. The interior of Montaigne's tower is textualized, and in turn the microtexts on his ceiling beams form the architectonics of his essays (fig. I.2; pl. 3). Behold, then, the architext, wherein text and architecture enfold materiality and intellectual activity within one roof. In other words, for Montaigne there is a continuum between the interior, interiority, and inwardness: the built environment not only encloses his body but also reflects his inner life.



FIGURE I.1. Montaigne's tower in his chateau; his library is on the top floor.



FIGURE I.2. Inscriptions from ancient authors and Bible in Montaigne's tower library.

In the essay “Of Solitude,” Montaigne writes: “We should have wife, children, goods, and above all health, if we can; but we must not bind ourselves to them so strongly that our happiness [*tout de heur*] depends on them. We must reserve a back room [*une arriereboutique*] all our own, entirely free [*franche*], in which to establish our real liberty [*liberté*] and our principal retreat and solitude.”⁹ Clearly present here is the emergence of the modern liberal self—the autonomous individual with his right to privacy. After all, Montaigne says outright the need for happiness, freedom, liberty. His use of *arriereboutique*, “back room,” is here interesting, because it evokes more of a shophouse bustling with trade rather than the tranquility of a nobleman’s secluded estate. Machiavelli in his letter similarly uses the humbler *scrittoio*, a writing room, as if his space in the farmhouse is not deigned to be worthy of the lofty title of *studiolo*. In any case, for both writers—and this is true for Renaissance humanism at large—there is no *vita contemplativa* without the *vita activa*: the two modes of life—commerce and contemplation—necessarily coexist.

The invention of the *studiolo* is thus the invention of privacy. In modernity, the individual self is formed through the carving off of a separate place for oneself. In other words, the coordinates of the study are located within the

entanglement of household, silence, and the individual. The studiolo manifested the desire for an inner life. But if the mood arose and circumstances demanded, its owner could turn it easily into a sociable place for refined entertainment and cultivated gatherings.

Montaigne is basically advocating for—to use a rather crude term—a “man cave.” He could afford this because he was land-owning gentry with a chateau outside Bordeaux. From the 1500s, in the elegant courts and cities of Europe, the studiolo became a must-have accessory for the well-to-do. Elite women, as we will see, also had an opportunity for their own self-fashioning. Isabella d’Este had her own bespoke studiolo in the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua.¹⁰ As a widowed marchioness, Isabella became a patron of considerable renown, commissioning artworks from Giovanni Bellini, Giorgione, Leonardo da Vinci, and Titian. Here I should admit that my study deals almost exclusively with elite culture, and an overwhelmingly male one at that. A considerable infrastructure sustains Montaigne’s and Isabella’s intellectual pursuits—a complex household of servants and staff was necessary to maintain their estates. That said, Montaigne and Isabella also took responsibility for managing them. But not every noblewoman had Isabella’s discerning tastes nor means.

As in all things, the studiolo is imbricated in the early modern economy—the accelerated acquisition of knowledge, power, capital, and real estate—and to point this out is to acknowledge that gender and social inequality pervaded their world as it does ours. In Virginia Woolf’s famous formulation, a woman always struggles to find “a room of one’s own.” And as Linda Nochlin puts it in her landmark essay, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” (1971): the social conditions to flourish “are stultifying, oppressive, and discouraging to all those, women among them, who did not have the good fortune to be born white, preferably middle class and, above all, male. The fault, dear brothers, lies not in our stars, our hormones, our menstrual cycles, or our empty internal spaces, but in our institutions and our education.”¹¹ That is, Montaigne’s sister—or Shakespeare’s, or so many others—would have been an author too had she had the same opportunities as her brother.

And then there are times when the best writing comes from a scarcity of books. A long tradition of prison writing runs through St. Paul to Boethius, from Antonio Gramsci to Primo Levi.¹² Their carceral cell becomes their studiolo in captivity. Disgraced, condemned, and ultimately executed, Boethius

writes his *Consolation of Philosophy* (ca. 523) as a balm for suffering by summoning Lady Philosophy, who comes bearing a pile of classical books. Almost exactly a thousand years later, Sir Thomas More would be executed by Henry VIII in the Tower of London. In the final months of his imprisonment, he composed *A Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation* (1534). In 1603 Sir Walter Raleigh was also imprisoned in the Tower of London, where he spent seven years producing his massive *History of the World*. In fact, prison literature proliferated in early modern England: we can count Thomas Wyatt, Henry Howard, John Harington, William Tyndale, Thomas Cranmer, Anne Askew, even Elizabeth I herself.¹³ Perhaps it is no accident that both More and Elizabeth translated Boethius (though not while they were in prison). For them, writing becomes a strategy of resistance against political oppression and a way of creating a happier reality. Their deprivation of physical liberty perforce gave them freedom of thought.

From Bibliophilia to Bibliomania

The virtues of the Renaissance *studiolo* can sometimes disguise its vices. We all know that spending too much time in isolation is good for neither the soul nor the body. Instead of chambers of sweet silent thought, the *studiolo* can become a locus of melancholy—bibliophilia curdles into bibliomania and bibliophobia lapses into biblioclasm. Obsessive reading can lead to derangement and even damnation. As such, the *studiolo* acts as a fulcrum between two sides of Renaissance thought: self-cultivation, self-reflection, self-care on one hand; anxiety, pathology, megalomania on the other. The contrast between Albrecht Dürer's *St. Jerome in His Study* and *Melencolia I* encapsulates this dichotomy (figs. I.3, I.4; pl. 4, pl. 5). If the visible libraries of Petrarch and Montaigne express the luminous study, the invisible libraries depicted in the literature of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries show us the dark side. The *studiolo* is thus what the ancient Greeks called a *pharmakon*: a cure and a poison.

Renaissance literature lampoons bibliomania. In Rabelais's *Pantagruel* (1532), as the protagonist embarks on his adventures, he happens upon the Library of Saint-Victor in Paris, where he reads a hilarious invented catalog of books with titles like "The Shittershatter of the Maidens, the Shaven Tail of the Widows . . . Monkey's Paternoster . . . The Kissass of Surgery." Rabelais thereby parodies two things: the nature of lists as well as the transition from medieval epistemology to early modernity. In the first pages of Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605), the narrator recounts how our hero "spent his nights reading from dusk



FIGURE 1.3. Albrecht Dürer, *Saint Jerome in His Study*, 1514, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



FIGURE 1.4. Albrecht Dürer, *Melencolia I*, 1514, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

till dawn and his days reading from sunrise to sunset, with too little sleep and too much reading, his brains dried up, causing him to lose his mind.”

In Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (ca. 1610), when we first meet Prospero, he recounts how he was exiled to an enchanted island. As the former duke of Milan, he had devoted himself to the liberal arts, believing that “my library was dukedom large enough.” Since he neglected the business of state, his perfidious brother usurped the throne. In Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* (1592), the protagonist is a man utterly exhausted by knowledge. In his opening soliloquy, he paces around his studiolo and bids farewell to his vast learning. He recounts his mastery of philosophy, medicine, law, theology: “Read no more; thou hast attained the end. . . . Physics, farewell! . . . Divinity, adieu!” Thereupon he summons the dark powers and makes his infamous pact—he sells his soul to the devil.

For Don Quixote, Prospero, and Faustus, their identities and studioli are so entangled that their bibliomania charts their rise and fall. In its apogee, the studiolo was a major statement piece in the self-fashioning of an aristocrat, a place for not only solitude but also sociability. A duke could spend

his afterhours there to read and relax but also host his friends and selected company. The problem with Don Quixote, Prospero, and Faustus is that they never let anyone in theirs. On account of their excessive love of books, Don Quixote loses his mind, Prospero his dukedom, and Doctor Faustus his soul. For Don Quixote, the world becomes a text. For Prospero, the island to which he's been exiled becomes a colonialist laboratory. For Faustus, his study becomes first a locus of temptation and finally a scene of damnation. In act 5, the library's floor—that is, the stage trapdoor—is flung open as the devils come for him. His studiolo is now a chasm, his customized gateway to Hell. Ultimately, Don Quixote renounces his books, Prospero drowns his, and Faustus attempts to burn them. The Renaissance studiolo becomes the crucible where knowledge is created and destroyed, and whereby the modern self is formed and deformed.

I find it interesting that Cervantes, Shakespeare, and Marlowe never really describe their protagonists in the act of reading in their libraries—we only hear about the aftermath, all narrated in the beginning of the works. The reason, I think, is simple: while white, middle-aged men sitting alone in their rooms might produce grand philosophical tracts, they usually do not make for the most compelling romances or drama. Nor are *Don Quixote*, *The Tempest*, and *Doctor Faustus* Renaissance *Magic Mountains*. Their studioli begin as spaces of care but eventually turn toxic. Don Quixote, Prospero, and Faustus are famous because they go on their quixotic (for what other word can be used?) adventures of reviving knight errantry, island domination, and world travel. But none of these would have happened had they not spent significant parts of their early careers in deep reading. Their studioli thus function as absent centers: their storylines are haunted by the nostalgia of the libraires where their intellectual innocence was lost.

Libraries are like cities. As Italo Calvino claims, all cities are invisible and visible. “With cities, it is as with dreams: everything imaginable can be dreamed, but even the most unexpected dream is a rebus that conceals a desire or, its reverse, a fear.”¹⁴ For William Marx, the invisible library precedes the visible library, for behind every material collection is a mind that attempts to conjure a model of the cosmos.¹⁵ That is why real libraries from Petrarch to Montaigne must be read with their imaginary counterparts in Cervantes, Shakespeare, and others, for literature has the unique capacity to manifest and explore what

is only latent in the facticity of history. Alberto Manguel, in his meditative *Library at Night* (2005), describes how, during the day, his library is a realm of order. Books are neatly arranged, allotted in their proper rank and order. At night, phantoms return, spectral presences loom, and the tender chaos of free associations commingles. And since mimesis and reality reflect each other, the imaginary library becomes a self-portrait of literature, a way for literature to think about its own modes of representation: its ways of creation, acquisition, storage, circulation, use, and, on occasion, dispersal.

The imaginary library is therefore an epiphenomenon of the self-reflexivity of knowledge itself. The history and literature of libraries must perforce be studied together, for they constitute the philology of culture. In the *studiolo* the individual curates and produces culture, whereas in the *bibliotheca* it is the institution that does so. Each institutional library constitutes a unique constellation of knowledge, and each *studiolo* enacts an individual's material and mental *Bildung*. Literary representations of the library mean that literature was self-aware of its own danger: the moral is that holing ourselves up into a room with too many books may not always be a good thing, liable to induce claustrophobia and paranoia. Having imaginary conversations with the dead may be a sign of delusion. The *studiolo*, so certain of its universalism, may promise a false abundance, becoming a closed system that seals itself up into a mirror-house of solipsism.

An Earnest Bending

“Study” is both an activity and place. John Florio, the translator of Montaigne, defines its multiple meanings in his 1611 *Queen Anna's New World of Words, or Dictionary of the Italian and English Tongues* as:

Stúdio, an earnest bending of the minde to a thing, affection to doe good or evill, study, endeavour, diligence, industry, laborious desire, mentall exercise.

Stúdio, a private study, a cabinet, closet or any place to study in. Also an university where studies are profest. Also a College where Students are, Also a standing deske in a school for great bookes.¹⁶

This definition reminds us that we shape our places and our places shape us: a basic axiom of architectural theory that is as self-evident at first glance as inexhaustible upon scrutiny. What better word, therefore, to describe the growth of the mind (and the body), what better word suited to Renaissance

humanism, known for its bookishness, its nerdiness, its stirrings of the intellect, its pangs of sublimated desire, than “study”?

When we study, we concentrate on the matter at hand; we focus our mind. But to learn something we must go outside ourselves, “bend” toward some new thing, as Florio suggests. In this he follows an ancient definition. In Cicero’s *De inventione*, *studium* is not only a liberal art but an art of living (*artium . . . vivendi*): “an unremitting mental activity ardently devoted to some subject and accompanied by intense pleasure, for example interest in philosophy, poetry, geometry, literature” (1.36).¹⁷ Humanists came to call this the *studia humanitatis*, to contrast it with the study of divinity.¹⁸ They dedicated many tracts to the methods and materials of study.¹⁹ For Cicero and Florio, study is centripetal and centrifugal, pushing and pulling us out of our habitual modes of thinking. To truly study, then, we must center and decenter ourselves. (For this reason the scholar’s caricature is that of the *eccentric*.) Though scholarship derives from the Greek σχολή (*scholé*)—leisure and free time—we all know too well that much of academic work is a painful “laborious desire,” often coerced by our teachers and administrators.

