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The Private Library: Cultural Consumption and the Fashioning of Gentlemanly Character in the Long Eighteenth-Century

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“What a delightful library you have at Pemberley, Mr. Darcy,” said Miss Bingley. “It ought to be good,” he replied, “it has been the work of many generations.” “And you have added so much to it yourself, you are always buying books.” “I cannot comprehend the neglect of a family library in such days as these.” “Neglect! I am sure you neglect nothing that can add to the beauties of that noble place.”

“How pleasant it is to spend an evening in this way! I declare after all there is no enjoyment like reading! How sooner one tires of anything than a book! When I have a house of my own I shall be miserable if I have not an excellent library.”

--Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 1813

A gentleman’s private library was a significant part of his life – it was a place where his intellectual character was fed, his connections were solidified, and his home adorned. The gentleman’s library was both a place of solitude and a locus of sociability, and was private in the sense that it was part of the domestic (i.e. private) realm and was an individual’s private collection, particular to him and shared with family and associates. During the late Georgian era, the cultural collecting that built the private library reached a peak of extravagance and grandeur that was the result of over a century of evolution and growth. As a keen observer of upper-class society and culture, Jane Austen provided a window into aristocratic life in her novels. In her most popular work, it is fitting that the library is mentioned as both a distinguisher of class and learning and a place of sociability and conversation. Austen’s gentleman hero, Fitzwilliam Darcy, had a fine library befitting a man of his station, sophistication, and the period he represented. Donald Greene argues that Austen used the country estate of the Devonshire family as the

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2 Austen, p. 58.
inspiration for her hero’s fictitious manor house, Pemberley.\(^3\) Chatsworth’s elegant library (Plate 1) was indeed the work of generations of collectors who used their wealth to expand and display their collections with splendor and opulence in a country house setting.

![Plate 1. William Henry Hunt, Chatsworth Library, 19th century (source: Bridgeman Images)](image)

Throughout the long eighteenth century, books were a meaningful part of the gentleman’s life and the acquisition, cataloguing, housing, and use of one’s books occupied a great deal of the collector’s time and devotion. Books and the private library were also agents of polite sociability. A gentleman’s library exerted influence through its power to reinforce masculine ideals through domestic sociability and the sociability of scholarly fellowship. A gentleman used his library to forge his own identity, focusing his collecting efforts through predilection, literary and historical archiving, and the

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renovating of his home to accommodate and display his collection. The private library, through its design and book collection, left a lasting legacy representative of the gentleman, his tastes, erudition, and the historical time in which he lived.

In 1812, literary scholar Samuel Egerton Bridges wrote in his edition of Collin’s Peerage that, “the Spencer, Marlborough, Devonshire, and Pembroke libraries, are national treasures, becoming a people who are contending for the empire of the world.”

At the end of the Georgian era when Bridges was writing, the prosperity of the eighteenth century had built extravagant private libraries and cultural consumption became a way for the gentleman to escape the rigidity of societal ideals and fashion an independent self through predilection and its use and display. Private libraries were the realization of the gentlemanly ideal; learned, self possessed, affable, poised, and uniquely suited to govern the British Empire, the library became a symbol of British intellectuality and elite masculine superiority. With social constructs built into the fabric of national character, home libraries are significant in evaluating the historical and cultural relevance of collecting, particularly as it related to the construction of an independent self. Every element of consumption related to the growth and maintenance of the private library was significant and meaningful.

Through personally directed cultural consumption and domestic and intellectual sociability, the private library and its contents were essential tools in reinforcing masculine societal ideals while aiding in the construction of an independent self. A unique, refined, and masculine space, the private library held a special place in the heart of the gentleman and his home. From furniture to art and décor choices and perhaps the

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most telling, the books that graced the library’s shelves, this thesis will investigate how the gentleman used his collection and his home to reinforce masculine ideals and construct an independent self. The library served to represent a gentleman’s ambition or reinforce his position in society and it was indicative of his sophisticated culture and learning, and his wealth and success. The library, in many ways, can be seen to represent the achievement of the ultimate gentleman, a learned, polite, responsible, civic minded man of high moral character and influence. This essay will explore the private library through three qualifiers of gentlemanly character, learned masculinity, polite sociability, and the individual predilection that was indicative of the independent self, and will show how societal changes over the course of the long eighteenth century contributed to the evolution and growth of book collection and the private library.

Masculine identity in the long eighteenth century has been explored by a number of historians and their research confirms that masculinity was interconnected with education, sociability, and politeness. These themes are woven throughout the work of the foremost authorities of eighteenth century masculinity, namely Michele Cohen, Philip Carter, Lawrence Klein, Henry French, and Mark Rothery. These historians explore different aspects of masculinity and its relation to the development of elite male character over a lifetime. Masculinity was measured through different identity qualifiers and historians collectively agree that there were a number of traits that the gentleman had to develop through a classical education, continental travel, and the learning of social constructs through experience in public and private spheres that created a rigid, fixed masculine identity. This essay explores and presents the previous work of historians to lay a foundation of masculinity and polite sociability that will aid in showing how the
cultural consumption that built and maintained the private library did not just reinforce societal notions of masculinity, but gave the gentleman a measure of freedom in forming a personal identity through a collection and its use and exhibition.

Historians have also explored the history and architecture of the private library during this period and their work will be presented to show how the private library was used in distinct ways throughout this time of development and growth. The research of Lucy Gwinn, Jennifer Ciro, Simon Jervis, and Mark Girouard offer detailed architectural analysis and a contextual understanding of the ways in which private library rooms were designed and used over the course of this period. An architectural guide by Robert Kerr published in the mid-nineteenth century offers primary source material that will aid in the further evaluation of design and use. Book collecting was an important component of the private library and historical research relating to the growth of the book trade provides necessary background in evaluating the collecting habits of two gentleman collectors. James Raven and Philip Connell’s research on book collecting in the eighteenth century offers background on how printing grew and changed during a century of economic growth and intellectual enlightenment and relates book collecting to a broader cultural heritage in Britain that played a significant role in the growth of the private library.

Two libraries and their gentleman collectors will be examined to illustrate how the private library developed whilst a book collection was cultivated to become important components of the gentleman’s identity. The private library of Samuel Pepys serves as an example of the library at the start of this period when it was used primarily as a study. Samuel Pepys used his library as a means of intellectual and personal growth to increase his wealth and status and assert the cultural prestige of the ideal gentleman. A number of
primary sources will be used to aid in the examination of his library room and book
collection, including his diary, a compilation of his personal writings and papers, and a
Pepys kept a diary throughout the 1660s and it charted some of his early collecting habits,
but ended when his library was only a fraction of its eventual size. The diary provides a
glimpse into his reading habits, early collecting acquisitions, and the development of his
unique press (bookcase) design. The bulk of his collection was accumulated after the
diary ended, and thus the catalogues and other personal papers are useful in evaluating
the books he collected afterwards as well as his thoughts on what a private library should
be. Because Pepys willed his library to his alma mater, Magdalene College at Cambridge,
the library and the majority of its furnishings have been preserved, photographed, and
catalogued. The extensiveness with which this was done provides insight into the
development, design, and function of his library as well as his collecting habits and these
sources are crucial to the evaluation of Pepys’s private library as an example of the
library in its early form, as a gentleman’s study.

The private library of the Second Earl Spencer, George John, will serve as an
example of the private library at the close of the long eighteenth century and represents
the library as a place of intellectual development, polite sociability, and historical
archiving. Spencer’s library illustrates how at the height of book collecting the library
had grown to a large, well appointed living room. Whilst Pepys’s library is partly
representative of his ambition and desire to attain elite status, Spencer’s library is
indicative of a gentleman of elite status and vast wealth. As a member of the landed
aristocracy, Spencer was the embodiment of the elite masculine ideal and through his
library and collecting habits he reinforced the traits of the ultimate gentleman. A number of primary sources will aid in the examination of Spencer’s library and collecting habits. Spencer’s librarian, Thomas Dibdin, published an extensive catalogue of the books housed in the library and of the design and contents of the Spencers’ ancestral home Althorp. Both multi volume catalogues, *Bibliotheca Spenceriana* (1812) and *Aedes Althorpianae* (1822), provide information about the acquisition of each book as well as the design, contents, and use of each of the five library apartments within Spencer’s country house. Edward Edwards’s *Libraries and the Founders of Libraries* (1864) offers a wide range of information about the prolific Spencer library, the Earl’s valuable contributions to Britain’s literary heritage through historical preservation, and his innovative cataloguing techniques.

