Brushstrokes of Care: An analysis of acts of caring for the book through seventeenth-century paintings

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Abstract

This thesis researches acts of caring for the book in seventeenth-century paintings from the Dutch Republic. Through an analysis of selected artworks from the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, it responds to and expands on existing research on the depiction of books which has overlooked the discussion of these paintings with a book historical finality. The complexity of pictorial sources is addressed by taking associated symbolisms, socio-cultural and economic contexts into consideration. In the seventeenth century, the emergence of a book and visual arts mass market, combined with a growing interest in depictions of the mundane, increased the prominence of books within artworks. The book had reached every circle of society, and its trade was growing exponentially in the newly formed Dutch Republic. These socio-cultural and economic shifts impacted our perception of books as material objects, which is reflected in an altered material appreciation. Moreover, it impacted the circumstances and symbolisms of their depiction as well. Whereas the book remained a valuable and significant object, medium, and symbol, these changes paint an interesting scenario which introduced new opportunities and challenges to the care of the book. The analysis therefore investigates care through concrete acts of protection and maintenance of the book's physical integrity, as well as through a more conceptual perspective which elaborates on the care of the book as a medium and symbol. Ultimately, this research outlined a refined and contextualised understanding of care which considers the omnipresence, multi-purpose functions, and everyday utilitarian uses of books in the seventeenth century. The distinction between book typologies also allowed to highlight how perceived value and purpose relate to distinctive forms of caring which extend beyond material preservation. Acts of caring for the book are balanced and/or informed by questions of accessibility, perceived value, use, and even moralising intentions.

Acknowledgements

This thesis marks the end of my master's, and as such, the end of my student days. Nonetheless, I hope this was only the start of a lifetime of learning driven by curiosity. Curiosity first inspired this topic during a visit at the National Museum in Warsaw with my best friend. We were looking at artworks in the Medieval section when I noticed the different layouts on two open manuscripts, and went on to explain to her how you can use this information to approximate the date of the depicted manuscripts. Fast forward to eight months later, to a complete thesis investigating book history through artworks. As my great supervisor Dr. Bram Caers knows best, it has been a long journey of reviews and doubts. I would like to thank him for believing in this thesis from day one, even more than I did myself. My thanks will then be extended to all my friends and family who supported me in every possible way – from listening to my complaints, to cooking for me, to planning study-dates or forcing me out of the house to have some fun. Thank you as well to my coworkers who are probably tired of seeing me study at the café on my days off, but still supported me with cheers and free coffees. Lastly, this thesis is focused on ways of caring, so thank you once again, to all those who cared.

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Introduction

From illuminated manuscripts to the evolution of the modern picture book and graphic novel as well as from carefully hand-drawn decorations to woodblocks, copperplates and photographs, the (visual) arts have embellished the book since its dawn. The very history of the book is built on the networked craftsmanship of skilled workers such as goldsmiths, scribes, illustrators, bookbinders, and printers. Whilst books have historically been affected by art movements – see for instance how art nouveau emphasised designs with sensuous lines and unity between text and ornamentation[1] – the arts too have often chosen the book as subject. Indeed, hundreds of paintings depict books as subjects, as prompts, as symbols. Furthermore, the identification of the codex – an encased volume of quires bound to a spine – in the Middle Ages with the sacred word of God, first established the book as a dominant iconographic symbol in religious images.[2] In later centuries, the significance and symbolism of books in art shifted, in answer to the socio-cultural contexts of depiction and the changing role of books within society. A surge of artists in the nineteenth century even went beyond depiction, turning the book itself into an art object with artists' books.[3] Such a fascination with books continues well into the twenty-first century, with artists still interacting with the book either through its depiction or its creation. What can be concluded is that there is the art of the book, the book as art, and the book *within* art. It is to the latter that we focus in this thesis. Of note is how the codex persists as the most obvious identification with the concept of the book. Moreover, the codex is the book depicted by hundreds of artists, de-structuralised by many others and decorated by thousands more. Therefore, it is to such imagery that this thesis henceforth relies on when we refer to the book.

The symbolism of books in art

A brief overview of the symbolisms of books in art sets the grounds for interpreting their presence in a given visual context. Within paintings books appear closed or open, laid out on a supporting device or stacked, in the process of production or while being consulted.[4] Books are thus props, symbols or subjects by themselves.[5] Their appearance in Western art steadily

[1] Robert R. Walsh, 'John Russell Taylor, "The Art Noveau Book In Britain" (Book Review)', *The Library Quarterly*, 37 (1967), pp. 313–14.
[2] Jan Białostocki, *Bücher Der Weisheit Und Bücher Der Vergänglichkeit: Zur Symbolik Des Buches in Der Kunst* (Schimper, 1985), pp.1-42.
[3] Jessica Pigza, 'Book Art Resources: Brief History of Artist's Books', *Yale Library*, 13 April, 2023 <https://guides.library.yale.edu/c.php?g=295819&p=1972527> [accessed 17 June 2024].
[4] Helen Smith, 'The Book', in *A Handbook of English Renaissance Literary Studies*, ed. by John Lee (Wiley Blackwell, 2017), pp. 396–410.
[5] James W. Watts, *How and Why Books Matter: Essays on the Social Function of Iconic Texts* (Equinox Publishing, 2019), pp. 1-6.

intensified with the propagation of Christianity following the conversion of Roman Emperor Constantine.[6] At the time, literacy was a privilege of the few, which made visual literacy essential for disseminating and creating knowledge to the illiterate.[7] As such, the representation of a book within a painting functioned as a communication channel for the teachings of Christ.[8] Given the privilege of literacy though, the depicted book was a means of legitimising the authoritative spiritual and intellectual position of the holding figure as well.[9] For instance, in the majority of thirteenth-century paintings saints hold the book while gesturing towards the viewer with a hand held up (*adlocutio*), suggesting their role in preaching the Word using books as a source.[10] As a central visual sign in Christianity, the depicted book legitimised itself as a vessel for the Word and as its teaching channel. Overall, the depiction of saints, the Virgin Mary or Christ holding scriptures, books of hours or other devotional texts was a preferred motif up until the fifteenth century.[11]