In his definition, Florio’s *studiolo* moves from widening circles of learning. The studio is solitary—“a private study, a cabinet, closet or any place to study in”—and communal—“a College where Students are.” Florio’s mention of the “closet” is particularly telling: long before it was a metaphor for queer repression, the closet was a secluded room where the soul selects her own society, then shuts the door: a refuge for reading, writing, praying, dressing, and occasionally socializing with a chosen few.²⁰ And as Alan Stewart points out, because so much of early modern pedagogy happened in same-sex spaces, there is a close kinship between humanism and sodomy.²¹ The eros of knowledge always murmurs in hushed voices. Much of the hidden history of studying is also the hidden history of sexuality.

But the solitude of the *studiolo* exists side by side with the more sociable sites of knowledge making: cabinets of curiosities, workshops of artists, print shops, operating rooms, laboratories, menageries, law courts, theaters, monasteries, religious institutions, universities.²² In Italy, academies sprouted up with witty names like *Oziosi* (“The Idle Ones”), *Intrepidi* (“The Intrepid Ones”), *Abbandonati* (“The Abandoned Ones”), and *Gelati* (“The Frozen Ones”).²³ Information and ideas came from all walks of life: aristocrats, academics, artists, scientists, tradesmen, and housewives.²⁴ And since the *studiolo* is a microcosm, to talk about the study is to consider how porous and receptive it is to the wider world.

Too Much to Know

Individual libraries exist hand in hand with institutional libraries. And people have dreamed, created, and destroyed libraries since the invention of writing—from the Egyptians to the Chinese to the Greeks and Romans. The European Renaissance marked a particularly efflorescent period when humanists accumulated and circulated vast systems of discourse surrounding the cult of books. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are usually celebrated as the dawn of early modernity, when Renaissance humanism, the Reformation, the rise of science, the discovery of the “New World,” the decline of magic, the birth of the individual—all hotly debated terms in historiography—came into being. My take is that the library is where all these intellectual movements were forged.

None of this would have happened, of course, without the technology of print: within fifty years of its arrival in Europe (China had already invented the printing press in the eighth century), the world was swimming in books. By 1500, something like nine million printed objects were in circulation. By 1600, the number had exploded to 180 million.²⁵ There was just “too much to know,” in Ann Blair’s felicitous phrase.²⁶ Humanists everywhere devised ever more ingenious ways to sort, select, and summarize this deluge of information. As Roger Chartier shows, bibliographers like Antonio Doni, Conrad Gesner, and François Grudé de la Croix du Maine came up with rational ways to give order to the abundance of books. By the power of their bibliographic instruments, circumscribed libraries could contain a universe of books, a “library without walls.”²⁷ In 1602 Justus Lipsius writes *De bibliothecis syntagma*, considered to be the first history of Western libraries: from Ozymandias of Egypt to the philologists of Alexandria to the imperial and private collections of ancient Rome. He writes that “the word *bibliotheca* refers to three things: a place [*locum*], a bookcase [*armarium*], and a collection of books [*libros*].”²⁸ In 1627 Gabriel Naudé writes *Advis pour dresser une bibliothèque*, a guide on how to systematically select, acquire, and arrange books in a library.²⁹ A few years later, he puts theory into practice when he became librarian to two mighty cardinals who loom large in French history: Richelieu and Mazarin.

Already in 1494, Sebastian Brant, the chancellor to the Holy Roman emperor Maximilian I (himself possessing a magnificent cabinet of curiosities and a massive library), places the bibliophile as the first specimen in his satire *Ship of Fools* (fig. I.5):

If on this ship I’m number one
For special reasons that was done,

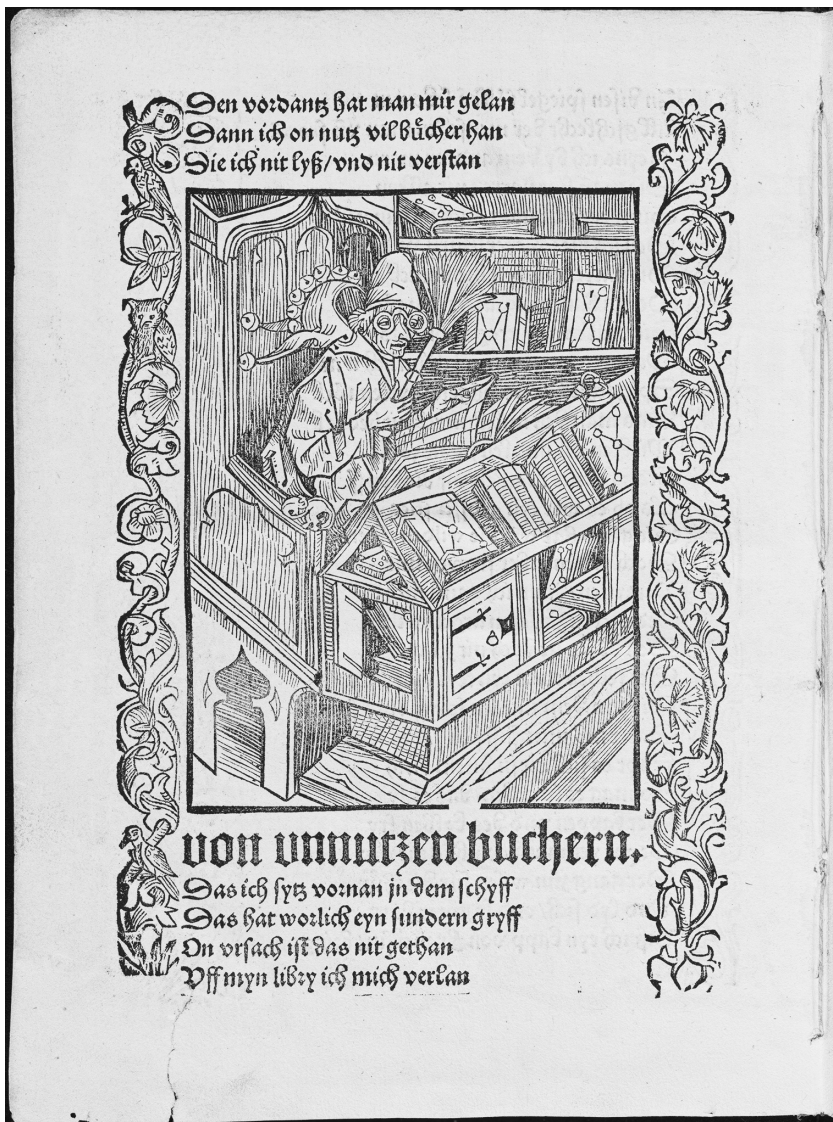


FIGURE 1.5. The reader, from Sebastian Brant, *The Ship of Fools*, 1494, Staatsbibliothek Bamberg.