**The Development of the Learned and Polite Gentleman**

The Glorious Revolution changed the balance of power in Great Britain, shifting governance and authority from the monarch to Parliament. Thus, new masculine ideals developed out of the need to mold generations of gentleman to embody specific qualities that would give them the education and finishing to govern themselves and then to govern others. New demands were placed on the gentleman to be a confident figure of authority, command, and reason. Masculine ideals were rooted in the philosophy and morality of the ancient republics that placed virtue, honor, and concern and responsibility for others at the center of identity and added additional traits the “natural ruler” needed to

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possess. French and Rothery’s scholarship on elite masculinity highlights qualities of British masculinity that were constructed through education. Whilst virtue, honor, and responsibility were important, natural rulers also needed to exhibit personal autonomy, self-command, independent judgment, and authority. Karen Harvey noted that philosopher David Hume argued in the eighteenth century “that men were subject to three forms of government: of the state, of self control, and of heterosexual interaction or ‘conversation.’” These three forms of ‘government’ were ever present throughout the education and molding of the young gentleman and carried over into the polite society of the adult gentleman. Masculine values were woven into every aspect of the gentleman’s life, including his cultural consumptive partialities, and are therefore significant to the evaluation of the private library.

Education was the core trait of elite masculinity and it began early in the life of the gentleman either at home by private tutor or at a local school. With the obligations of family and estate and a responsibility for the governing and prosperity of the nation, the education of the elite gentleman focused on the self-control and self-command necessary to ensure the success of Britain’s future both at home and abroad. Learning distinguished the gentleman of consequence by grounding him in knowledge and morality through the ethical teachings of ancient philosophers that favored the use of reason for independent judgment and the authority that was necessary to participate in a private (family and estate) and a public (local and national) life of governance. Elite

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7 French and Rothery, p. 2-3.
8 French and Rothery, p. 2-3.
10 French and Rothery, p.56-7.
11 French and Rothery, p. 59.
schools like Harrow, Winchester, Eton, and others provided the classical base on which later education would build and expand.

University was where the young gentleman flourished. His education was further developed and he gained social polish through independent socialization. French and Rothery point to university as “a valuable staging post in the development of masculine independence.”¹² Virtue was a central theme and was an essential element of the reason that a classical education imparted on the young gentleman. Virtue was the basis of a life of honor, or governance. University was a place of intellectual development and sociability and prepared the gentleman for a life that centered on not only public duty, but also the further development of the self through individual study, intellectual networks and social groups, and the beginnings of a collection. University provided the gentleman with a mastery of rhetoric and logic that prepared him for the debate of both public life and the private scholarly life of an intellectual. The gentleman began to develop his preferences in collecting during this time, which included the beginnings of his book collection.

After his university education, the wealthy, young gentleman embarked on what was thought of as the ‘crown’ of his education, the Grand Tour.¹³ Continental travel gave the gentleman true social polish and the Grand Tour was a time of development in situ; development of language through conversation, masculine accomplishment through the body fashioning of sport and dance, and independent liberty.¹⁴ The purpose of the Grand Tour was to continue to educate the elite male and the focus became cultural immersion

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¹² French and Rothery, p. 91.
¹⁴ French and Rothery, p. 139.
and the development of polite sociability through mixed sex interaction. The Grand Tour sought to give the gentleman “practical, social, cultural, and linguistic experiences” that finished the fashioning of his identity and reinforced intellectual and cultural ideals.¹⁵ The Grand Tour imparted the knowledge necessary to a gentleman as a “public agent.”¹⁶ Sociability on the continent provided him with the skills needed to interact with individuals of different classes in his public life and it encouraged the independence of judgment that would allow him to effectively occupy a public role.¹⁷ The Grand Tour was also a place where the gentleman would begin life as a collector through the acquisition of art, books, and other objects meant to enhance the self and adorn the home.

A culture of politeness suffused the long eighteenth century and whilst learning was the main component of masculinity, politeness became the standard by which all aspects of elite, adult life were measured. Politeness was defined in three ways - as moral standards of behavior, as an aesthetic standard for art and architecture, and as an adjective associated with society and culture.¹⁸ Philip Carter posits that polite ideology “was associated with a reorganization of culture and social life” in which the philosophy of the polite and refined gentleman as a “social animal” emerged; men of rank were to exhibit a virtuous moral character that was essential to the gentleman as a public agent. The private library became one of many arbiters of politeness through its place in the gentleman’s social home life. Politeness included a variety of identity qualifiers including propriety and decorum, ease and elegance in manner of speaking, writing and behaving, and the courteous amiability associated with a genuine care and generosity towards one’s

¹⁵ French and Rothery, p. 140-1.  
¹⁶ French and Rothery, p. 139.  
¹⁷ French and Rothery, p. 139, 141.  
companions.\textsuperscript{19} These “qualifying attributes” contributed to a gentleman’s overall refinement with the goal to become “free, easy, natural, graceful” in his adult life.\textsuperscript{20} The library became part of the adult male’s identity in that it played a vital role in communicating his politesse through the sociability of domestic entertainment.

Liberty was intertwined with eighteenth-century politeness and Lawrence Klein argues that politeness encompassed more than just standards of behavior and recognizes its roots in the classical civilizations that were held up as the model for intellect, creativity, and the civic tradition. With its roots planted in classical citizenship, politeness created qualifiers of behavior by which the gentleman should aspire to live, essentially, manners. Manners were tied to ethics in as much as they were meant to be habitual. Moral standards of behavior were rooted in education and civic liberty and the laws that it created and civic liberty was tied to the power associated with property. Therefore, manners were not just standards of behavior, “manners were the foundations of civic politics,” and were a crucial part of the gentleman’s public and private life.\textsuperscript{21} Furthermore, Klein draws a relationship between liberty, or political involvement, and “sophisticated modes of human expression”, or culture.\textsuperscript{22} Civic duty became tied to cultural patrimony and the collection associated with the private library emerged as a sort of patriotic duty. Philip Connell addresses this in relation to book collecting as a public literary heritage, calling it collecting for the nation, or “patriotic patrician virtú,” and although a gentleman’s collections were ‘private,’ they were seen as national collections

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
  \bibitem{20} Klein, p. 583.
  \bibitem{21} Klein, p. 591.
  \bibitem{22} Klein, p. 590-3.
\end{thebibliography}
based on the public responsibility associated with the landed aristocracy. Lawrence Klein argues that “the language of politeness sought to impose general order over large tracts of the human experience,” creating an idealized vision of social interactions, fusing politeness with sociability both inside and outside of the home, so private and public sociability.

The cultural cachet of the British gentleman was elevated through the display of cultural partialities in his home and politeness, through the lens of sociability, became a cultural ideal and an indicator of status by creating a divide between elite society and the rest of society through consumption. Culture, and its consumption, was what distinguished the gentleman in a unique and meaningful way. Sociability and domesticity joined hands to convey the true character of the gentleman, and his collection became an indicator of his patriotism, sophistication, and supremacy. Predilection was an integral part of the self-directed fashioning of character and it was through polite sociability that gentlemanly identity became much less fixed. Sociability and culture merged to give the gentleman the autonomy to fashion an aspect of his identity independent of social constructs yet rooted in the foundations of what it meant to be a upper-class male. Thus, a spectrum developed between the independent, self-directed development of identity through the collection of culture (i.e. art, sculpture, books, or other items) and fixed masculine ideals.

Combining virtue and manners with cultural responsibility, the gentleman shouldered not only the responsibilities of family, estate, and governance, but also

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24 Klein, p. 587-8.
cultural achievement and the duty to preserve it. Politeness – manners, chivalry, liberty, and sociability – was an integral part of eighteenth-century society and evolved in ways that affected elite consumptions, influencing predilections and the communication of family and individual virtue, intellect, and success.\(^{26}\) Home was a site of polite sociability with a gentleman’s domestic success and harmony an indicator of character.\(^{27}\) At home, the thoughtful, well-read, conversationalist would put his predilections on display. The spark that had been lit during the gentleman’s university education and continental tour inspired a lifelong passion for learning and the arts. Politeness combined with learning and a culture of collection to allow the material objects that created the private library to wield their power in the self directed crafting of gentlemanly character, identity, and image.

