CARE AND HANDLING: BOOKS

Presented by
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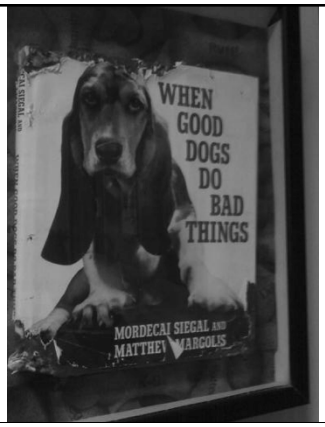
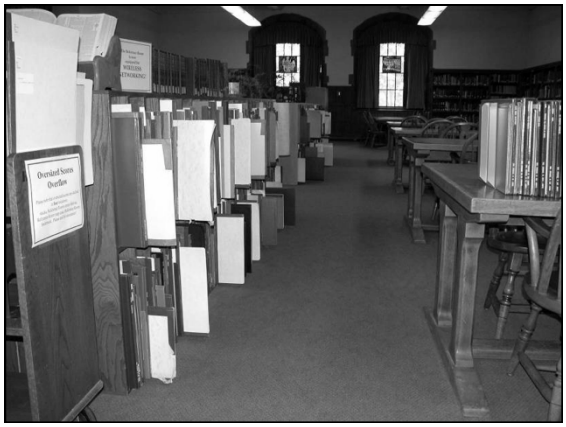
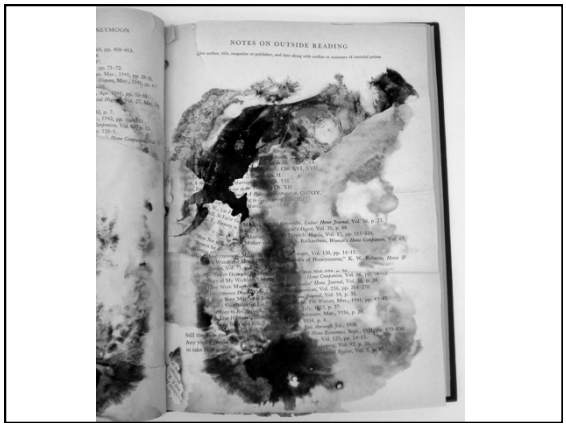
Northeast Document Conservation Center

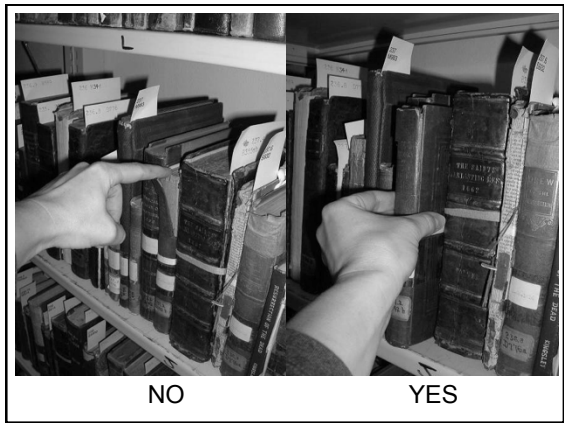


Environment – Best Practices

- Temperature
  - Combined stack & user areas: 68°F
  - Dedicated storage: 55°-65°F
- Relative Humidity
  - 30-50%
- Light
  - Storage: Install timers; containers and/or folders
  - Windows: Cover with drapes or UV blocking film
  - Exhibition: Limited duration, lights low (50-100 lux)