The late Middle Ages introduced a proliferation of books outside the religious contexts such as academic works, herbals, philosophy works, histories, and bestiaries.[12] Albeit images of books had existed for centuries, the infiltration of books into everyday civil life was accompanied by a proliferation of paintings in which books acquired meaning outside of the religious sphere.[13] In particular, fifteenth-century Humanism presented the book as a symbol of secular erudition, scholarly and spiritual life, and knowledge.[14] The result was increasing depictions of books held by scholars, scientists, philosophers, and writers.[15] Here too, the presence of books functioned as an authoritative legitimisation, yet this time of the figure's source of knowledge.[16] Indeed, stacks of books painted on the shelves of *scriptoria* confirmed the book's role as a source and as a means to the creation and preservation of knowledge.[17] As an attribute, the book thus switched from a preaching tool to the device of scholars and many lay professions.[18] Accordingly, new forms of books were depicted, as testified by frequent Baroque imagery featuring account and ledger

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[6] Jamie Camplin and Maria Ranauro, *The Art of Reading: An Illustrated History of Books in Paint* (Getty Publications, 2018), pp. 71–246.
[7] Anthony Mcgrath, 'Books in Art: The Meaning and Significance of Images of Books in Italian Religious Painting 1250-1400.' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sussex, 2012) <https://sussex.figshare.com/articles/thesis> [accessed 14 August 2024].
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Watts, *How and Why Books Matter*, pp. 7-30; Camplin and Ranauro, *The Art of Reading*, pp 73-106.
[12] McGrath, 'Books in Art'.
[13] Bialostocki, *Bücher der Weisheit und Bücher der Vergänglichkeit,* pp. 1-42.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Camplin and Ranauro, *The Art of Reading*, pp. 71–246.
[17] Smith, 'The Book', pp. 396-410.
[18] Sabine Schwarz, *Das Bücherstilleben in der Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts* (O. Harassowitz, 1987), pp. 3-5.

books.[19] Nevertheless, the new visual meanings adopted by books did not exclude previous religious symbolisms which persisted up until the seventeenth century.[20]

During the seventeenth century, a general shift in the realm of visual arts happened in concurrence with book imagery growing more limited to lay contexts. Indeed, the art of the 1600s is 'humanised', as in it aims at reflecting secular themes and at recording the visual world and its common life.[21] Therefore, lay sceneries and people in non-religious contexts were of growing interest to artists in comparison to previous centuries. With the expansion of subjects in visual arts and the proliferation of books in lay contexts, it is logical that the depiction of books alone or in non-religious uses is more likely to have been captured. However, the symbolism and depiction of books in artworks are always context-related as well, meaning that religious book imagery did not disappear entirely – especially in the Catholic world. The humanisation of art was particularly predominant in non-Catholic contexts – as was the Dutch Republic – where still-life movements further reinforced the image of the book as the symbol of theoretical wisdom.[22] The still life movement (*stilleven* in Dutch) took a strong hold in the Dutch Republic partially due to the widespread presence of Calvinism, while the thriving academic environment fostered by Leiden University established a unique category of book still-life paintings.[23] Typical of this period and style are *vanitas* compositions – collections of objects symbolising the inevitability of death, the transience of earthly achievements and wisdom – in which books symbolise the temporary nature of human minds.[24] As a result, the books depicted in *vanitas* are often destroyed, damaged or fragmentary, perhaps signs of heavy wear and use.[25] At last, the seventeenth century marked a strengthening of the idea of engaging with books for pleasure and what Habermas defines as the 'public sphere'.[26] The full proliferation of books and other printed ephemera in ever-so-popular social clubs such as salons, reading and literary societies though flourished only during the eighteenth century. Likewise, the market for women, children, and the educated audience (e.g. scholarly journals) strengthened as well, albeit it properly flourished in the eighteenth century too.[27]

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[19] Białostocki, *Bücher der Weisheit und Bücher der Vergänglichkeit,* pp. 1-42.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Madlyn Millner Kahr, *Dutch Painting in the Seventeenth Century* (Westview Press, 1993), pp. xi-xiv; Svetlana Alpers, 'With a Sincere Hand and a Faithful Eye: The Craft of Representation', in *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Penguin Books, 1989), p. 72.
[22] Schwarz, *Das Bücherstilleben in der Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts*, pp. 45-62.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Kahr, *Dutch Painting in the Seventeenth Century*, pp. 190-203.
[25] Ibid.
[26] As quoted by Rietje van Vliet, 'Print and Public in Europe 1600-1800', in *A Companion to the History of the Book*, ed. by Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose (Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007), pp. 247-258.
[27] Van Vliet, 'Print and Public in Europe 1600-1800', pp. 247-258.

Why books matter

Having established the multiform symbolisms attached to the book, it is important to underline how the latter is first and foremost a material object whose undeniable materiality implies a chain of physical acts such as holding, browsing, and storing the book which determine our engagement with it as an object. This materiality simultaneously allows the book to be and act as a cultural object. Namely, the book is a tangible externalisation of culture in a form that is perceivable and comprehensible.[28] As the embodiment of such 'shared significance', the book exists in a web of interactions at which centre is agency.[29] That is to say that both material and symbolic qualities of a book are not merely passive, but can influence – and are simultaneously affected by – the actions of those involved in said cultural transactions.[30] Within and beyond its material boundaries, the book thus performs a dual role by carrying and communicating a priori symbolic meanings while affecting these very meanings through interaction.[31] Such ability of books to register, transfer, and construct cultural worlds and meaning is always concurrent. Therefore, the book is never *just* a symbol, *just* a vehicle of meaning, and neither *just* an object. However, the book is always an icon whose value and power are expressed in its physical form, its ritual uses, and its artistic representations.[32]

Arguably, acts of care too ought to be considered as an expression of the book's iconic status since they imply a recognition of its worth in terms of its material and symbolic power. The capacity of a book to be a symbol is thus what allows it to exert its iconic power, and it is through the material features of a book that the latter can be expressed.[33] To a certain extent, the recognition of the book's iconic status makes caring for the book's materiality an integral necessity. Moreover, the act of care inherently involves an interaction which is a meaning-making act by itself since it recognises and reinforces the symbolic value of a book. Notably, meaning is here conveyed and created through the set of bodily postures and motions provoked by the encounter with a book, including handling and motions of caring for the book.[34] However, when considering why and how books are cared for, one cannot forget shifts in market forces since they impact our perception of books as material objects and therefore our appreciation of them. For instance, the proliferation of cheaper books and other printed ephemera impacted the

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[28] Terence E. McDonnell, 'Cultural Objects, Material Culture, and Materiality', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 49 (2023), pp. 195-205, doi:10.1146/annurev-soc-031021-041439.
[29] Ibid; the term 'shared significance' is used by McDonnell in pp. 198-199.
[30] McDonnell, 'Cultural Objects, Material Culture, and Materiality', pp. 195-205.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Watts, *How and Why Books Matter*, pp. 7-30.
[33] Brian Cummings, 'The Book as Symbol', in *The Oxford Companion to the Book*, ed. by Michael F. Suarez and H.R. Woudhuyen (Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 93-96.
[34] Daniel Selcer, 'Introduction', in *Philosophy and the Book: Early Modern Figures of Material Inscription* (Continuum, 2010), p.1-21.

perceived value of books, and therefore both the necessity, the ways, and the extent to which they were taken care of. In unison, each dimension thus has formed the rationale of *why* books matter, and therefore why their care is a logical cultural development. It is these facets of the book, these acts of care towards it, that we focus on in our analysis of books within art.