Yes, I'm the first one here you see
Because I like my library.
Of splendid books I own no end,
But few that I can comprehend.³⁰

Renaissance humanists were inspired by the Library of Alexandria in its dreams of the universal library—the urge to collect everything under the sun. But we must remember that the myth of the Library of Alexandria is inseparable from its destruction.³¹ And it's easy to see how Google Books is but a continuation of this millennial-long endeavor of data storage. And are not our smartphones the smallest studioli in the world? (Surely a *Ship of Fools 2.0* would include the internet addict.) When we cradle this marvelous gleaming object in our hands, we have an infinite microlibrary, greater than any fantasies an Alexandrian philologist could conjure. Every time we stare at our portable devices, we circumscribe ourselves out of our surroundings and create, at least momentarily, a membrane between us and the physical world.

If Voltaire's Enlightenment dictum is *Il faut cultiver notre jardin* (we must grow our garden), the Renaissance humanist would have said, "We must grow our library." In an age of pandemic, violence, and persecutions, it makes good sense to retreat into our little rooms where our intellects can roam and soar unmolested. The studiolo becomes a place where we can cultivate what the late Foucault calls "care of the self" (*souci de soi*) against the onslaught of the world. "In my library I spend most of the days of my life, and most of the hours of the day," Montaigne writes; "confined solitude broadens my horizons and expands me outward: I throw myself into the affairs of state and into the wide world more willingly when I'm alone."

A history of Renaissance knowledge—or, for that matter, any knowledge—without a consideration of the study would be incomplete. We should study personal libraries because they are the sites of our knowledge production—and sometimes destruction. To study the study, then, is to take a critical gaze at our own day-to-day practice of scholarly work. A historical investigation into the personal library would very much inform our present habits of mind. After all, at least in the humanities, all research originates and ends at the desktop of the scholar's studio. Our on-campus study (otherwise known as the office, for those lucky enough to get one) is the most visible manifestation of the division of university labor into academic units, and thus the atomization of knowledge. And since we also have lives as private individuals, our home study represents the domestication of our professions. Individual and institutional libraries exist on a continuum, since all august collections, however encyclopedic, have at their core the donations of some quirky bibliophile (or the whims of the librarian who curates the collection). That is why it's crucial that we pay attention to the studiolo's ecologies, etiologies, and idiosyncrasies.

Faustus's Journey

In the original German *Faust Book*, our Doctor tells Mephistopheles: “My pretence is to visit the whole face of the earth, visible and invisible when it pleaseth me.”³² Mephistopheles readily complies, and he and Faustus go off to Pannonia, Austria, Bohemia, Silesia, Saxony, Meissen, and Thuringia; also Muscovy, Tartary, Turkey, Persia, Cathay, Alexandria, Barbary, Guinea, Peru, the Straits of Magellan, India, the frozen zone, and Terra Incognita. In the court of Rudolf II in Prague, Faustus might have encountered Giuseppe Arcimboldo’s parody of bibliomania *The Librarian* (ca. 1566, fig. I.6; pl. 6). He was disappointed—no surprise—remaining as weary as ever: “He saw very little that delighted his mind.” In Marlowe’s retelling, Faustus is much less global: the University of Wittenberg professor remains in Europe. He goes to Rome and pulls a prank on the pope; he is invited to visit Charles V; and he summons an apparition of Alexander the Great. Faustus goes to England and sells an enchanted horse to a horse dealer. Back in Wittenberg, he summons Helen of Troy in order to impress his colleagues.

Now let us, by a flight of imagination, suppose that Doctor Faustus, instead of wasting his time on trifles and shenanigans, revives his devotion to true study and undertakes a multiyear sabbatical. What would happen if Faust instead embarked on a highly selective Grand Tour of world libraries? What would happen if he went on a journey from Córdoba to Constantinople, making stops in Timbuktu and the Yangzi River delta in China, circa 1550–1600? Though the core of this book is the European studiolo, we must not think that the culture of erudition was an exclusively Western phenomenon. And since the library encapsulates the idea of *multum in parvo* (many in the small), a space that spans the latitudes and longitudes of the world, we might very well use the conceit of Faustus traveling to libraries around the world in order to broaden our own cartographies of knowledge.

Beginning in Córdoba, Faustus sees the post-*Conquista* shadows of the Islamic libraries. He decides to go north to the Escorial, Philip II’s palace, its heart a magnificent library, where plundered Arabic manuscripts cohabit with documents of Christian holy men and women. He goes to visit Toledo, where there was a school of translators. He might have even seen the hidden libraries underneath floorboards and fake walls in *conversos*’ homes that contained caches of Islamic texts. He might have visited Cervantes, who flitted in and out of prison. As a staunch Protestant, Faustus would have surreptitiously observed the proceedings of the censors of the Holy Office of Inquisitions. In Seville, he



FIGURE I.6. Giuseppe Arcimboldo, *The Librarian*, 1566, Skokloster Castle, Sweden.

goes to the Biblioteca Columbina, founded by the son of Christopher Columbus.³³ If he went to a bookstore, he would have seen stocks of romances, some works of theology, commentaries on Aristotle. Making some discreet inquiries, he might have found a bookseller who could have sold him some contraband Erasmus, recently placed on the *Index of Forbidden Books*.