**Book Collecting and the History, Evolution, and Growth of the Private Library**

“Certainly one of the greatest ornaments to a gentleman or his family is a fine library,” declared Thomas Coke in 1715.\(^{28}\) In the eighteenth century, the intellectual virtuoso was the model of the ideal gentleman who decorated his home, and consequently his character, with domestic adornments reflective of societal values and paradigms.\(^{29}\) The home became a theater of display and the cultured gentleman placed books at the forefront of his collecting efforts. As collections grew, accommodations were made to the home and the library evolved from a collection of a few hundred books housed in a closet or study to a living room devoted to the display of thousands of books. Each style was

\(^{26}\) Klein, p. 583-4; 588.  
\(^{27}\) Carter, p. 98.  
home to the sociable gentleman’s entertainments and both were used in similar but
distinct ways. 30

The growth of the book trade and the evolution of the private library were
inextricably linked. As access to books increased, collections grew and the library
evolved from a closet or study, devoted to individual learning and intimate sociability to
a large living room that became a domestic necessity to the gentleman and his family.
Books were the building blocks of the library and their role in the gentleman’s life was
significant and personal. James Raven concludes that, “men of property regarded books
as vehicles of enlightenment and instruction, but also as instruments of social and cultural
assertiveness,” therefore books were both objects of utility as well as objects that exerted
agency and influence. 31 This fusion created the gentleman connoisseur, the book collector
with a cultural and social prestige as opposed to simply a consumer. Books were not only
objects of utility that aided in learning and enlightenment but were also instruments of
cultural patrimony and historical preservation. Through their use and display, books were
meant to communicate a number of highly regarded personal attributes. There was a
dynamic that developed between the collector and his collection that is unique to the
private library. Because a book collection was one that had utility and was reflective of
individual predilection, the library in a sense became one with the personality or
character of the collector. Through different modes of interaction, the bibliophile devoted
a significant amount of his time to the organization of his books, the use of his books to
further refine his intellect and solidify his influence, and he was generous in the loan of
books to friends and colleagues, suggesting that this form of consumption and its use was

31 James Raven, “Debating Bibliomania and the Collection of Books in the Eighteenth Century,”
Library and Information History, Vol. 29 No. 3 (September 2013): p. 203.
deep and meaningful and had a utility that was multifaceted. Books also had social
currency; the gift of books was common and reciprocity expected, creating an informal
network of non-monetary exchange and scholarly fellowship where the collector could
increase his learned reputation and grow his collection.

Early collectors favored books for their intrinsic value and contextual use and
their collections were largely meant to be utilitarian and universal. However predilection
also shaped an individual’s collection. Lucy Gwinn posits that early libraries were
reflective of protestant notions associated with solitude and meditation and the early
closet, or study, suited this purpose and the more modestly sized collections of the time.32
The library as a study was often indicative of a man’s occupation, individual literary
interest, and intellectual sociability. In The Gentleman’s House, an 1864 architectural
guide to planning a home, Peter Kerr outlined the ways in which the library was used by
different classes of gentleman. A man of business or the clergy would place his library
off of the dining room, with such a room functioning as a waiting room for his guests and
associates or as a retiring room for intellectual socialization after a dinner party with
colleagues or other connections. A man of learning would place his private library near
his sleeping quarters to facilitate private, solitary study. And a man of significant
property would place his library near the sociable rooms of the home, near to the billiard
room or the gallery, where the library could serve as a lounge for gentleman or a place of
intimate sociability throughout the day, where such individual activities as letter writing
or reading were to occur as well as the intellectual sociability of discussion, conversation,

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32 Lucy Gwinn, “The Architecture of the English Domestic Library, 1600-1700.” Library and
and debate. Mark Girouard offers a look at the evolution of the library within the country house setting and provides the library belonging to the Duke of Lauderdale at Ham House (Plate 2) as an example of the early study style of library from the late seventeenth-century. Samuel Pepys’s library followed in this vein and functioned as a gentleman’s study. Over the next fifty years, the library’s focus shifted and it evolved into a family style living room. It maintained its masculine bent and was used by the gentleman for defined tasks and homosocial activities, but it now included a mixed sex use of study and polite entertainments that marked the latter half of the eighteenth century.

Plate 2. Patrick Rossmore, Ham House Library, circa 1675 (source: Girouard, p. 171)

34 Girouard, p. 169-171.
Later collectors formed collections that were utilitarian and universal, but their collecting efforts notably focused on the preservation of antique manuscripts that was prompted by the bibliomania of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Generations of collectors had built larger collections that included thousands of inherited books. With the end of perpetual copyright in 1774, a massive increase in printing occurred and the nation’s literary past suddenly became an important part of book consumption across the classes. The middle class was now able to purchase reprints of Britain and Europe’s great literary works. This overall popularity prompted the wealthy to collect not reprints of antique works like those the middle class consumed, but original incunabula, contributing to the preservation of Europe’s literary heritage and reinforcing notions of cultural responsibility. The rise of bibliomania (the craze for incunabula) refocused collecting efforts and contributed to the further increase in the size of collections. Books grew as a commodity as society moved into the enlightened eighteenth century and as incomes increased, books were at the top of the list of luxury goods that were purchased. Books served to strengthen the dominance of the upper class by reinforcing their intellectual and cultural superiority through a private library collection and its accommodation. As time progressed and collections grew, design reflected the need for a different style of space and the library evolved from cabinet to study to grand living room. A new socially focused home emerged in the eighteenth century that was neatly and logically arranged, with apartments that moved from public to private in a rectangular plan. The library transformed from a study often located near the private

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35 Connell, p. 27-8.
36 Raven, p. 201.
37 Gwinn 56; Raven, p. 203.
quarters of the home to a luxurious room in the entertaining quarters and this shift happened out of necessity.

In the early eighteenth century books began to need special accommodations and libraries were built or enlarged in many homes. Books became the primary object of display in a new sociable library living room and design was focused around them. Design was rather fluid and reflective of individual taste as well as need. In *The Gentleman’s House* (1864), architect Robert Kerr stressed that the library’s importance within a residence was wholly based on the “family’s literary interest.” Accessibility was one of the main emphases when designing a private library. In the grand country homes that mark this period, the library was one of the principal entertaining rooms and could consist of a number of apartments en suite or one large room. The new sociable library served the family as a multipurpose living room and was used in three distinct ways. As a light and bright morning room, it served both sexes as an elegant space to write correspondence or spend leisure time engaging in the respectable and adored pastime of reading. When not entertaining, the gentleman of the house would often use the library as his morning room where he would conduct the business of the estate. In the afternoons, the library was strictly the territory of gentlemen and served as a cultivated, masculine space for influential men to participate in discussion about “worldly affairs” and engage in serious study from the collection of books, manuscripts, and folios. The library was the locus of male intellectual sociability; an integral part of gentlemanly

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39 Kerr, p. 129.
40 Kerr, p. 30-31; 132; 209.
masculinity was the opportunity to discuss, debate and argue.\textsuperscript{42} The library provided a refined masculine setting as well as the tools that were a crucial part of the language of debate, books.\textsuperscript{43} Finally, as an evening drawing room, the library served as a luxurious location for visitors to play games and gossip when the family entertained guests that came for an extended stay in the country.\textsuperscript{44}

With elegance and sophistication, the private library evolved from a private study, like that in Ham House, to a sociable living room that could rival any drawing room or gallery. Filled from floor to ceiling with books, manuscripts, fine art and statues, and embellished with exquisitely balanced architectural details, it is no wonder a gentleman of the highest caliber would choose to work and entertain in such a room.\textsuperscript{45} The engraving of “The Library as a Sitting Room,” at Cassiobury Park from 1830 (Plate 3) is a typical representation of libraries of this time. Cassiobury Park’s library was embellished with not just books, but many classical architectural details, multipurpose furniture, and fine art. This library is a perfect example of how neoclassical design principals were used to create a balanced room that served as an inviting and comfortable living room reflective of the sophistication and prestige of the family.\textsuperscript{46} In studying this engraving, several features of library design stand out - artistic treatment of the room, the necessity of a light feature, often a wall of windows to offset the darkness of bookcases, unique furnishings that accommodated library specific activities, as well as other instruments of learning dependent upon predilection, including telescopes, globes, and

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} Ciro, p. 92-93.
\textsuperscript{45} Girouard, p. 178.
\textsuperscript{46} Girouard, p. 234-235.
other scientific or mathematical instruments. The star of the library was clearly the elegantly bound books that filled the shelves, indicating the learned status and sophistication of the gentleman to whom the books and home belonged.


The Mind Makes the Man

“Mens cujusque is est Quisque,” is a quote from Cicero’s Somnium Scipionis, and roughly translates to, “the mind makes the person.” This was Samuel Pepys’s motto and it was included in two of the three bookplate designs (Plate 4 and Plate 5) he placed in every book in his collection. The front bookplate showcased an oval portrait of Pepys with a surround of his title, “Samuel Pepys, Secretary to the Admiralty under two kings,

Charles II and James II,” that indicated his status as a statesman and was written in the language of learning, Latin. Below the oval plate of his portrait, name, and title, was a ribbon containing the text of his motto and likely represented his status as a virtuoso, the most desirable attribute of the gentleman. Pepys’s two back bookplates were variants based on his naval association, with a “nautical theme of anchors and ropes,” and again his motto in a ribbon above. Pepys’s bookplates are a window into his identity as a collector, a scholar, and a gentleman and show him as an important man within his majesty’s government and an accomplished and learned gentleman. Samuel Pepys is best known for the diary he wrote during the tumultuous 1660s, but he was arguably

Plate 4. Pepys’s Front Bookplate, left (source: Hughes, p. 15; The Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge)

Plate 5. Pepys’s Back Bookplate, right (source: Hughes, p. 85; The Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge)

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49 Girouard, p. 173.
50 Hughes, p. 15; Tanner, Bibliotheca Pepysiana, Vol. 1, title page.
one of the most interesting and passionate bibliophiles, scholars, and historical archivists. In 1701, he wrote in “on the Conditions of a Private Library,” about three elements “to be attended to” in relation to maintaining a private library.\(^{51}\) Pepys believed the private library of a gentleman, in contrast to the “extensive and pompous” libraries of universities and princes, should exhibit a great variety and universality of taste, books should be bound handsomely in a uniform design, and with special attention to its organization, book cataloguing should be a “three-fold” system, alphabetical, numerical, and classical (by subject).\(^{52}\) Pepys collected books and built his private library over the course of decades and through his diary, personal letters and papers, the library’s catalogue, and a biographical knowledge of how he spent his public and private life, his library can be analyzed to show how he used his book collection and his library room in both his private life and his public life to reinforce his intellectual sophistication, advance his career, and achieve the attainment of wealth and status. Through the sociability of reading, he fulfilled literary desires and advanced his ambitions in public life through self-education and intimate, intellectual sociability, and cultivated a character that was well-respected and known for intellect, ability, and influence. The private library, for Pepys, was a locus of individual development, intellective pleasure, and cultured sociability.