Historiography

From a scholarly perspective, little has been explored in this crossover of books within art; at least concerning the significance of artworks for contributing to the history of the book. Such significance has been remarked upon by McGrath (2015) who refers to a research methodology proposed by Dürrfeld (2000), according to which pictorial sources must be considered valuable evidence of historical binding techniques.[35] Similarly, the appearance of research databases such as BASIRA (Books as Symbols in Renaissance Art) – which aim at fostering interdisciplinary studies on historical depictions of the book – serve as further evidence to a much neglected, yet advised, approach to the study of book history. Indeed, it was traditional throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to rely on textual materials for the generation of knowledge.[36] Yet, images have proven to be meaningful sources for revealing historical practices, attitudes, and technologies, in particular when textual documents have been scarce or non-existent.[37] Exemplary is the emergence of aforementioned research databases such as BASIRA in which visual materials are treated as a generating source, and which further underline the 'visual turn' claimed by Bedi and Webb (2020).[38] Consequently, the methodological shift implied by the visual turn has led more and more scholars in the humanities to adopt visual approaches to research.[39]

Both Białostocki (1985) and Schwarz (1987) delved into the symbolisms of books in art with respect to different socio-historical periods and with a focus on seventeenth-century Dutch still-life paintings.[40] Schwarz remarks how an independent branch of still life featuring books develops in Leiden, which reinforces the symbolic separation of the book from a purely religious context.[41] A study by Sandler (2022) instead approached the topic of book images by thematically

[35] Anthony Mcgrath, 'Using Religious Art as Pictorial Evidence for Medieval Book History', *Book History*, 18 (2015), pp. 33-47, doi:10.1353/bh.2015.0000.
[36] Ludmilla Jordanova, 'Approaching Visual Materials', in *Research Methods for History*, ed. by Simon Gunn and Lucy Faire (Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 31–48.
[37] Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (Reaktion Books Ltd, 2019), p. 12.
[38] Shailoo Bedi and Jenaya Webb, 'Visual Research Methods: Discovery', in *Visual Research Methods: An Introduction for Library and Information Studies*, ed. by Shailoo Bedi and Jenaya Webb (Facet, 2020), pp. 29–50.
[39] Jordanova, 'Approaching Visual Materials', pp. 31-48.
[40] Bialostocki, *Bücher der Weisheit und Bücher der Vergänglichkeit,* pp. 1-42; Schwarz, *Das Bücherstilleben in der Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts*, p.3-5.
[41] Schwarz, *Das Bücherstilleben in der Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts*, pp. 45-62.

treating the pictorial references to books within Medieval manuscripts.[42] Rather than looking at the book object itself, many other studies have focused on the significance of the reading figure, as did Bollman (2016) in his research on the images of reading women in the visual arts.[43] By studying this intersection, Bollman displays the power of images in revealing silent stories such as that of the reading woman. Similarly, Cusack (2022) studied images of the reading figure in Irish art to disclose the concatenation of historical and cultural signs carried by it.[44]

Despite the established interest in the depicted book by art historians and other academic fields, and despite the recognition that images carry historical signs of value, the discussion on depicted books is rarely with a book historical finality. It is ultimately the aim of this thesis to address this unexplored angle and bring a fresh perspective to how we look at books in paintings. Additionally, the central focus of this thesis is on the book object itself for itself – including its materiality – rather than who is reading or broader symbolisms. The latter are addressed nonetheless, but inform the discussion rather than being its focal point. Moreover, there is incredible potential in working with visual materials when researching aspects lacking substantial written records, such as 'acts of care'. Indeed, aside from a few treatises on the love or enemies of books, fragmentary texts from monastic orders, and collectors' guidelines, early written instructions of use and care are rather scarce. Most importantly, these reference guidelines are institutional or target books of historical value and thus are often in contradiction with the actual uses of a book when its value is considered to be utilitarian. Therefore, this thesis aims to use iconographical sources as an alternative corpus through which we can increase our understanding of historical book care practices. In conclusion, this approach highlights aspects of care which take practical use into consideration while tackling a complex, but much-neglected sphere of book history which is however part of iconographic depictions.

Methods and research

Previous paragraphs have established the symbolic value of books, the necessity of caring for them, and introduced the rationale for using iconographic evidence. This thesis will thus build on existing art historical studies to bring the research on book imagery to an interdisciplinary field which extracts book-historical information – here acts of caring for the book – from iconographic depictions. In particular, the analysis will focus on acts of caring for the book in seventeenth-century paintings due to historical and socio-cultural reasons. Indeed, factors such

[42] Lucy Freeman Sandler, 'Introduction', in *Penned & Painted: The Art and Meaning of Books in Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts* (The British Library, 2022), pp. 6-35.
[43] Stefan Bollmann, *Women Who Read Are Dangerous* (Abbeville Press, 2016), pp. 13-17.
[44] Tricia Cusack, 'Introduction', in *The Reading Figure in Irish Art in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Anthem Press, 2022), p. 1.

as urbanisation, secularisation and political reforms impacted both market forces and the cultural life of Europe.[45] Between the sixteenth and the seventeenth century the book trade grew exponentially across the continent, with the beating heart of its international trade in the Low Countries – first Antwerp and then Amsterdam respectively.[46] Once the book had permeated every sphere of society, it was only a matter of time before private and public libraries were established as well. The emergence of a mass market for books happened in concurrence with the emergence of a mass market for the visual arts in Northern Europe. In the seventeenth century, many artists from Flanders moved to the Dutch Republic and brought with them a tradition of painting (still-life, genre painting, and landscape) which had developed during the previous century.[47] The combination of these two mass markets and a growing interest in depicting the mundane, made the book an even more prominent object of depiction.