Bored with the familiar, he quits Europe. Somewhere, Faustus gets hold of Leo Africanus's *The Cosmography and the Geography of Africa* (1526). "The king of Timbuktu possesses enormous wealth in precious stones and gold bars," the author writes. "In Timbuktu there are many scholars, imams and judges, all subsidized by the ruler, who greatly honors men of letters. Many books are bought and sold, especially manuscripts from Barbary; merchants earn more from them than from all their other wares."³⁴ Though Timbuktu is proverbial for the faraway, the Portuguese and English saw the city as the mythical gateway to untold wealth deep inside Africa. They were not too far off the mark; situated on the edge of the Sahara Desert, Timbuktu was a considerable center for trade in salt, gold, slaves, textiles—and books. Within its mud brick buildings are housed the most significant Islamic manuscripts outside of Cairo and Mecca. Scribes and scholars filled private libraries, mosques, and madrasas with copies of the Qur'an, treatises on Arabic grammar, Sufism, hadith of the Prophet, and jurisprudence, as well as translations of Greek philosophy, medicine, and astronomy. The prolific polymath Ahmad Baba (1556–1627), a native of Timbuktu, captures the spirit of the city's learning when he writes: "One hour of a scholar lying on his bed but meditating on his knowledge is more valuable than the worship of a devout person for seventy years."³⁵ Today there are more than 350,000 surviving manuscripts in Timbuktu's private libraries, all in precarious condition.³⁶

Eastward to Istanbul. Though there was a mass exodus of Greek scholars from the fall of Byzantium in 1453, the Ottomans quickly developed their own intellectual culture. Upon his accession to the throne, Sultan Mehmed II ordered the construction of the Topkapı palace. Commanding views of the Black Sea and the Mediterranean at the conjunction of Europe and Asia, the Inner Treasury of the Topkapı housed the palace library and private treasure collection of the sultans. Mehmed invited Italian artists and scholars to his court. One read to him ancient historians such as Laertius, Herodotus, Livy, and Quintus Curtius as well as chronicles of the popes and the Lombard kings.³⁷ As in the case of all imperial collections, the act of systematically collecting and organizing books, along with the spatial order of the library itself, was part and parcel of the Ottoman state's ambitions to project itself as a potent political and cultural force across Eurasia.³⁸ Venetian diplomatic communiqués record that the history of Alexander the Great and Aristotle's philosophy were read to Sultan Süleyman, Mehmed's descendant, after dinner. A beautiful page from a manuscript illumination shows Murad III, the grandson of Süleyman, seated in front of a desk with a bookshelf behind him, surrounded by courtiers

(fig. I.7; pl. 7). Next to the imperial bathhouse and harem, in the sultan's studiolo the pleasures of the mind meet the pleasures of the senses: a fountain flows in the foreground; in the background, trees peek from behind a blue dome topped with a golden finial.

In act 1 of Marlowe's play, Faustus says that once he attains power, he will send soldiers to "fly to India for gold, / Ransack the ocean for orient pearl" (1.1.84–85). In our fantasy, he goes there himself and participates in the religious debates (*ibadat khanah*) of the emperor Akbar (fig. I.8). On Thursday evenings, the emperor would summon Muslim, Hindu, Jain, Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian scholars and clerics to discuss spiritual topics. It was in these sessions that the first Jesuit mission presented him with a polyglot Bible that was in Hebrew, Chaldean, Greek, and Latin. "My father always associated with the learned of every creed and religion," his son Jahangir wrote, "especially with Pandits and the learned of India, and although he was illiterate, so much became clear to him through constant intercourse with the learned and wise, in his conversations with them, that no one knew him to be illiterate, and he was so acquainted with the niceties of verse and prose compositions that his deficiency was not thought of."³⁹ In order to understand the culture they were ruling, the multilingual and multiethnic Mughal court engaged deeply with Sanskrit thought.⁴⁰ Akbar ordered the Persian translations of Sanskrit epics and scripture and founded colleges in Fatehpur Sikri, Agra, and Delhi. In his workshop, artisans imitated and transformed European paintings in the spirit of cosmopolitan exchange.⁴¹

After visiting Turkey, Muscovy, Tartary, Persia, and India, Faustus's flight continues to Cathay. Like Europe, China had a complex ecology of libraries. Faustus is spoiled for choice: one census puts the number of private libraries during the Ming dynasty at nine hundred.⁴² Examples ranged from imperial collections in the capital; academies dedicated to cramming for the notoriously difficult civil examinations; book collections in family compounds in large cities; studioli in exquisite pleasure gardens in the suburbs; and rustic retreats in the countryside. (Given his transgressive nature, Faustus would appreciate the ghost stories of scholars possessed by fox spirits in Pu Songling's *Tales from a Chinese Studio*, 聊齋誌異, published in 1740.) In fact, the Chinese classical tradition shares with European Renaissance humanism many of the same concerns: a desire for the return to antiquity (復古, *fugu*), self-cultivation (修身, *xiushen*), and methods of reading (讀書法, *dushufa*).

The Chinese art tradition abounds with depictions of the country retreat.⁴³ Solitary reclusion was necessary for moral self-cultivation in times of worldly

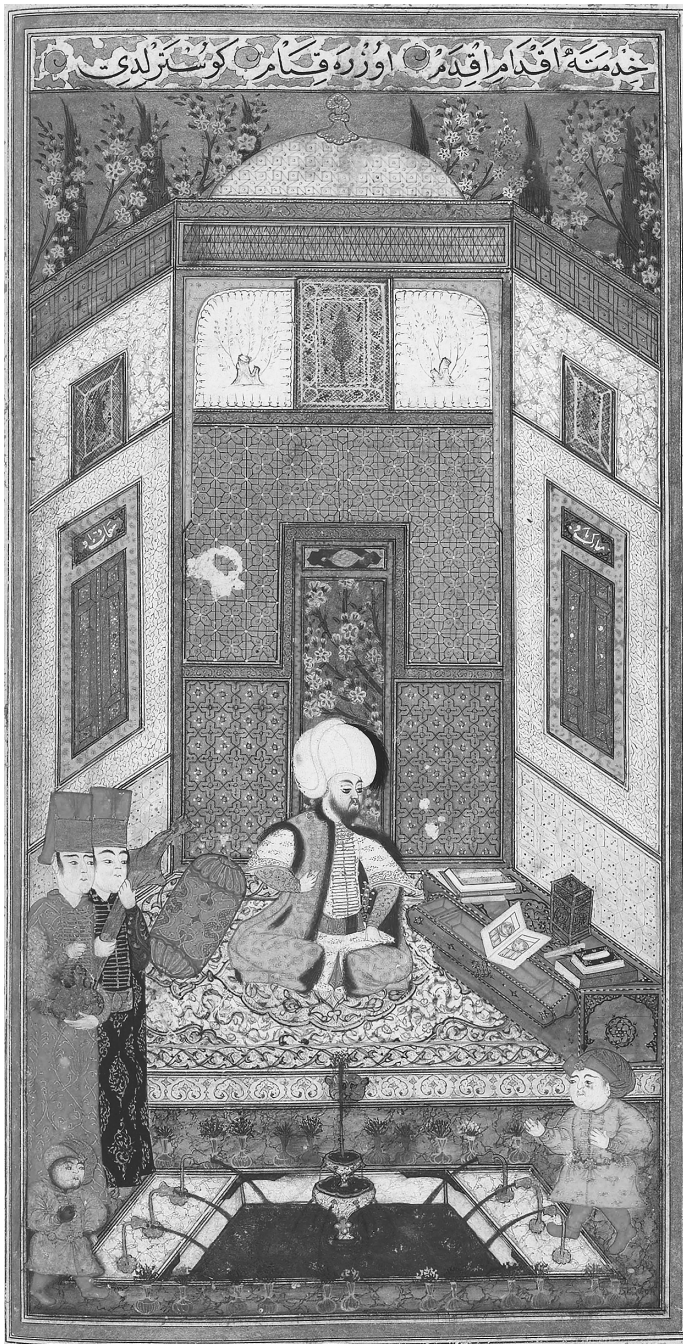


FIGURE 1.7. Mehmed Suûdi Efendi, "Library of Murad III," *Metâli'üs-Sa'ade ve Yenâbi'ü's Siyâde*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, Sup. TurC. 242, fol.7b.