Samuel Pepys (1633-1703) came from a middle-class family; his father was in trade and worked as a tailor. He was intelligent and ambitious and was able to utilize advantageous connections to build a life of wealth and influence that lifted him out of a middle class designation. Members of the Pepys family had married into the aristocracy,


which provided Pepys with connections that would prove fruitful in the early years after his education when he sought a job within the government. Pepys’s intellect allowed him to enjoy a prestigious education that, in concert with his connections, played a crucial role in his rise in affluence and station. He began his intellectual development at the village school and then attended the esteemed St. Paul’s School in London. At St. Paul’s, his studies focused on rhetoric, logic, and grammar in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. St. Paul’s gave him a foundation in classical learning that men of a higher class received and it allowed him to move on to an elite university. In 1651, Pepys’s talents won him a scholarship to Cambridge and he began his university career at Magdalene College.

At Cambridge, Pepys expanded his classical education and was able to exercise his skills at weekly public debates and through essays where he would put his knowledge of the ancient philosophers and mastery of argument to use. Combined with knowledge of history, these exercises would prepare him for a future public life. Pepys developed a penchant for history and poetry whilst at university, and music became a great passion of his during these formative years. His future collecting habits reflected the classical education and the predilections he developed at university, and worked to fill in the gaps he thought lacking due to his upbringing. Unlike many of his classmates who entered the church or were members of the aristocracy, Pepys’s connections were necessary to attain a job that would allow him to raise his status in elite society. His first job was as secretary to Edward Montagu, a relation who became the Earl of Sandwich. This connection to the future Earl was important and allowed Pepys to attain a valuable job in government that was instrumental in his gain of wealth.

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54 Tomalin, p. 38-40.
Samuel Pepys’s intelligence and ambition coupled with his fidelity to Lord Montagu was influential in him attaining a job as Clerk of the Acts to the Navy.\textsuperscript{55} The Navy was the main industry in Britain during this time of conflict and was therefore a dominant and essential sector of government.\textsuperscript{56} Pepys was able to expand his duties and increase his value, and was thus provided with a good wage and monetary kickbacks. By 1667, he had become a wealthy man, and by the early 1670s he had successfully advanced his career to secretary to the Navy’s chief administrator, The Lord High Admiral. Thereafter, he became a Member of Parliament, representing the Navy in the House of Commons.\textsuperscript{57} Providence, and his connections, may have gotten him his first placement, but it was through auto didacticism that he was able to consistently and independently achieve his ambitions. Books and his library played an essential role in Pepys’s achievement and were an intimate part of his identity and social life.

Books were a luxury in Restoration England and there was a network of booksellers and collectors throughout London, of which Pepys was part. Pepys capitalized on connections and networks of virtuosi through book collecting. Reading was integrated into every aspect of his life; Pepys enjoyed a closet with books bought by the king’s purse at his Navy office, and a private collection in his study at his home, and used books throughout the day for work and for pleasure.\textsuperscript{58} Over the next several decades he would cultivate a collection based on the principles he outlined in “on the Conditions of a Private Library,” using utilitarian motives and individual predilection to build a collection of over 3,000 volumes that he used and cared for in the most diligent of

\textsuperscript{56} Loveman, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{57} Loveman, p. 8-9.
\textsuperscript{58} Loveman, p. 27.
manner. Books became a necessary tool in Pepys’s life and helped to fill in the gaps that his formal education and lack of a genteel upbringing inevitably left. He had an unquenchable thirst for knowledge and the learning he gained from books provided him with the finesse to advance himself in a variety of ways. Three types of texts were important in his individual course of study - the classical texts associated with an elite education, the booming conduct literature genre, and technical books that supported his career.  

The private library of a gentleman was based on a number of principles; the most important was that it was to be largely utilitarian. A library was seen as an arbiter of knowledge and wisdom, but it was much more than that to an ambitious man like Pepys. Elspeth Jajdelska asserts that the library was used as a source for “personal advancement” and Pepys’s collecting habits indeed reflected his desire for advancement, with books as the objects of knowledge that were necessary in attaining that advancement.  

Whilst Pepys’s collection included utilitarian texts, his collecting habits were often at war with one another. There is an interesting contrast between what he wanted to purchase for his reading pleasure, what he believed he should acquire to advance himself and his intellect, and what he thought should be on display in his sociable home to present a learned image. This clash between what a library should have versus what the collector desired will be at play throughout the building of his collection. It is evident that the library was not a private place but rather a place of visibility and through its sociability was a reflection of the gentleman whose ‘private’ collection was on display within his home.

61 Loveman, p. 39.
The learned gentleman’s library contained a number of volumes dedicated to the classics and personal and professional principles. Pepys’s diary and other writings combined with the codicil to his will, show that his focus was always on curating a library that was illustrative of the type of man he strove to be, a well informed, learned gentleman. Every gentleman’s library had a collection of classical texts, including philosophies and ancient histories; these topics were the foundation of practical morality, taught self-control, the prudence and rhetoric needed to engage in debate and conversation, and were the foundational necessities of learned masculinity. Not only did these texts provide guidelines for morality, self-governance, and public responsibility, they also created a shared value system with colleagues and associates. For Pepys, this shared education provided a common bond with Navy colleagues and those he interacted with in intellectual circles, and allowed him to present himself as a bona fide gentleman and an intellectual equal. Because of the commonality of classical texts in a gentleman’s library, they are not often mentioned in one’s papers or diary unless they are of special interest or favor as it is assumed that most libraries contained a respectable variety of these texts. As such, not many classical texts are mentioned in Pepys’s diary. He did have an affinity for Cicero, which is evidenced by the inclusion of his work in his motto, and Epictetus was also a favorite, both of which were mentioned several times in his diary in relation to what he was reading and what he was discussing with others.

Education was not a simple acquisition of information gleaned from the classical texts, the gentleman also needed to know how to put that knowledge to use in his personal and professional life and it was conduct literature that aided in this. Conduct

literature was a thriving business and addressed all classes, giving the rising gentleman the ability to adjust the use of these texts as his rank rose. One of the most popular conduct literature authors of the time was Francis Osbourne. Pepys owned a number of volumes of his work and he had such esteem for him that he referred to him in his diary as, “My father Osbourne.” Pepys also turned to other authors whose work was focused on conduct and personal advancement. He was particularly fond of Francis Bacon’s *Faber Fortunae*, or *The Architect of Fortune*. It is affectionately mentioned a number of times in his diary, “… making an end of reading over my dear *Faber Fortunae*,” and, “…all the way, coming and going reading my Lord Bacon’s *Faber Fortunae*.” Conduct books gave advice on decorum and propriety and provided social and political advice of great benefit to those looking to advance themselves, as Pepys was. They were also a source of debate and discussion amongst the coffee house crowd where gentlemen would show off their knowledge by reciting memorized tracts from popular conduct literature. Pepys made use of conduct literature to advance and because of the literature’s great variety, he was able to tailor his use to accommodate his changing status and support its continued rise. Conduct literature was also an important part of male intellectual sociability during this time.

Like conduct literature’s usefulness in the continued development of manners and the advancement of the self, technical books and histories of the navy and other naval writings, maps, and papers helped Pepys increase his knowledge by building on his formal education and expanding his comprehension of matters relating to his profession. Although mathematics was part of a classical education, the extent to which mathematics

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66 Loveman, p. 77.
was learned in schooling often came up short for a number of professions that the
gentleman would enter into upon completion of his university degree. Pepys wrote about
engaging a private tutor to expand his comprehension and his frustration with his lack of
mathematical abilities. A greater understanding of mathematics was crucial in Pepys’s
ability to interpret maps, charts, and a whole host of Navy and nautical papers, and
technical books aided in self-education. Pepys collected naval documents, which
provided knowledge that supported his career. As his predilection for all things navy
grew, he became an important curator of naval documents and papers of this time period.