Ultimately, these changes make for an interesting scenario in which the care for books surely faced new opportunities and challenges. The newly formed Dutch Republic was also the most urbanised and literary region of the continent during the seventeenth century, and with a prosper trade in both art and books. Therefore, this thesis will analyse and narrate acts of care through the artworks of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, which houses an on-display collection of about 8,000 objects from the Middle Ages onwards – mostly from the Netherlands. Moreover, it seems reasonable to use a selection of artworks from the Rijksmuseum collection because of its core inclusion of art from the Dutch 'Golden Age', which is the focal period of interest. In recapitulation, this thesis will analyse acts of care towards the book in a corpus of seventeenth-century paintings from the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam collection from a book historical perspective. The research question thus states as follows: *How do 'acts of care' towards the book, as depicted in seventeenth-century artworks from the Dutch Republic in the Rijksmuseum, reflect or inform our understanding of historical practices of book care?*

With the following sub-questions:

- How are books handled and stored, and what do these depictions suggest about the methods of care of the time?
- What does the physical condition of the portrayed books tell us about historical attitudes towards their care?
- What do these depictions suggest about the evolving significance of books?

[45] Van Vliet, 'Print and Public in Europe 1600-1800', pp. 247-258.
[46] Paul G. Hoftijzer, 'The Dutch Republic, Centre of the European Book Trade in the 17th Century', *European History Online (EGO)*, 2015, pp. 1–23 <https://www.ieg-ego.eu/hoftijzerp-2015-en> [accessed 16 August 2024].
[47] Filip Vermeylen, 'A Mass Market for the Visual Arts: The Golden Age of Dutch Painting During the Seventeenth Century', in *Global Art Markets: History and Current Trends*, ed. by Iain Robertson, Derrick Chong and Luis U. Afonso (Routledge, 2024), pp. 27-38.

Structure

Following this introduction, chapter one builds on the discussed symbolisms of books in art, necessary for later interpretations of book depictions and their care. The latter will be conceptualised on both a symbolic and material front to introduce questions of why and how books are cared for. The intent is to provide a sound theoretical understanding of 'acts of care' as the grounding premise of this research. The chapter will further discuss the advantages and weaknesses of using pictorial sources as historical evidence while introducing the selection criteria for the corpus of this research, elaborating on the role and presence of books in the Dutch Republic of the seventeenth century. Chapter two opens the analysis chapters with an investigation of protection through concrete actions of care which are divided into the following sub-sections: storing the book, environmental measures, and protective bindings. In continuation, chapter three will look at how books are handled and the reflection of modes of touching on their material conditions. It will do so by taking into consideration the reality of books in the period of relevance, which undoubtedly affected the rationale and circumstances of their care. Moreover, the analysis will use written guidelines of care as a framework of reference while maintaining a critical stance. The fourth chapter further discusses care on an abstracted front by looking at caring for the book as a medium and symbol. It does so by discussing practices of collecting books and *vanitas* still-life paintings. Each chapter is supported by visual material of exemplary evidence. Lastly, the conclusion of this thesis will summarise the main points of discussion, and address potential weaknesses as well as future research directions.

1. Books, their care, and the Dutch Republic

Concepts of Care

In 1473 Richard de Bury published the first edition of *Philobiblion*, a treatise on the love of books in which he claims that any 'zealous follower of truth, of happiness, of wisdom, of science, or even of the faith, must of necessity make himself a Lover of Books'.[48] An individual who loves books and/or engages in the habit of collecting them – such as Richard de Bury – is typically defined as a 'bibliophile'. Yet, what does it truly mean to be a lover of books? Undoubtedly, to love books inherently entails a dimension of care which translates that love into concrete actions with the intention of providing safety or protection. As such, there is an emotional dimension inherent to our interaction with the book which works as a precondition for its care. Such emotional dimension connects to the symbolic one in how we imbue books of transcendent meanings beyond their functional uses. What a book symbolises becomes the reason why we deem it important and the ways we use it to construct our sense of self and the world.[49] Additionally, our relationship with the book was – and still is to a certain extent – incredibly tactile.[50] Indeed, books must be opened and manipulated to divulge contents. These haptic interactions affect not only the object but the person who touches it as well.[51] By extension, natural traces of wear are left on the book which are a testimony of its significance in the lives of its owners and society at large. Furthermore, the rationale of why one touches a book affects how the book is touched and cared for.[52] Therefore, acts of care towards the book are intrinsic to its material development and uses, to its symbolism, and its perceived value.

Albeit definitions of the word 'care' as in providing safety or protection only appear around the fifteenth century, attention to the protection of the book – regardless of the motivations behind it – appeared well before then.[53] Practices of care were both symbolic and practical – see how monasteries preserved texts to assure their future copying or how the time-intensive labour of scribes limited availability, as well as how lavish embellishments turned manuscripts into artefacts at risk of theft. Later technological and cultural developments introduced new solutions and challenges to the care of books, whose significance as objects,

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[48] Richard De Bury, 'Showeth that Books are to be Preferred to Riches and Corporal Pleasures', in *Philobiblion: A Treatise on the Love of Books*, (Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 13-16.
[49] Jessica Pressman, 'How and Now Bookishness', in *Bookishness: Loving Books in a Digital Age* (Columbia University Press, 2020), pp. 25–40.
[50] Henry Sussman, 'Introduction: Around the Book', in *Around the Book: Systems and Literacy* (Fordham University Press, 2011), pp. 1–48.
[51] Kathryn M. Rudy, 'Feeling One's Way Through the Book', in *Touching Parchment: How Medieval Users Rubbed, Handled, and Kissed Their Manuscripts* (Open Book Publishers, 2023), pp. 1-28.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Etymonline, 'Care', <https://www.etymonline.com/word/care> [accessed 25 June 2024].

symbols, and icons though never failed to sustain arguments on *why* they should be taken care of. Indeed, the book often assumes a semi-sacred position which makes its destruction and ruin a crime against the very values of society.[54] What results is that these acts of care are mostly a consequence of our human tendency to vest material objects with transcendent meanings.[55] For instance, it is our emotional response to books which partially prompted collectors throughout centuries, and jointly advocated the survival of the book as a medium for millennia. Most importantly, this transports arguments of care outside the individual sphere of the 'bibliophile' thus making the love of books a communal act. As a result, a network of care is established which concerns itself with the preservation, protection, repair, and reverence of books. This network is constructed of varied demonstrations of care for the book which are embedded in everyone's daily perceptions of and attitudes towards it. Namely, the care for books is not limited to cultural institutions such as libraries and neither to the bibliophile, but rather begins with how each individual handles them, stores them, protects them, and expresses desire to preserve them.