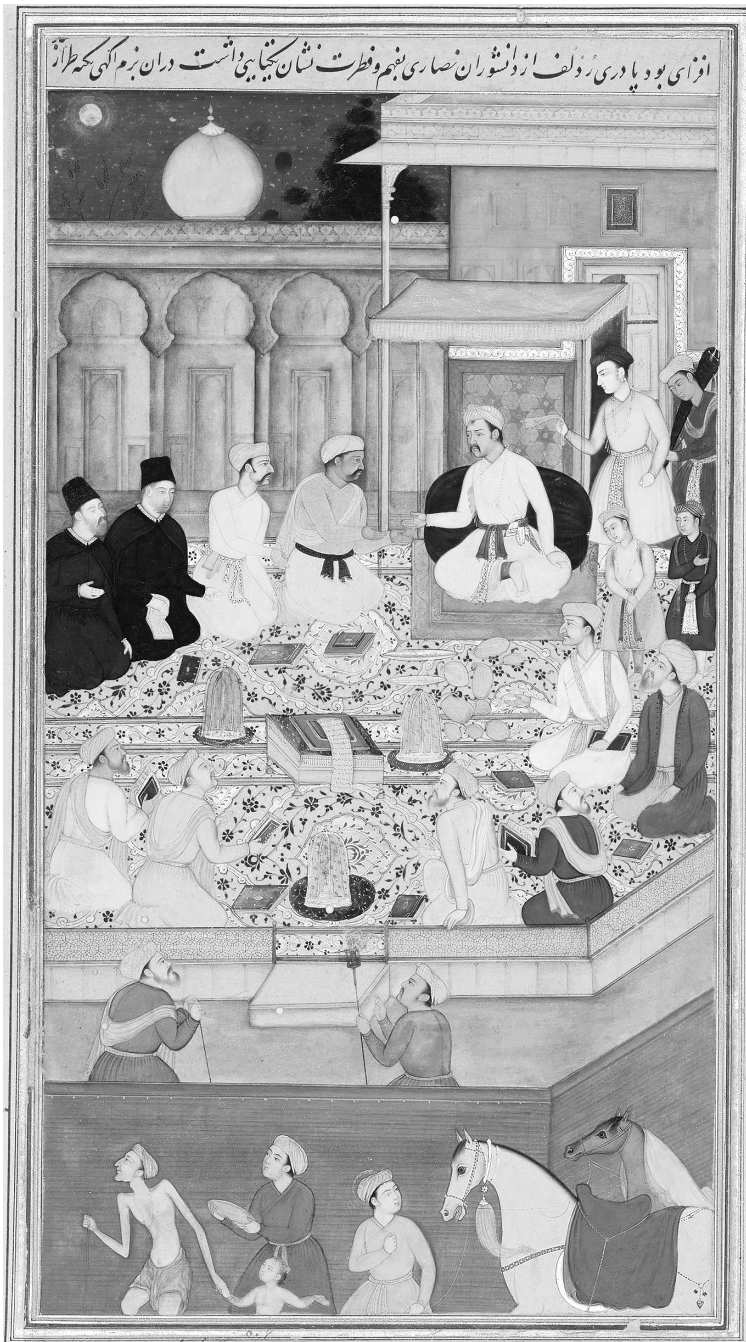


FIGURE I.8. Illustration to the *Akbarnama*, miniature painting by Nar Singh, ca. 1605, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin. Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605) holds a religious assembly in the Ibadat Khana (House of Worship) in Fatehpur Sikri; the two men dressed in black are Jesuit missionaries.

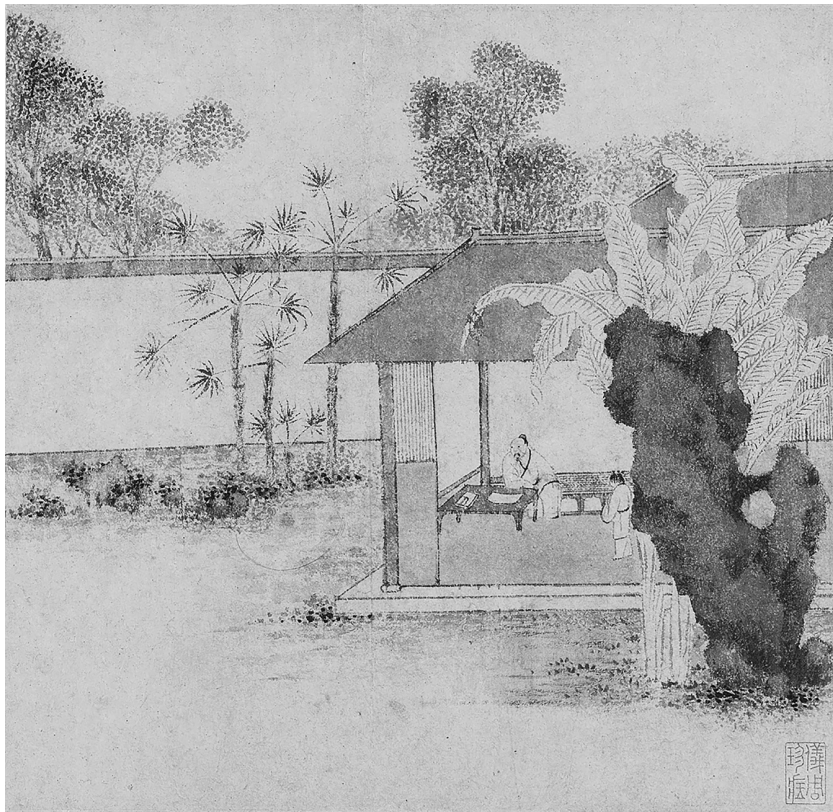


FIGURE I.9. Wen Zhengming, *Garden of the Inept Administrator*, 1551, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

troubles. At the same time, companionship with like-minded people—drinking under the moonlight, admiring a piece of calligraphy or the landscape, sharing a meal to celebrate or lament—has long been seen as essential to the good life. Countless are the limpid ink scroll-paintings that depict a simple thatched studio nestled amidst a grove of cassia, pine trees, or bamboo by a lake, river, or mountain (fig. I.9; pl. 8). The rustic retreat where the scholar-gentleman could meditate on the vanished past, tend to his chrysanthemums or plum blossoms, or perhaps indulge in inebriated naps was a cherished dream.