As a collector and curator of a private library, a collector’s predilection, those
items beyond the respectably traditional, offer a fuller picture of individual character and
identity. Pepys collected a number of different types of texts, compilations, papers, and
documents that either related to areas of special interest and study and/or his work and its
history. Through these collections, he was a magnificent collator and preserver of historic
documents. Three areas of historical interest reflective of predilection are his collections
of books on shorthand, of sea manuscripts, and of ballads.

Samuel Pepys’s diary was written in a form of shorthand that he became
proficient in called Shelton’s Tachygraphy. He learned the art of shorthand while he was
at Cambridge and used it in his diary and in a number of official Navy letters. Pepys
interest in shorthand was so great that he built a broad and unique collection of literature
on the subject. In the introduction to the volume of Bibliotheca Pepysiana on Pepys’s
collection of shorthand there is a fitting quote about the collection by John Nichols, “Mr.
Pepys’ library contains everything that is wanting in the other libraries, so as to be their

68 Carlton, Bibliotheca Pepysiana, Vol. 4, p. vii-viii; ix.
complement. To instance in a small particular: in three or more volumes, according to their sizes, he has collected almost every writer on shorthand, with a complete catalogue of all that he could ever hear of.”69 This is a nod to him as both a curator of a collection on a practice he heartily used, enjoyed and appreciated, but also as a steward of historical archiving. Pepys is the first collector of shorthand styles on record and he had the collection bound in five volumes, with his usual attention to detail and uniformity of style. Pepys was an avid collector and diligently sought out works that his collection lacked but were hard to find.70 Overall, his collection is a remarkable, unrivaled preservation of the art of shorthand.

The Navy played a significant role in Samuel Pepys’s life; his wealth and respect were gleaned from his rising position within this sector of the government. He amassed an extensive collection of documents pertaining to the history of the navy, which were listed in his catalog under the designation “Sea Manuscripts.” Pepys mentioned in his diary that he had an interest in writing a history of the Navy and began collecting documents pertaining to his work early in his career. Once he became Secretary to the Admiralty, which oversaw the whole administration of the navy, he was able to collect essential documents pertaining to “naval matters called for by Parliament from 1660 to 1679.”71 These documents provide a history of the Navy from Restoration to Revolution, with a large collection of 1,438 documents pertaining to matters of administration and economy including costs associated with the Dutch War, and the registries of ships, artillery, and men in the navy. In all, the collection includes one hundred and fourteen volumes of miscellaneous papers that cover a wide-ranging variety of historical and

political documents. For Pepys, his career and the wealth and connections it fostered, were significant parts of his identity as a man. His erudition and unquenchable curiosity built a large collection of documents relating to a revolutionary period in history. Many were of great significance whilst others were of personal interest and inquisitiveness and set him apart as an archivist for British Naval history of this time period and prior.

Another collection that fused historical importance with personal interest was Pepys’s collection of ballads. He had a particular interest in ballads as a valuable “index of the times” and derived quite a bit of pleasure from reading them. Pepys was one of only a few collectors of ballads, he purchased the collection of John Selden and continually added to it, and its rarity only serves to increase its cultural and historical value. He developed connections with Anthony Wood, another collector, and consulted him in selection and compilation of his own collection of ‘Vulgaria,’ as he referred to it. Pepys’s enthusiasm for ballads is representative of an interest in them as objects of amusement, like other works under his ‘Vulgaria’ designation that included additional short publications known as penny merriments and penny godliness. This aspect of his catalogue is historically relevant as a cultural reflection of the time period. Pepys was an excellent curator of documents with an attention to detail in their collation and binding. Collections were bound and indexed and show him as a capable archivist and preserver of historical documents, stories, and manuscripts with posterity at the heart of his motivation.

Books were a form of social currency and allowed the reader greater access based on social networks that fostered acquaintances that were beneficial to the collector, his

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74 Loveman, p. 249.
collection, and his professional life. A system of loan and gift elicited reciprocity “in favors, in intelligence, and in luxury goods.” London was a prime location for book collecting with access to bookshops and an international social network based on commercial and noncommercial interactions and exchanges. London was also a point of intellectual sociability and Pepys fostered a reputation as a learned gentleman collector, thus eliciting introductions and invitations from those with shared bibliophilic proclivities and intellectual passions. Books as objects of sociability provide the owner with social cachet and a powerful currency to curry favor or build connections. From books sprouted intellectual clubs and societies of formal and informal groupings. The most distinguished of these groups was the Royal Society, a group of scientists and intellectuals who met together for discussions and the observations of experiments and other ‘science’ specific topics. All the prominent scientists of the time were members of the group and Pepys was admitted as a member in 1665. The Royal Society was part of the “intellectual liveliness of the city” and Pepys, as a virtuoso, enjoyed being part of a flourishing scientific community. Whilst he was not a scientist, he was valued for a number of administrative contributions he made to the society and was elected as its president in 1684. Out of membership to one of these clubs or societies, sincere friendships were forged and Pepys and several intellectual intimates created a smaller group that enjoyed weekly meetings. The ‘Saturday’s Table’ club was a group of virtuosi and literati who met weekly and included some of the era’s most distinguished thinkers with Pepys as its host.

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75 Loveman, p. 196.
76 Pepys, Diary, Vol. 6, p. 36.
77 Tomalin, p. 247; 250.
78 Loveman, p. 203-4.
A gentleman’s private library was a locus of solitary learning and routine sociability. Pepys wrote that the library was “for the SELF-ENTERTAINMENT onely of a solitary, unconfined ENQUIRER into Books.”\(^{79}\) Towards the end of his diary, his library consisted of about 500 books and occupied two of the eventual twelve presses, or bookcases, that filled the room.\(^{80}\) The majority of his collecting and library design was done in the final decades of his life, which was not chronicled in his diary. In the codicil to his will, Pepys left his library to his nephew and when he finished with its use, it was to pass on to his alma mater, Magdalene College where it was to be kept in perpetuity, as he left it at the time of his death. Pepys understood the value of an intact collection, one he built and used over many years and catalogued as its librarian, and therefore his reasoning behind keeping the collection together was for posterity and as a reflection of his legacy as a learned gentleman.\(^{81}\)

Whilst the library was to be based around a collection of books, it was also “a record of the self.”\(^{82}\) As such, books were housed according to their owner’s requirements and status. Pepys’s study was initially a private space, used for a variety of administrative and intellectual purposes. However, within a few years it evolved into a semi-social space, where he would “entertain select guests.”\(^{83}\) As his wealth and status rose, the necessity of a withdrawing room for the intellectual entertainment done within his home, a place to discuss books and scholarly pursuits with colleagues and friends, also rose. The library (Plate 6 and Plate 7) became an important aspect of his character; it

\(^{80}\) Pepys, *Diary*, Vol. 10, p. 35; M.E.J. Hughes, p. 43.
\(^{82}\) Loveman, p. 250.
\(^{83}\) Loveman, p. 258.
was essential and expected that a man of intellect and influence would have a handsome, well-appointed, and ordered library. Pepys began to design book presses (Plate 8) in the mid-1660s to house his collection and adorn his library space and were based on several important factors - protection, organization, and ease of movement. The cases are impressive in their unique and elegant design with fine decorative carvings. After living through the Great Fire of 1666 and escaping its destruction, ease of transport and protection were of great importance to Pepys. He met with a joiner and designed the presses to his specifications. They had numerous features that were unique and thoughtful, including glass paneled doors that protected the books from dust, adjustable shelves that helped with ease of organization, and each press was numbered to help with

Plate 6. Sutton Nicholls, Pepys’s Library, overlooking the Thames, 1693
(source: Loveman, p. 246; The Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge)

84 Loveman, p. 254.
Plate 7. Sutton Nicholls, *Pepys's Library*, view facing away from the windows, 1693
(source: Loveman, p. 247; The Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge)

Plate 8. Pepys's Book Presses, designed in 1666
cataloguing purposes. Pepys organized his collection of books by size, making easy shelf adjustment an important component of their design. Ease of movement was also a critical element of the presses’ design. Divided into two sections, they came apart and had handles along the sides to aid in the movement of the cases through the hallways of London housing. The larger bottom section of the presses were for oversized folios and the doors opened in an unconventional manner, sliding upwards – Pepys took this design cue from ships where doors that opened outward were a hazard in a confined space. Books were placed in two rows, with smaller books in front so that the spines of both rows could easily be read. The presses were a handsome addition to the library and their functionality was a central aspect of their design. Pepys’s library was principally a place of use and study and ease of access was reflected in the press design. Handsomely carved and with the intention of placing the collection of books on full display, the aesthetics of the presses’ design is also relevant and added to the elegance of library space.

Pepys’s desk (Plate 9) was a large writing style table and is the earliest illustration of a partner’s desk, which allowed for individuals to be seated on either side to make use of a shared space.\(^85\) Pepys often used his library to read with another person, this desk was the perfect location for intimate, shared reading and was a large enough setting for the exploration of books, manuscripts, and maps. The design of Pepys’s desk was practical, with a surface large enough to study maps and charts for his work in the Navy and functioned as a place of storage for Pepys’s largest folios. Outfitted with false drawers along the front, the sides had large built in shelves for the largest folios in his collection. Its attractive design matched that of the presses and completed a distinguished selection of furnishings in Pepys’s private library.