In respect to this thesis, said network is constructed of demonstrations of 'care' which are both physical and symbolic. For example, modes of protection and correct handling demonstrate attention to preserving the physical integrity of the book by protecting it from environmental and/or ideological threats. Simultaneously, care entails demonstrations of appreciation for the book as an object of material and symbolic value. As such, heavy use and signs of wear equally demonstrate care in how the book is not forgotten, but rather well-loved as a valuable object of everyday life. Here the book is cared for through immersive and recurrent engagement. The fundamental notion of care of this thesis is therefore constructed of storage solutions, handling practices, and material features of protection installed within the physicality of the book. Simultaneously, it considers modes of engagement which reveal care for, or use of, the book through its physical condition. Ways of caring for the book are thus multiform and cover a variety of individual and collective initiatives. Of note is how these acts of care – however mundane – cannot be separated from their respective socio-cultural framework since the latter undoubtedly impacts our understanding of the book, and therefore the ways we externalise our care for it.[56] Ultimately, this leads to questions of why, but most importantly, *how* do we care?[57]

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[54] James W. Watts, *How and Why Books Matter: Essays on the Social Function of Iconic Texts* (Equinox Publishing, 2019), pp. 1-6.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Loes Veldpaus and Hanna Szemző, 'Heritage as a matter of care, and conservation as caring for the matter', in *Care and the City. Encounters with Urban Studies*, ed. by Angelika Gabauer et al. (Routledge, 2022), pp. 194-203.
[57] Ibid.

Books in the Dutch Republic

Given that both the depiction of books and their care are dependent on their respective socio-cultural framework, it is necessary to briefly discuss the presence of books in the Dutch Republic. During the seventeenth century, the urban landscape of the Republic grew rapidly, eventually making the area the most urbanised region of Europe.[58] Moreover, the century marks what is commonly referred to as the Dutch 'Golden Age' – a term of which political correctness is currently debated – due to the flourishing of Dutch society in many aspects, including a substantial commercial expansion and the growth of literacy rates.[59] Percentages of literacy were typically lower amongst immigrants, but the Republic's investment in education – within and beyond urban areas – maintained a steady increase in literacy rates.[60] By the end of the century, these efforts made the Dutch Republic the most literate region of the world.[61] Reading and the book therefore became essential to the Dutch way of life, infiltrating every aspect of society.[62] Indeed, the Republic published more books per capita than any other region during the seventeenth century and books were one of the main export goods.[63] Such an optimal market environment was guaranteed by a society mostly tolerant of religious minorities and by a governmental and religious structure with lower levels of censorship.[64] Consequently, printers and booksellers could cater to domestic markets, as well as to foreign ones in which state or religious control was much higher.[65] The international market was mainly supplied by the cities of Amsterdam and Leiden, which dominated it with small-format Latin texts.[66] The domestic trade instead was not centralised to any particular city.[67] Indeed, most areas outside of the urbanised region of Holland had a functional book market of their own.[68] Of course, this ensured stable access to books for broad layers of society in the Dutch Republic, both within urban centres and elsewhere. The success of the Dutch is also credited to their capacity to buy titles and books for the best bargain prices.[69] This aspect supplied the domestic market with the best of European titles throughout the century.[70] For instance, the Elzevier shop in Amsterdam

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[58] Maarten Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), pp. 193-203.
[59] Paul G. Hoftijzer, 'The Dutch Republic, Centre of the European Book Trade in the 17th Century', *European History Online (EGO)*, 2015, pp. 1–23 <https://www.ieg-ego.eu/hoftijzerp-2015-en> [accessed 16 August 2024].
[60] Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century*, pp. 204-218.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Andrew Pettegree and Arthur der Weduwen, *The Bookshop of the World. Making and Trading Books in the Dutch Golden Age* (Yale University Press, 2019), pp. 1–24.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Pettegree and Der Weduwen, *The Bookshop of the World*, pp. 266–93.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Pettegree and Der Weduwen, *The Bookshop of the World*, pp. 266–93.

counted about 8,000 titles for sale, covering both professional disciplines and recreational material in several languages.[71]

Cheap prices, high accessibility, and extensive choice in terms of language and content jointly fostered book collecting among all levels of society. Of note is how to possess a book or multiple ones, was a means to construct and navigate one's social life. Indeed, the construction of a private library – regardless of its size – asserted one's social distinction, especially amongst the lower classes.[72] However, accounts on the extension of these collections are conflicting. According to Pettegree and der Weduwen (2019), a handful of books could be found in most Dutch households and a serious scholarly collection could count up to thousands of titles. Hoftijzer (2015) though noticed how many estate inventories from Leiden do not mention books, or only a handful of them, thus concluding that the presence of books in households is perhaps not as extensive. Nevertheless, Hoftijzer underlines that this does not diminish the presence of a lively book culture, which is testified by the large number of surviving book catalogues. Perhaps, it is because of such wide and cheap accessibility to books that they are not always listed in inventories. Indeed, objects regarded as trivial or with low resell value were mostly excluded from probate inventories.[73] On the whole, though, practices of book collecting were multiform and multi-purpose. For instance, the ownership of certain books was a means to confirm one's religious confession or to demonstrate a dedication to life-long learning and intellectual growth.[74] For the most part, to be surrounded by books was a sign of erudition.[75] This bridges us to the aforementioned symbolisms of books within art since the relevance and significance of books within seventeenth-century Dutch society is reflected in their presence in portraits, genre pieces, and *vanitas* still-life paintings. Having contextualised the role and presence of books in seventeenth-century Dutch society, let us now delve into the analysis of practices of book care within these pictorial sources.

The Rijksmuseum collection

The little consensus – especially in the humanities – on how to employ and successfully integrate visual methods is of no help to the long-lasting scholarly debate on the reliability of pictures as

[71] Pettegree and Der Weduwen, *The Bookshop of the World*, pp. 266–93.
[72] Pettegree and Der Weduwen, *The Bookshop of the World*, pp. 1–24.
[73] Jan Kuuse, 'The Probate Inventory as a Source for Economic and Social History', *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, 22 (1974), pp. 22-31, doi:10.1080/03585522.1974.10407781.
[74] Pettegree and der Weduwen, *The Bookshop of the World*, pp. 1–24.
[75] Ibid.