The Ming dynasty literatus Li Rihua (李日華) writes about his country retreat in the Yangzi River region:

The library/study (書屋, *shuwu*) should be situated where the brook twists and bends between the hills. The total structure should not exceed two or

three buildings, with an upper story to observe the clouds and mists. On the four sides there should be a hundred slender bamboo plants—to welcome the fresh wind. To the south a tall pine tree to hang my bright moon. A gnarled old prune tree with low, twisting branches to come in through the window: Fragrant herbs and thick moss surround the stone foundation. The east building houses the Daoist and Buddhist sutras, and the west building the Confucian classics. In the center, a bed and desk with a scattering of fine calligraphy and paintings. In the morning and evenings, white rice and fish stew, fine wine and tea; a strong man at the gate to reject social callers.⁴⁴

As the *Dao de jing* puts it: “Without stirring abroad, one can know the whole world; without looking out the window, one can see the way of heaven.”⁴⁵ For a gentleman of means, having a well-appointed place to do so became *de rigueur*. In Li’s account, the design of his studiolo—in its emphasis on the four cardinal directions and the careful placement of the Daoist, Buddhist, and Confucian texts—suggests a cosmological orientation that seeks to create unity between the individual, culture, and the cosmos at large. And in the symmetry of its construction, the harmonious balance of nature and artifice—and not least in the simplicity of the gentlemen’s diet—the aesthetics of refined simplicity (平淡, *pingdan*) is achieved.

In the beginning of *Doctor Faustus*, a friend of Faustus boasts that by the power of Faustus’s wits, he shall have all nations obey them, “as India moors obey their Spanish lords.” On his last leg of the journey, the professor sails to the “New World.” The closest equivalent of *book* the Mexicas called *amoxtli* and the Maya named *vuh*. Scribes were called *tlacuilos* and depositories *amoxcalli*.⁴⁶ The bishop of Yucatan, Diego de Landa, writes that the Maya “wrote their books on a long sheet doubled in folds, which was then enclosed between two boards finely ornamented; the writing was on one side and the other according to the folds.”⁴⁷ And for their script:

These people used certain characters or letters, with which they wrote in their books about their antiquities and their sciences; with these, and with figures, and certain signs in the figures, they understood their matters, made them known, and taught them. We found a great number of books in these letters, and since they contained nothing but superstitions and falsehoods of the devil we burned them all, which they took most grievously, and which gave them great pain.⁴⁸

The incineration of books was not unique to de Landa. Bernal Díaz del Castillo in his account of the conquest of Tenochtitlán and José de Acosta in his

Natural and Moral History of the Indies describe, in vivid detail, the destruction of idols, artifacts, quetzal feathers, and a multitude of writings.⁴⁹ Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls this *epistemicide*—the deliberate destruction of Indigenous knowledge systems.⁵⁰ But Aztec scribes, in their profound desire to recover what was lost, learned to use the Latin alphabet to record their chronologies in accordion-shaped codices.⁵¹ One friar consulted with Indigenous sources to create an encyclopedia of Nahua culture now preserved in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, thus named the *Florentine Codex*. The irony is that while colonialists and missionaries eagerly eradicated the living cultures of the New World, their fossilized knowledge is preserved today in the august libraries of Old Europe.

“Each man calls barbarism whatever is not his own practice,” Montaigne writes in the early essay “Of Cannibals.”⁵² In the late “Of Coaches,” an extraordinary meditation that roams from a discussion of the displays of wealth in antiquity to his own dislike of coaches to a cosmological fantasy on the decay of the world to the destruction of the empires of Mexico and Peru, Montaigne concludes that it was the Europeans themselves who were savages in their conquest: “So many cities razed, so many nations exterminated, so many millions of people put to the sword, and the richest and most beautiful part of the world turned upside down, for the traffic in pearls and peppers.”⁵³ Such reflection is made possible by the safe distance afforded to him in his library tower—it is only at a remove that we can perceive the pulse of global turbulence.

This whirlwind tour from Bordeaux to Brazil is necessary, for it rouses us (and Faustus) out of our Eurocentric comfort zone. In place of the old presupposition of the European Renaissance as the font of all modernities, this brief around-the-world tour of libraries gives us a less linear and more global view of humanism, a humanism beyond the Quattrocento and Cinquecento that recognizes the search for what it means to be human is an enterprise undertaken by lovers of knowledge and possessors of books everywhere. And as Montaigne shows, the emergence of European modernity is inextricable from its encounters with other cultures. Private spaces of learning always exist within a wider network of communal sites, economic exigencies, religious ideologies, and social enterprises. The planet of the European studiolo swims in the Milky Way of world culture. So if Renaissance studies is to truly globalize, it should pay attention to the learned practices of other cultures beyond Europe, and acknowledge that the European studiolo is but one of many possible sites of scholarship and self-cultivation in the world.

When Faustus returns to Europe, he is reminded that epistemic repression happened there too.⁵⁴ Both Catholics and Protestants burned books and

people. Many were the inquisitions, confiscations, and *Indexes of Forbidden Books*. In 1521, in his efforts to suppress the circulation of Lutheran texts, Francis I decreed that all books had to be approved by the University of Paris's Faculty of Theology. In the aftermath of Henry VIII's reforms, chapter houses and monasteries were despoiled of a great many titles. In 1559 the Council of Trent formalized the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*.⁵⁵ In fact, the Roman censors' knowledge was parasitic: one particularly zealous Jesuit, Antonio Possevino, used the Protestant Conrad Gesner's *Bibliotheca instituta et collecta* (1545) to create his own guide called the *Bibliotheca selecta* (1593).⁵⁶ As the title implies, Possevino has handpicked titles for the reader so that they be in absolute conformity with Catholic Church doctrine. Gesner's *Bibliotheca universalis* was placed on the *Index*, and a copy preserved in the University of Iowa library shows that the censor has dramatically marked the entry for Martin Luther with large, wavy X's (fig. I.10).⁵⁷ The dialectic of epistemic gathering and erasure is working full tilt here: the bibliographer creates metaknowledge and the censor suppresses it, the two canceling each other out.