\(^85\) Hughes, p. 45.
Pepys spent a great deal of time on the binding, gilding, and organizing of his books as is evidenced by the mention of these activities repeatedly in his diary.\textsuperscript{86} A great deal of attention was paid to the organization and cataloguing of his library, there are also many references to him cataloguing the library in his diary.\textsuperscript{87} He gave instructions on how to catalogue one’s library in “on the Conditions of a Private Library,” that focused on ease of access by classifying the books in several different ways.\textsuperscript{88} Library organization and cataloguing were no easy feat. Pepys employed Paul Lorrain as his literary assistant in the 1680s to help with this task, but it was a constant one and he enlisted the help of others, including his brother, his male servants, and his nephew, with whom he created the \textit{Suppellex Literaria}, a catalogue of his library created in the last

\textsuperscript{86} Pepys, \textit{Diary}, Vol. 7, p. 311, 412; Vol. 8, p. 40, 45; Vol. 9, p. 72, 559-60.
\textsuperscript{87} Pepys, \textit{Diary}, Vol. 7, p. 412; Vol. 8, p. 40, 45; Vol. 9, p. 72, 559-60.
years of his life. There was a constant flux of acquisition, arrangement, and cataloguing for the book collector, he was the curator of his collection and special attention was paid to its accommodation and arrangement. Samuel Pepys was not an exception in this regard; he too was devoted to curating and organizing of his book collection. In analyzing what these tasks are indicative of, it is easy to draw a line between collection and the display of one’s collection, but the book collector and his collection’s connections go deeper than mere acquisition and exhibition. The mind makes the man, and in that sense one’s book collection is not an exhibition of objects (the books) but of the mind, or the self. The expansive knowledge amassed within a collection is suggestive of the extensive knowledge the collector has acquired through its use – the collection became the collector and the library became an indicator of the achievement of the ideal gentleman, that is the learned gentleman. Through the attention paid to organization and the creation of a catalog, the historian can be sure that the collector used the collection and required easy access through the search of one’s catalog and corresponding organization on numbered presses or shelves.

The private library of Samuel Pepys is a remarkable collection of over 3,000 volumes, rather large for this time period. Pepys was adept at assembling and classifying his collections and had them handsomely bound, indexed, and catalogued. The way in which he outfitted his library and organized his collection indicates that he was a man wholly devoted to his collection as an indicator of the self, an object of display, and as and arbiter of knowledge and personal pleasure. Pepys spent a great deal of his free time reading and thus a connection between the self and one’s library is solidified. His collection also served to support the ambitions of a man intent on rising through the ranks

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of government, scholarship, and wealth to reach the pinnacle of success as the ultimate
gentleman. As Pepys’s wealth grew he could afford more extravagant spending on books
and the furnishing of his library. What began with only a few presses and a writing table,
expanded to twelve presses in total. The library was the work of a man dearly devoted to
learning and books, his book presses were exquisitely designed to incorporate a
handsome style with perfect utility and organization. A book collector’s work was never
done when it came to acquisition and arrangement. Pepys spent a great deal of time
utilizing his collection for learning and advancement, but he also spent significant time
arranging and cataloguing his books, as is evidenced in his diary and personal papers and
the catalogues published by Cambridge. Pepys was fully engaged in the legacy his library
would represent, of the period in which he lived, and of himself as a virtuoso of the
Restoration era.

The Finest Private Library in Europe

George John, the Second Earl Spencer, was born into a family of gentleman book
collectors that spanned generations. Centuries of inherited wealth built a rich dynasty of
bibliophiles culminating in a collection rivaled only by some of Europe’s royal and
university libraries. Spencer amassed a collection of over 40,000 volumes that occupied
five apartments within Althorp, his country house. He assembled an archive of some of
the most rare examples of early printing and is recognized for his remarkable collection
of incunabula from England and the continent. Much like Samuel Pepys he was a well
informed, intelligent, and devoted collector and is remembered as a passionate
bibliophile, scholar, and historical archivist. Spencer did not harbor the same ambitions
or insecurities as Pepys, as a wealthy, influential member of the aristocracy, his collection
did not follow the same conditions that Pepys set forth in the writing of both his diary and personal papers. A true love of books and reading and a passion for early printing and antique books that had become a pervasive part of the late eighteenth century drove the Earl as a collector. The first Earl Spencer had a respectable library at Althorp made up of books that had passed through the generations, amounting to about 7,000 volumes when George Spencer became Earl in 1783. Over the course of decades Spencer collected tens of thousands of volumes through the acquisition of whole collections and the diligent work of seeking out rare specimens at auction to add to his collection. He also devoted time to arranging and renovating his home to accommodate such a large collection and worked with two librarians to acquire, organize, and catalogue his library. Spencer’s library was a place of intellectual passion and polite sociability. As an aristocrat with wealth and status, Spencer developed a reputation as a devout and prolific bibliophile. The time period in which he lived also presented the opportunity to adorn his home with a collection of library apartments that suited sociable purposes and placed his erudition and collection on display in an impressive and sophisticated fashion. The private library, for Spencer, was a locus of passion, archiving, intellective pleasure, and polite sociability.

George Spencer (1758-1834) enjoyed a happy childhood at Althorp in Northampton. He began his education at seven under the tutor William Jones. Jones accompanied Spencer on two continental tours where they visited libraries and shared a mutual fondness for books and collecting. After the tutorship of Jones, Spencer attended the elite boarding school Harrow and then continued on to Trinity College, Cambridge. His education was similar in focus to Pepys’s with the study of classical philosophy,
languages, rhetoric, logic, mathematics, and history at the fore and with the new addition of the sciences. Spencer learned the graceful art of conversation and debate at university and through continental travel, which prepared him for a public life in government. Unlike Pepys, Spencer’s education was focused on his future as a statesman and as such he was put through a full elite gentleman’s education and finishing that was meant to prepare him for the civic duties and the responsibilities of a landowning earl. At 22, Spencer became a Member of Parliament for Northampton, and at 25 he inherited the earldom and the family estate, and his political career spanned the next several decades. The Spencer branch of the Marlborough family were reluctant statesmen with a preference for country life focused on the management of the estate, nonetheless they served with dignity and honor and George Spencer was no exception. He held a succession of offices in the administrations of the tumultuous late eighteenth century with a role as First Lord of the Admiralty for six historically eventful years. Spencer was known for his personal character and his administration is quoted as having “been the most auspicious to the honor of His Majesty’s arms.” He retired from government service in the early 1800s, leaving the admiralty in 1801 and eventually fully retiring from his last governmental role as Secretary of State in 1806. Spencer’s collecting efforts would flourish under his ‘retirement’ to landowner of Althorp.

George Spencer was part of a bibliophilic tradition that went back generations and spanned several branches of the extended family, littering the great houses of the aristocracy with elegant library rooms that housed some of the most exquisite private collections. Spencer was surrounded by books throughout childhood and began collecting

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early, however it is argued that his collecting efforts did not become truly serious until the purchase of the Reviczky collection in 1793. Georgina Battiscombe contends that this early acquisition influenced Spencer’s future collecting habits, with a portion of his collection focused on early printings, or incunabula, of which the Reviczky collection contained some of the finest examples of early printing in volumes known as Aldines. However, incunabula were of great interest at this time. The collection efforts of many of the prominent bibliophiles centered on early printed works and this craze was a widespread part of book collection. There are a number of classes of incunabula based on where, when, and who printed the work. There was also a focus amongst the gentry on acquiring extremely rare early printed works, of which Spencer had some of the best in the whole of printing preservation.

At Althorp, Spencer devoted five apartments to his library collection, with renovations done to create a series of sociable rooms for the entertainments of a gentleman and his family. Each of the five rooms was used in different ways, housed specific collections of works, and was vested with pieces of fine art and distinctive furnishings that gave each room elegance and a clear function in Spencer’s sociable life. Edward Edwards asserted that Spencer’s wife was known as a consummate entertainer at their homes in the country and in London, particularly during the years that Spencer served in the government. In *Aedes Althorpianae*, Spencer’s librarian Thomas Dibdin, described The Long Library (Plate 10) as having a “gay and cheerful appearance” and he

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93 Reid, p. 66-7.
94 Edwards, p. 399-400.
affirmed that it was used as an assembling room for guests in the morning or evening. The Long Library is illustrated as an elegantly appointed space for Spencer’s guests to gather in, shown with figures about the room enjoying its appointments and bookish attractions. A sociable room like the Long Library would have integrated a number of different design features focused on elegance, balance, and symmetry. The furnishings were utilitarian, yet richly appointed; light, art, architecture, and furnishings worked in concert with one another to showcase the primary feature of the library, the books, and provided an elegant locale for socialization.\textsuperscript{95}

Country house design was based on symmetry and balance and the neoclassical aesthetic principles of order, proportion, and harmony were a clear part of the Long Library’s design. In many ways, the Long Library epitomized all that the private library was trying to convey during this period; the prestige associated with continental travel, the superiority imparted on those in receipt of an exclusive, classical education, and the opulent display of the influential, wealthy, ruling class. Georgian architectural design emulated the great empires of the past, Greek and Roman designs were used throughout the country house including the library. Flanked by ionic columns on each end, the Long Library employed classical architectural details throughout the room including similar details around the fireplace and bookcases. 