integral sources to the generation of reliable research data.[76] It is thus important to clarify *how* visual elements should be analysed or *which* details are relevant. In this regard, Gillian Rose has conceptualised a framework on 'sites' according to which one can approach visual material from the site of production, of the image itself, or of its audience.[77] As for this thesis, the site of the image itself is of interest since we are looking at the visual content and composition of the image. Going beyond composition though, what will be analysed is the condition, position and relation of the depicted book(s) and the extent to which these elements reflect acts of care. Drawing from existing art historical research, the analysis will look at the image from a book historical perspective in order to focus on materiality, the circumstances of use and care for the book. Especially if books were not the central subject of a painting, their representation may be accurate and objective to a certain degree. Arguably, such degree of objectivity is given by artists who acted as an eyewitness of a particular point of view at a specific time.[78] According to Bergström, Dutch 'realism' delighted in describing everyday life in detailed and accurate representations.[79] Indeed, Dutch art of the seventeenth century aimed at reflecting ordinary experiences of life and at reinforcing shared beliefs.[80] Nevertheless, this limited tradition and Bergström's approach are challenged by de Jongh (1997) who talks instead of 'seeming' realism – where the material world is recorded in form, but simultaneously abstracted.[81] Hence, life is accurately *re*-made for visual consumption.[82] Such critical distance from objectivity is necessary when discussing representations of books – in particular for still-life compositions which group objects for 'artistic purposes'.[83] Therefore, to assume that an image is a perfect mirror of a historical past is to ignore factors such as visual conventions, and therefore reinforce claims on the non-reliability of visual sources.[84] As Burke (2019) suggests, sources – including visual ones – should always be considered as 'traces' of the past rather than *de facto* evidence.[85] Images are thus complex, mediated by their historical context, their intended audience, and the creator itself.[86] As such, what Rose calls the 'site of production' must, to a certain extent, be taken into account as

[76] Jenaya Webb and Shailoo Bedi, 'A Brief Introduction to Visual Research Methods in Library and Information Studies', in *Visual Research Methods: An Introduction for Library and Information Studies*, ed. by Shailoo Webi and Jenaya Webb (Facet, 2020), pp. 3–28.
[77] As quoted in Webb and Bedi, 'A Brief Introduction to Visual Research Methods in Library and Information Studies', pp. 3-28.
[78] Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (Reaktion Books Ltd, 2019), p. 17.
[79] Ingvar Bergström, *Dutch Still-Life Painting in the Seventeenth Century* (Faber and Faber Limited, 1956), pp. 1-42.
[80] As quoted in Madlyn Millner Kahr, *Dutch Painting in the Seventeenth Century* (Westview Press, 1993), pp. xi-xiv.
[81] Eddy de Jongh, 'Realism and Seeming Realism in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting', in *Looking at Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: Realism Reconsidered*, ed. by Wayne Franits (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 21-56.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Bergström, *Dutch Still-Life Painting in the Seventeenth Century*, pp. 1-42.
[84] Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, p. 16.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Bedi and Webb, 'A Brief Introduction to Visual Research Methods in Library and Information Studies', pp. 3-28.

well. Indeed, we cannot make sense of an image's content without considering broader socio-cultural factors of influence. This analysis therefore positions itself in a set historical context and art historical tradition, which allow to also discover non-symbolic meanings related to the cultural life of material objects.[87] The symbolic meanings though are equally necessary for a well-rounded analysis since the transformation of objects for artistic purposes generates meaning as well.[88] The result is a way of looking which reveals historical utilised functions and associated values, as well as the metaphorical meaning of books. Nevertheless, it is fundamental to the scope of research to remain critical and therefore ground this analysis in critical distance.

Besides focusing on each image individually, a comparative perspective will identify meaningful patterns among the visual data. To approach our analysis as such means to conduct content analysis, albeit in a simplified version since the dataset is not extensive.[89] As mentioned in the introduction, the basic corpus of this thesis is a selection of artworks from the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam collection of seventeenth-century Dutch paintings. By Dutch is hereby intended that the painting was created by an artist in the territory of the Dutch Republic between 1600 and 1700. The artists themselves need not be born in the territory but must share an artistic and socio-cultural influence which informs their choice of subject and style of painting. Indeed, this allows us to contextualise the visual dataset and the external influences which might impact the representation of books, as well as the socio-cultural context in which books are produced, disseminated, and used. The resulting corpus consists of 47 paintings, selected after an in-person visit to the Rijksmuseum in combination with extensive research in the Rijksstudio portal. The latter provides access to a great number of digitised artworks and thus helped filter and view non-exhibited items in the collection. The main criteria for selection were the period, place of creation, and of course, the presence of at least one book. In terms of materiality, the selection limited itself to oil paintings – regardless of their support – and therefore excluded representations of books in prints, watercolours or sculptural works. The choice of paintings is partly a practical choice for a coherent corpus with a shared visual code but is not meant to diminish the potential of other forms of art. At last, there was no criterion for the typology of painting in terms of its genre. This means that genre paintings as well as portraits and *vanitas* compositions are part of the pictorial evidence.

[87] Celeste Brusati, 'Natural Artifice and Material Values', in *Looking at Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: Realism Reconsidered*, ed. by Wayne Franits (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 144-157.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Bedi and Webb, 'A Brief Introduction to Visual Research Methods in Library and Information Studies', pp. 3-28.

2. Images of safekeeping

Taking care of the book entails maintaining its physical longevity and therefore ensuring its long-term preservation. To do so, the book must be protected from damage and risk scenarios. Perhaps the most obvious form of protection one can think of is the book cover – and later the dust-jacket – to which bookbinders and owners partially entrust the protection of the book. Said protection is not only to avoid damage caused by frequent use but also a preventive measure against soiling during transportation and storage.[90] Nevertheless, there are some threats, whether ideological or natural, which sturdy bindings or paper coverings cannot prevent and neither combat. The protection of the book thus implies a much wider variety of acts including proper storage and a system of risk-management techniques. As with other aspects of care, the how and why of protective measures are responsive to their socio-cultural contexts.

Storing the book

Shifts in book collecting and the wider book market brought on the necessity to restructure the architecture of the (home) library and innovate book furniture.[91] Details related to these initiatives of restructuring and innovating are part of caring for books because practices of storing are designed to maintain the physical longevity of a book without denying accessibility to it. Whereas the analysed paintings say little about the actual space in which private libraries were set up, they do provide an interesting source of information on how books were stored. The only pattern of notice regarding space is that organised systems of storage are always represented in controlled spaces such as a study. Alternatively, if the physical space is unidentifiable, the presence of a scholar as a guardian figure automatically repositions the book in an intellectual setting. There is only one instance in which a collection is depicted in an uncontrolled space and that is in *The Married Couple Abraham Casteleyn and Margarieta van Bancken* (1663) by Jan de Bray (fig. 2.1). A curtain partially covers a bookshelf which – if the painting is to be believed as objective – is installed in an outdoor environment. However, many wealthy Mennonite families from the seventeenth century requested that their country estates be depicted in commissioned portraits.[92] Abraham Casteleyn from Haarlem was a Mennonite printer and the glimpse of a garden simply refers back to such art historical conventions. Therefore, the bookshelf was most