The early modern air burned thickly with the ashes of incinerated parchment and paper. In this age of bibliographic conflagrations, Savonarola in Florence held his infamous Bonfire of the Vanities in 1497, consigning to flames the works of Ovid, Propertius, Dante, and Boccaccio. In June 1520 Pope Leo X issued a bull that ordered Luther's texts to be publicly and solemnly burned in the presence of the clergy and laity. In turn, Luther orchestrated his own little spectacle: a burning of a copy of that papal bull and canon law books in December 1520. The library was the front line in interconfessional war, a favorite hunting ground for inquisitors to root out heretics and apostates. A couple of passages in Montaigne are censored.⁵⁸ In *Don Quixote*, the priest, the barber, and his housekeeper cheerfully burn the books in our hapless protagonist's library. As he returns to his study in Wittenberg, Faustus vainly attempts to burn his books at the hour of his death.

Vaucluse, Bordeaux, La Mancha, Wittenberg . . .

All libraries are real and imaginary. The following chapters chart how private literary spaces from the mid-1300s to the early 1600s—some fictitious, some real, whether in Vaucluse, Florence, Bordeaux, La Mancha, or Wittenberg—try to escape from the confines of ideology, discipline, and, ultimately, the public sphere. The solitude of the study holds in suspension the spirit and the system: on one hand, it encapsulates the sum of one's aspirations and dreams and delusions; on the other, it embodies the aggregate of material conditions

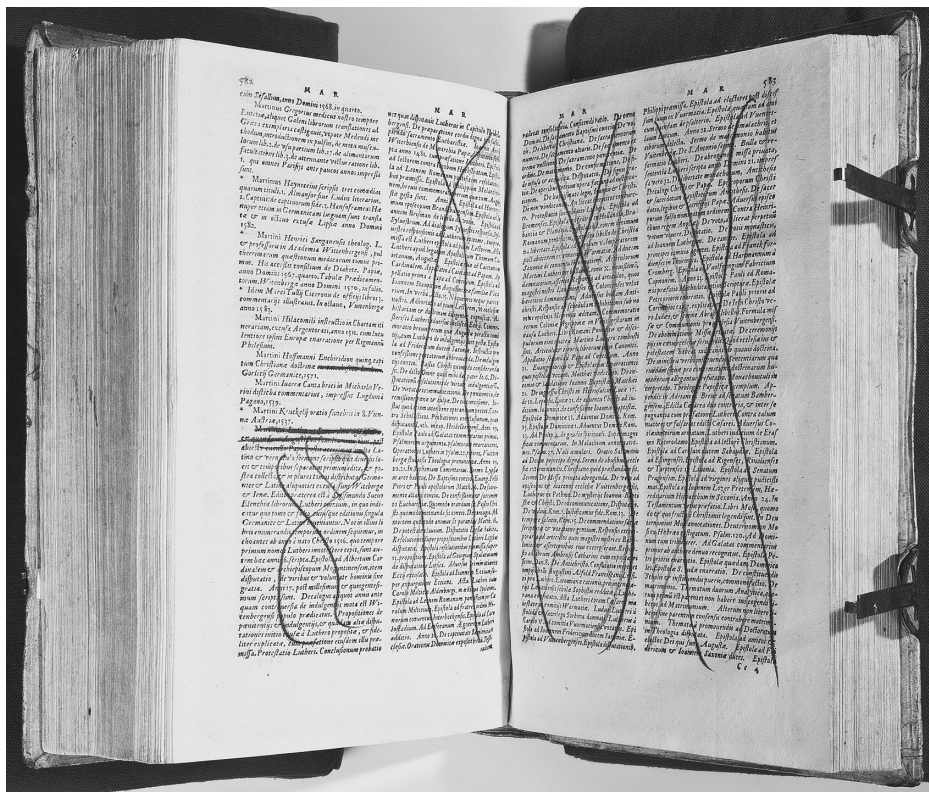


FIGURE 1.10. Conrad Gesner, *Bibliotheca universalis*, 1583, University of Iowa Libraries. The entry for Martin Luther has been crossed out.

that makes the life of the mind possible. At the threshold of modernity and the rise of subjectivity, the imaginary library was forged in order to shelter and nourish the self from the outside world, as an inner sanctum to ponder all sorts of controversial and possibly heretical thoughts. In this sense the Renaissance humanist constructs Foucault's heterotopia to explore thoughts unbound by social norms. For Satan in *Paradise Lost*, “the mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven” (1.254–55).⁵⁹ It contains the archive of the things in heaven and earth that are dreamt of beyond Hamlet’s and Horatio’s philosophy. In this sense the Renaissance library is the crucible of modernity.

When Petrarch writes to a friend from remote Vaucluse, gathering “My Rome, my Athens,” when, at the end of a day, Machiavelli in his study takes off

his regular clothes and dons the garb of the ancients, each revives classical antiquity by imagining conversations with ancient authors (chapter 1). When Federico da Montefeltro builds his *studioli* in Urbino and Gubbio, when Raphael paints *The School of Athens* in the Vatican, they visualize a transhistorical, trans-cultural community of learning gathered in one place in one time (chapter 2). When artists such as Botticelli, Ghirlandaio, and Dürer depict the Virgin Mary and St. Jerome ensconced in their studies, they signal bookishness as a saintly virtue (chapter 3). When Montaigne builds a library in his tower outside Bordeaux, he ushers in the intensification of a brooding subjectivity (chapter 4). When Rabelais has Pantagruel discover a list of fake books at the Abbey of Saint-Victor in Paris, the author is critiquing medieval erudition (chapter 5). When Don Quixote, tired of reading romances, sallies forth into the world, it marks the uneasy transition from feudalism to early capitalism (chapter 6). When Prospero trades his dukedom for a library but finally drowns his books, when Faustus renounces and tries to burn his, they signal an end to a certain strain of humanist bibliomania (chapters 7 and 8). Modern intellectual culture emerges after long nights of bookish cogitation.

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