Ancient Roman and Greek architectural style was a prominent feature in country house renovation during the eighteenth century and Spencer’s architect used these styles throughout the room. An impressive gallery wall occupied the space above and to both sides of the fireplace with many valued works of fine art. The display of art above and to each side of the fireplace illustrated the importance of balance in all areas of design and décor. One of the main features of the room, this display created a symmetrical gallery wall with an equal number of paintings, similar in size and proportion, on either side of the hearth. The star of this display is the centrally hung portrait of Rembrandt’s mother done by her son. Inherited from Sarah, the Duchess of Marlborough and Spencer’s great, great grandmother, this is a superb piece created by one of the finest artists of the Dutch Golden Age. In viewing this painting, Dibdin claimed that “the spectator cannot fail to be struck with its force and beauty,” and as the room’s artistic centerpiece, it made a striking

96 Jervis, p. 178-179.
impression.\textsuperscript{98} A number of portraits of prominent members of the family, including Sarah Duchess of Marlborough and John Duke of Marlborough, also graced this wall.\textsuperscript{99} Through the display of fine art, this gallery wall served two purposes to the family; it represented a cultured knowledge of the arts and ancestral pride in the portraiture included in the display.\textsuperscript{100}

Balance was of the utmost importance when designing a room of this type, a wall of light opposite the gallery wall contained five large windows and was meant to complement it and illuminate the presses of books. The room was painted white to offset the darkness of the bindings of the books and highlight their exquisiteness. The employment of a wall of windows imparted the light that a room of this nature required during the lighted hours of the day. Other modes of light for evening use of the Long Library are illustrated by the large chandeliers in the center of the room as well as at the ends of the room in the areas that were set apart for Spencer’s principal collections of import and interest.

The furnishings in the room were beautiful in appearance and functional in style, and created an accommodating and comfortable space in which to entertain. Intricate bookstands and desks, like the antique regency desk (Plate 11), were used for serious study, reading aloud or writing correspondence. Comfortable seating lent itself to quiet

\textsuperscript{98} Dibdin, \textit{Aedes Althorpianae}, Vol. 1, p. 20-21.
\textsuperscript{100} Girouard, p. 180, 235.
conversations or private reading, large tables could be commissioned to hold oversized folios and manuscripts for further study or to serve as a top on which to play cards or other games, and chairs, almost all of which were on casters for ease of movement, were also placed throughout the room to facilitate set up for study, debate, or play.  

All of these practical pieces of furniture, which were neat in design, showed the family’s desire to make the library a polite space of inviting elegance and practical functionality for guests. The room was used as a morning sitting room and an evening drawing room and was the principal library room when Spencer began his prolific collecting career. At the end of the Long Library, through the columns, was a collection that was “set apart for the reception of Editiones Principes and books printed in the fifteenth century,” or selections from Spencer’s incunabula collection.  

Not only was the Long Library a principal room of sociability, it was also a room that displayed Spencer’s métier, his incunabula collection and his handsome collection of early printed bibles. On the opposite end of the room, the area not displayed in the illustration from Aedes Althorpianae, was devoted to

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101 Dibdin, Aedes Althorpianae, Vol. 1, p. 20 (see figure. 2).
Spencer’s collection of theology and included his impressive collection of Polyglott and other early printed bibles.\textsuperscript{103}

The next apartment within the library suite was the Rafael Library, named for the painting of the Holy Family that hung over the fireplace. This painting was purchased on one of Spencer’s continental tours to Italy in 1785. The books housed in this library apartment were Spencer’s collection of poetry and county history, another nod to historical archiving with a focus on the region in which the Spencers were landowners.\textsuperscript{104}

Upon leaving the Rafael library, another socially focused library room is entered. The Billiard Library, named for the billiard table that occupied the center of the room, had three large windows that lighted the space and there was access to the park through “folding doors.”\textsuperscript{105} In this room was a Joshua Reynolds portrait of Spencer’s son, John Charles the Viscount Althorp. The Billiard Library was a distinctly homosocial room with its central designating feature, the billiard table, indicative of its use. It housed Spencer’s collection of history and poetry and had an access point to the parklands just outside the doors of Althorp, thus showcasing more of the splendor of Spencer’s collection and the entertainments his home and estate had on offer.

The Marlborough Library apartment, which was next in Spencer’s succession of library rooms, was named for the favored portrait of John, Duke of Marlborough that hung over the fireplace. This portrait is indicative of the style of room this apartment served as, with the special ancestor hanging in a room used exclusively as a ‘family’ room. The Marlborough Library was the family’s private living room, the room they retired to in the evening when there were no visitors staying at Althorp. The Marlborough

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{104} Dibdin, \textit{Aedes Althorpianae} Vol. 1, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{105} Dibdin, \textit{Aedes Althorpianae}, Vol. 1, p. 25.
Library was a room of private sociability, the sociability of home and family life, and would have been used regularly by the family. The collection of books housed within the Marlborough Library was voyages and travels, and history.

The library apartments focus on different types of sociability and the final area dedicated to Spencer’s collection is grander in scale and weightier in its representation of identity and legacy. The Gothic Library was an addition to Althorp, designed and completed around 1820, and had an added first floor picture gallery that was home to more of the Earl’s collection. On the walls hung many pieces of fine art, beneath which from the floor to a height of about four feet were shelves that housed more books. There was ample space in this corridor of art for chairs and tables for quiet study.¹⁰⁶ The Gothic Library room was filled with plentiful light from the four large Gothic windows on either end of the room. There was a large bay window that looked out into the “pleasure garden” of Althorp’s park. Dibdin described the room as particularly “bookish” and reminiscent of a room in “a well-endowed monastery.”¹⁰⁷ This library apartment housed the “finer copies, in all classes of books” that Dibdin described as the Earl’s treasures. Spencer was known to sell inferior copies of works when he had found a finer edition, this was where the years of buying and selling that created his impressive collection was put on splendid display. The Gothic Library was a true representation of George Spencer, the learned gentleman. Through the exhibition of the greatest treasures of his collective efforts, in the style of history’s most learned, those living under the rule in a monastery and known for their preservation efforts of the learning of the past, was rather apropos. The Gothic Library was, in contrast with the polite gentleman of the Long Library and

the Billiard Library, indicative of the ultimate, learned gentleman; it was a true representation of the self.

The collections of books and how they were housed, organized, and displayed were all key elements of the library’s design and one of the concentrations of the gentleman collector. Binding was an important feature of the private library, for both utilitarian purposes and for purposes of exhibition and congruency. Pepys paid close attention to the design of his bindings and collected some volumes for the fineness of their binding. Spencer also had an eye for a fine binding and attended to the elegant binding of his collection. Collectors of Spencer’s time cared very little for the condition of the books they acquired, for “complete rebinding was commoner than repairing a damaged binding,” so long as the volume was considered whole and complete.108 Both Pepys and Spencer employed London binders; Dibdin mentions rebinding repeatedly in the Spencer catalogues, *Bibliotheca Spenceriana* and *Aedes Althorpiana*. The elegance of the bindings was also described by Dibdin in *Aedes Althorpiana* as one of the most admirable and striking features of the suite of library apartments.109

Spencer worked his entire adult life on the collection housed in the library apartments at Althorp and those at his other homes, including Spencer House in London. His book collection was vast at over 60,000 volumes in total (including those kept at other family residences) and there were smaller collections within the larger that are of significant interest and consequence. A passion that began with Spencer’s acquisition of the Reviczky library, his interest in incunabula spanned the next several decades of his


collecting life. Spencer acquired numerous whole collections, sold off duplicates or those of a lesser quality, and attained more volumes through auction and the acquisition of further whole collections. The mania for incunabula during this time period created an interesting succession of acquisition and sale to build a select library with the choicest editions. The grand scale with which Spencer collected meant that he required a librarian cum secretary to organize, catalogue, sort, and assist with the purchase and care of the collection. However, Spencer did not simply pass this task off to his librarians, he had a remarkable knowledge of his collection and was an enthusiastic partner in these activities. Spencer employed two librarians throughout his life, the first an Italian who worked with him for 28 years and the second, the reverend Thomas Dibdin, who published the extensive Spencer libraries’ catalogues.