[90] Sean Jennett, 'The BookJacket', in *The Making of Books* (Faber and Faber, 1964), pp. 435-452.
[91] Andrew Pettegree and Arthur der Weduwen, *The Library: A Fragile History* (Basic Books, 2021), pp. 135-137.
[92] Nina Schroeder, "'Parks Magnificent as Paradise": Nature and Visual Art among the Mennonites of the Early Modern Dutch Republic', *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 35 (2017), pp. 11–39, <https://jms.uwinnipeg.ca/index.php/jms/article/view/1724> [accessed 20 September 2024].

certainly not installed in such uncontrolled environment which would expose the books to potentially detrimental agents. Such conclusion is further reinforced if we consider that these books were a reference to Abraham's profession and interests, based on which he should have known how to properly care for books.[93]

Fig 2.1. Jan de Bray, *The Married Couple Abraham Casteleyn and Margarieta van Bancken* (1663), oil on canvas, 83cm × 106.5cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

Circling back to ways of storing the book, it was standard practice by the seventeenth century to use conventional bookshelves and the wall system in private collections.[94] Accordingly, the analysed paintings show that books are stored, when so, on open bookshelves. There is no trace of the Medieval *armarium,* of lecterns and neither of chests. The structured bookshelf – resembling the standard one we can find in most houses nowadays – is featured in most depicted private studies. The structure and size of these bookshelves though may differ, as we can observe in the painting *Young Man in a Study* (1640-1650) by Adriaen van Gaesbeeck (fig. 2.2) where the depicted collection is fitting on two small shelves anchored to the wall. Petroski (1999) remarks that wall-anchored shelves were better suited for frequent consultation.[95] This hypothesis is very likely due to the joint representation with open books laying around the room, from the table to the lectern stand, and even the floor. There are three other cases in which the depicted books are stored, but where the structured bookshelf is replaced by a single shelf. In *Tobit and Anna with the Kid* (1626) by Rembrandt van Rijn, the shelf is located in the nook of a kitchen and the book appears as a mere prop to the scene. Considering how the book was a practical object as well, this painting demonstrates that the storage of books was not always

[93] Schroeder, "'Parks Magnificent as Paradise'", pp. 11–39.
[94] Henry Petroski, *The Book on the Bookshelf* (Vintage Books, 1999), pp. 129-145.
[95] Petroski, *The Book on the Bookshelf*, pp. 100-128.

limited to appropriate and/or controlled spaces. There are instances in which accessibility seems prioritised, even if the environment is potentially detrimental to the physicality of the book. Similarly, the scattered books in *Young Man in a Study* further prove the prioritisation of accessibility and consultation. Many other paintings as well depict stacks of books on tables, stools or the floor. Albeit this aspect reflects ways of using rather than their place of permanent storage, it highlights the reality of a book and the paradoxes inherent to their protection when their utilitarian value overrides other ones. As such, we can deduct that the most frequently used books might have not had a permanent place of storage at all.[96]

FIG 2.2. Adriaen van Gaesbeeck, *Young Man in a Study* (1640-1650), oil on panel, 100cm × 76cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain

In addition to the physical space and furniture on/in which the book is stored, caring for the book relates to how the books were essentially fitted on the (book)shelves. Indeed, there are ways of fitting the book which are more suitable to its care while still welcoming bigger collections and balancing a need for accessibility. For instance, storing books in a vertical position makes room for more volumes on the shelf while minimising removal efforts.[97] The majority of pictorial evidence featuring a bookshelf/anchored shelf depicts books fitted vertically, except for the following paintings: *Vanitas Still-Life* (1660-1665) by Aelbert Jansz van der Schoor, Rembrandt's *Tibit and Anna with the Kid*, and *A Scholar in his Study* (1642-1672) by Willem de Poorter (fig. 2.3). The latter painting is in fact a perfect example of the transitory period that was the seventeenth century in terms of storing books with spines facing inward or outward.[98] Indeed, this period marks a mixture of display

FIG 2.3. Willem de Poorter (attributed to), *A Scholar in his Study* (c. 1642 – c. 1650), oil on panel, 41.1cm × 34.2cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

[96] Pettegree and der Weduwen, *The Library*, pp. 135-137.
[97] Petroski, *The Book on the Bookshelf*, pp. 74-99.
[98] Ibid.

attitudes even within the same bookshelf, as seen in the scholar's system of organisation. One of the main reasons for which books were shelved with fore-edges out was so that chains would not damage the front cover.[99] Given that private libraries typically did not require such strict security measures, this practice was perhaps mostly acquired through imitation or out of habit. Since minimising contact with humidity is vital to the materiality of the book, exposing the fore-edge might simultaneously prevent the dampness from walls from transferring onto the pages. Another point of interest in this painting is the absence of books in the lowest compartment of the bookshelf. At first, this seems to prevent water-induced damage, which extends to leakages or floods due to heavy rainfall. What appear to be stairs on the bottom right of the painting though, suggest that the study is located on the upper floors of the building, thus minimising the risk of floods. Alternatively, the books might have been removed to protect them from ground dirt. Indeed, another observation concerning *Portrait of a Collector* (1665) by van Ostade (fig. 2.4) showcases how books shelved at the bottom are fitted with the spine out to protect the fore-edges from kicks and ground dirt.[100]

FIG 2.4. Adriaen van Ostade, cut-out from *Portrait of a Collector* (c. 1665), oil on canvas, 20cm × 17.8cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

Environmental measures

Besides water-induced factors, the natural deterioration of the physical book is induced by exposure to fire, light, dust, and bookworms. Awareness of fire hazards caused most libraries to be built – when possible – with enough interval from adjacent buildings to avoid the risk of neighbouring fires.[101] Similarly, candles were not permitted into libraries at all times, and a general admonition to keep books away from fire was well-known.[102] That is because heat can cause the cords in the spine to shrink and potentially damage the entire construction of the book.[103] Nevertheless, these are protective measures mostly taken at an institutional level, which does not guarantee their application in private settings. For instance, four paintings – two of

[99] Petroski, *The Book on the Bookshelf*, pp. 74-99.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Petroski, *The Book on the Bookshelf*, pp. 55-73.
[102] Pettegree and der Weduwen, *The Library*, pp. 29-51; Thijs Porck and Henk Porck, 'Eight Guidelines on Book Preservation from 1527', *Journal of Paper Conservation*, 13 (2012), pp. 17-25.
[103] Porck and Porck, 'Eight Guidelines on Book Preservation from 1527', pp. 17-25.

which *vanitas* – depict books in proximity to fire sources. As for the *vanitas* paintings, the juxtaposition with a burning candle is not to be considered as careless or detrimental with intention because the candle is merely another symbolic element of the still-life movement. On the other hand, how should one interpret the candles and the unlit fireplace in *The Night School* (c. 1660 – c. 1665) by Gerard Dou and *The Sampling Officials of the Amsterdam Drapers' Guild, known as 'The Syndics'* (1662) by Rembrandt van Rijn, respectively? Firstly, both depicted rooms are neither libraries nor private studies, meaning that the exposure to heat is presumably not perpetual. Moreover, the activities of *The Night School* take place – as the name suggests – at nightfall and cannot rely on any natural source of light. The events of the scene therefore justify the juxtaposition of books with sources of heat while commenting on how fire exposure was most likely not an uncommon occurrence.