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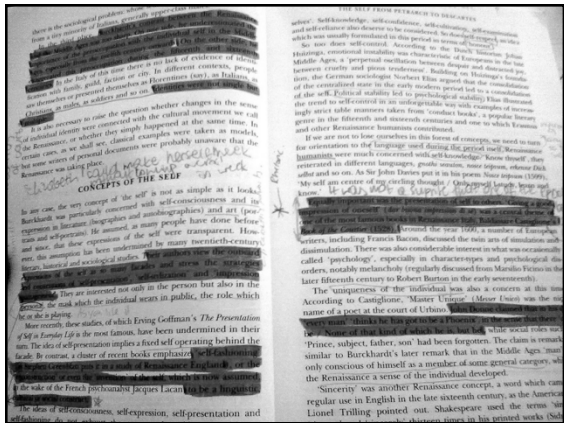

THE SELF FROM PETRARCH TO DESCARTES

selves'. Self-knowledge, self-confidence, self-education, self-examination and self-reliance also deserve to be considered. So does self-control, or rather

So, too, does self-control. According to the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga, emotional instability was characteristic of Europeans in the late Middle Ages, a 'perpetual oscillation between despair and distracted joy, between cruelty and pious tenderness'. Building on Huizinga's formulation, the German sociologist Norbert Elias argued that the consolidation of the centralized state in the early modern period led to a consolidation of the self. Political stability led to psychological stability. Elias illustrated the trend to self-control in an unforgettable way with examples of increasingly strict table manners taken from 'conduct books', a popular literary genre in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and one to which Erasmus and other Renaissance humanists contributed.

If we are not to lose ourselves in this forest of concepts, we need to turn for orientation to the language used during the period itself. Renaissance humanists were much concerned with self-knowledge. 'Know thyself', thus reiterated in different languages, *gnothi seauton*, *nosce teipsum*, *erkenne Dich selbst* and so on. As Sir John Davies put it in his poem *Nosce teipsum* (1599):

'My self am centre of my circling thoughts / Only myself I study, learn and know.'

Equally important was the presentation of self in society, a genre [illegible] of society', *Liber bonae inspirationis sui*, was a central theme in one of the most famous books to Renaissance Italy, Baldassare Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* (1528). Around the year 1600, a number of European writers, including Francis Bacon, discussed the twin arts of simulation and dissimulation. There was also considerable interest in what was occasionally called 'psychology', especially in character-types and psychological disorders, notably melancholy (regularly discussed from Marsilio Ficino in the later fifteenth century to Robert Burton in the early seventeenth).

The 'uniqueness' of the individual was also a concern at this time. According to Castiglione, 'Master Unique' (*Messer Unico*) was the nickname of a poet at the court of Urbino. [illegible] None of that kind of which he is, but he [illegible] while social roles such as 'Prince, subject, father, son' had been forgotten. The claim is remarkably similar to Burckhardt's later remark that in the Middle Ages 'man was only conscious of himself as a member of some general category, while in the Renaissance a sense of the individual developed.

'Sincerity' was another Renaissance concept, a word which came into regular use in English in the late sixteenth century, as the American critic Lionel Trilling pointed out. Shakespeare used the terms 'sincere' and

CONCEPTS OF THE SELF

In any case, the very concept of the self is not as simple as it looks. Burckhardt was particularly concerned with self-consciousness and its expression in literature (biographies and autobiographies) and art (portraits and self-portraits). He assumed, as many people have done before and since, that these expressions of the self were transparent. However, this assumption has been undermined by many twentieth-century literary, historical and sociological studies. These authors view the 'display' or 'presentation' of the self as a matter of 'fronts', 'masks' and 'impression management', self-presentation, self-dramatization and 'impression management'. They are interested not only in the person but also in the audience, the mask which the individual wears in public, the role which he or she is playing.

More recently, these studies, of which Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* is the most famous, have been undermined in their turn. The idea of self-presentation implies a fixed self operating behind the facade. By contrast, a cluster of recent books emphasizes 'self-fashioning' in the period between [illegible] in England, or that 'construction' or even the 'invention' of the self, which is now assumed by the sake of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan to be a linguistic [illegible]

The ideas of self-consciousness, self-expression, self-presentation and [illegible]

Questions?

The Ultimate Question by Ellie May