Spencer’s Aldine collection was one that was not only rare but also highly valued and began to build, along with the acquisition of other early printing, a collection with a focus on the preservation of early printing that was unique and scarce in the world of collecting. Spencer collected a variety of early printed works from English black letter to European incunabula, including the Latin and Greek classics that were part of the Reviczky Aldines and the Roman poets that were part of the Cassano Library. The next acquisition of a collection that was added to Spencer’s incunabula collection was Duke Cassano Serra’s collection that Spencer purchased on a continental tour in 1819. Spencer’s collection was deficient in early Neapolitan printing and the Duke’s collection was heavy with Neapolitan gems. This collection included early printing from Sicily and Naples, and some exceptional specimens from the Roman poets including Horace, Virgil, and Ovid. There were also several exceedingly unusual items of Horace, Aesop, and a
class of rare Boccaccios. These items from the Cassano Library were specimens of Bruxella printing from the fifteenth century, including an uncommon, famous, and long desired copy of Horace from 1474. Dibdin claims this as of “the very first importance” for it is the only known copy of this work. Another exceptional volume from this collection is a prized Fransisco del Tuppy edited Latin edition of Aesop’s Fables, filled with remarkable woodcuts, it is a fine example of early Neapolitan printing and another only known copy of a work. Spencer sought out singular Boccaccios throughout his collecting years, including a collection of rarities from the late fifteenth century, and in the Cassano Library he rounded out his collection with the scarcest of them all, the Philocolo of Boccaccio printed by Riessinger in Naples.

Spencer’s collection of incunabula reached 3,000 volumes, including 800 Aldines and many other examples of the early Italian press, gained through the acquisition of whole collections. He took a different approach in collecting Caxtons, works by the father of British printing, William Caxton, of which most were bought at private auction. Spencer purchased his first Caxton in 1795, a second edition of the Canterbury Tales. He continued to purchase Caxtons at auction and through private sale, bringing his collection to a total of 58. Spencer was also a keen preserver of early printed bibles in Greek and Hebrew, as well as early printed Latin and English bibles, including choice specimens from the Gutenberg press and the Moravus press, from 1450 and 1476 respectively.

10 Dibdin, Aedes Althorpianae, Vol. 2, p. IV.
14 Battiscombe, p. 81.
15 Edwards, p. 404-6; Battiscombe, p. 81.
Spencer’s rare collections included many limited editions of early and contemporary printing. Two folios are of a unique uncommonness and interest, a first edition of Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* from 1609 and a five volume set of Shakespeare’s historical plays. Many antique folios of Shakespeare available at this time were assemblages of pieces from multiple editions that were rebound to make a flawless, complete edition. However, the *Sonnets* Spencer acquired used a quarto technique, which confirms the rarity of the edition through this style. Quartos were made up of large single sheets that were folded to create a book and were impossible to disassemble to form a complete ‘antique’ compilation, making this a particularly extraordinary specimen. Dibdin claims Spencer’s folio of *Sonnets* as “of the greatest rarity” for its “color and soundness of condition.”\(^{117}\) One of the distinctive features of the volume is the inscription at the back in the handwriting of the time, but to whom it was inscribed remains a mystery according to Dibdin’s account in *Aedes Althorpianae*.\(^{118}\) The Historical Plays of Shakespeare consist of five folios printed by Boydell and Nicol. These folios were labeled as “The Illustrated Shakespeare” by Dibdin and contained superb illustrations that accompanied and introduced each of the ten historical plays included in the volumes. Whilst not part of the incunabula collection like the *Sonnets*, these folios were commissioned by Spencer’s mother-in-law the Dowager Countess Lucan and were special as a family heirloom. The historical plays were bound in green velvet and considered one of the particular treasures of the Spencer library collection.\(^{119}\)

Spencer began work on a classed catalogue toward the end of his life known as a sheaf or slip catalog, this form of catalog was an early predecessor to the modern card...  

catalog. Unique to the time, this form of cataloguing illustrates several important things about Spencer as a bibliophile and librarian. He employed some of the latest techniques in library organization and the implementation of a slip catalog demonstrates that Spencer desired his collection to be accessible, for his own personal use and for the use of others. Spencer’s slip catalogue indicates that he was not just a collector for the sake of preservation or even display, although these things were certainly part of his collective efforts, but rather that he was a scholar who interacted with his library regularly and desired an ease of access for its use. Spencer’s library was indicative of a store of knowledge ripe for learning and was a reflection of the knowledge that Spencer had himself achieved.

Spencer, along with his friend and librarian Dibdin, formed the Roxburghe Club in 1812. The club was named for the Roxburghe library that hit the auction block the year before and was considered at the time to be “one of the finest [libraries] ever established.” The Roxburghe Club was a literary club that produced editions of works that represented European culture, manners, beliefs and the “intellectual growth of nations.” Its purpose was to reprint books that were part of Britain and Europe’s literary history, these volumes had been previously inaccessible to scholars. Initially the early printed works of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were reprinted and bound as a trade for only its members, but ‘Club Books,’ which were published by the group, gave access to scholars. The Roxburghe Club was instrumental in the rescue and

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120 Edwards, p. 428.
121 Reid, p. 68.
122 Ibid.
123 Reid, p. 68.
Hughes

reprints of old books and pamphlets and paid special attention to the printing, typography, and the unique binding of its books. A number of texts preserved by Spencer were part of the reprints of classics, such as his copy of Ovid’s *De Tristibus.*\(^{125}\) Library historian Edward Edwards claims that the “literary history of Britain and Europe is under obligation to it [the Roxburghe club].”\(^{126}\) The Roxburghe Club remains the oldest society of bibliophiles in the world and its publications have provided great access to scholars and are a significant aspect of Spencer’s legacy as a bibliophile and scholar.\(^{127}\)

The scope and grandeur of the library of George Spencer is one that could only be rivaled by some of Europe’s academic institutions and royal libraries. His predilection for incunabula left a rich legacy of some of the most rare and finest copies of early printing from England and the continent. Whilst his collection was vast, it was most famous for this act of historical preservation. Like Pepys, Spencer had a significant collection of classical texts that are not to be overlooked simply because they are part of an ordinary library, including a collection of the incunabula of Cicero that numbered in the dozens. But he also left a collective legacy through his choices in collection. Pepys preserved substantial aspects of naval history from both his time in history and prior as well as other written works indicative of the time period in which he lived. Spencer preserved an incredible variety of early printed works from all over Europe, including some the finest examples of literary fiction, bibles, and works of the classical philosophers, historians, and poets. Both of these men were consummate bibliophiles, collectors, and scholars and their collective efforts and libraries have become synonymous with the self, both for the

\(^{125}\) Edwards, p. 425.
\(^{126}\) Edwards, p. 425.
individuality of their collections and for what these collections contribute to historical preservation and the legacy of the learned gentleman.

The ultimate gentleman is one that embodied the British ideal - he must be learned, and known and respected for his learning. He needed to practice self-control and restraint in matters where he was in power, as patriarch, landlord, and government agent. He was polite and capable of engaging in the art of conversation and debate to fulfill his duties in both his public life and his private life; he had to live up to his responsibilities as a member of the higher class curating and preserving a collection for national posterity. The private library, therefore, was a product of this ultimate gentlemanly ideal.

Books were the building blocks of education and a library filled with the finest specimens gave the gentleman an air of sophistication and provided him with the necessary tools to nourish his learned status in a society where there were distinct lines of hierarchal order. The qualifiers of masculinity – learning, morality, civic duty, liberty, patriarchal strength and responsibility – came together in the formation of one’s private library. The private library and its contents were interactive in a personal context as they related to identity and legacy as well as in a historical context and as a representation of the time in which the collector lived, including who he was on the hierarchical ladder of a class based society. In examining the private libraries of Samuel Pepys and George Spencer, a clear picture is painted of the ways in which book collecting evolved and flourished over the long eighteenth century that caused the private library to change and grow. The private library became illustrative of the power of home in the life of the gentleman. Home was a place of private sociability and the library and its contents were used to curry favor, promote advancement, and served as a unique locale for homosocial
intellectual fellowship and mixed sex socialization. The private library inspired the gentleman intellectually and encouraged his growth and the growth of scholarly communion in the formation of elite social groups focused on the advancement of scientific, literary, and erudite pursuits. Through the archiving of unique works, collections, and papers, predilection was a marker of the self and became an indicator of individual legacy. The libraries of Samuel Pepys and George Spencer were not simply collections of objects, but were an extension of the self and represented the mind of the gentlemen who curated, used, designed, and built them. In some ways, the private library was the self, it was an indicator of learning and through its display and use, the collection became the collector.
Bibliography

Primary Sources:


Secondary Sources:


**Plates:**

**Plate 1:**

**Plate 2:**

**Plate 3:**

**Plate 4:**

**Plate 5:**

**Plate 6:**
Plate 7:

Sutton Nicholls, *Pepys's Library*, view away from the windows, 1693. (Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge)


Plate 8:

Samuel Pepys’s Bookpresses, designed in 1666. (Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge)


Plate 9:

Samuel Pepys’s Desk. (Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge)


Plate 10:


Plate 11:

Althorp House, *A Regency Mahogany Library Chair*.

Althorp House Website, Last accessed, 31 March 2015.