If fire was to be avoided, most libraries depended on windows as a source of light.[104] Nevertheless, prolonged exposure to light can be detrimental to the physical integrity of a book because direct sunlight can cause spines to fade.[105] As a result, the position of windows impacted the configuration of furniture and the storing of books.[106] To store books with the spine inward – as previously shown – might have been a protective measure from light, especially if no other solution was applied. Alternatively, protective window shades or curtains were attached to bookshelves.[107] Indeed, the paintings featuring a bookshelf all depict a half-drawn protective curtain, except for *A Scholar in his Study*. In another portrait of a scholar (*An Old Scholar*, 1645-1672) by Karel van der Pluym, the curtain is not attached to any type of shelving storage but seems to have a protective function nonetheless. Indeed, it separates a few books stacked on a tabletop from the scholar's working environment. Of note is that curtains were a typical motif in Dutch paintings from the middle of the seventeenth century.[108] However, these motif curtains differed from those attached to bookshelves in their illusionistic function for a theatrical reveal.[109] They are inevitably part of the painting, but they do not belong to the captured scene/subject because they simply function as a theatrical tool. An example of this type of curtain appears in *Man Smoking a Pipe* (c. 1650) by Gerard Dou (fig. 2.5), which is part of our research database. Here the curtain is clearly external to the actual events of the scene by framing it, and is part of the art historical tradition of the time. In contrast, the curtain in *Young Man in a*

[104] John W. Clark, *The Care of Books* (Cambridge University Press, 1901), pp. 131- 170.
[105] Petroski, *The Book on the Bookshelf*, pp. 215-231.
[106] Petroski, *The Book on the Bookshelf*, pp. 100-128.
[107] Petroski, *The Book on the Bookshelf*, pp. 215-231.
[108] Robert Fucci, 'Parrhasius and the Art of Display: The Illusionistic Curtain in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting', *Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art*, 65 (2015), pp. 144–75, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43884383> [accessed 15 October 2024].
[109] Ibid.

Study (fig. 2.2) is clearly limited to its protective functionality. The little written and pictorial sources on the use of curtains for bookshelves allow us to conclude a protective function even in ambiguous depictions such as *Portrait of Johannes Hudde* (1686) by Michiel van Musscher (fig. 2.6). Indeed, the heavy drapery seems highly unpractical for mere protection, but its placement in revealing the bookshelf suggests that a different curtain might have been in use. Moreover, these illusionistic curtains appear to resemble protective ones used to shield paintings from light and dust both in terms of materiality and colour.[110] Therefore, despite the theatrical and decorative function that their depiction takes on, the use of curtains for protective functions was widespread among collectors of different kinds.

Fig 2.5. Gerard Dou, *Man Smoking a Pipe* (c. 1650), oil on panel, 48cm × 37cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

The shift from chests and *armaria* to bookshelves heightened the exposure of books to dust as well. The accumulation of dust is detrimental to the book because it increases the risk of insects (e.g. bookworms) while damaging the edges and binding of a book.[111] Referring back to *A Scholar in his Study,* this is the only painting featuring what seems to be a duster on the upper shelf (fig. 2.7). Whereas its presence is in contrast with the poor material conditions of many shelved books, it does suggest the scholar's awareness of the importance of keeping books free from dust and dirt. Perhaps the visible binding deterioration could be interpreted as an admonition to a lack of care. Alternatively, it

Fig 2.6. Michiel van Musscher, *Portrait of Johannes Hudde* (1686), oil on canvas, 57cm × 49cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

[110] Fucci, 'Parrhasius and the Art of Display', pp. 144–75.
[111] Porck and Porck, 'Eight Guidelines on Book Preservation from 1527', pp.17-25.

might refer to *vanitas* visual codes which we will delve deeper into in chapter four. The previously mentioned curtain was most likely effective in protecting books from dust as well. However, the lack of information we can derive from these paintings on the location of these 'library' rooms, the dustiness of the space and the book itself cannot provide us with further insight.

FIG 2.7. Willem de Poorter (attributed to), cut-out from *A Scholar in his Study* (c. 1642 – c. 1650), oil on panel, 41.1cm × 34.2cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

Protective bindings

De Bury's aforementioned *Philobiblion* and other Medieval evidence suggest an awareness of natural degradation already during the construction phase of a book.[112] The very history of bookbinding shows the development of techniques that contribute to the book's sturdiness with the intention of protection.[113] At first, sturdiness was essential to the durability of the book because manuscript production was long and labour-intensive. The wide availability of texts at cheap prices was mostly unattainable, and well-constructed bindings were economically advantageous investments to protect one's volumes.[114] See for instance how bindings were sometimes given secondary overlapping covers (of animal skin or silk) in protection of the book block.[115] The covers themselves were further protected by metal, wood or bone bosses.[116] Clasps were then added to ensure that parchment leaves, which are highly reactive to humidity, could

[112] Porck and Porck, 'Eight Guidelines on Book Preservation from 1527', pp.17-25.
[113] Harold W. Tribolet, 'Binding Practice as Related to the Preservation of Books', *The Library Quarterly*, 40 (1970), pp. 128-137, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4309898> [accessed 24 September 2024].
[114] Nicholas Pickwoad, 'Bookbinding', in *A Companion to the History of the Book*, ed. by Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose (Wiley, 2019), pp. 111–27.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid.

remain flat and under control.[117] Different combinations of these various elements of protection are visible in the majority of the studied paintings. The most common element is a sort of binding overhanging the edge – alternatively called extended cover or turned edge – which extends over the leaves to protect the book block's fore-edge (fig. 2.8). Besides the multitude of nomenclature of this binding style, there is little known of its actual functionality. A probability of course concerns the protection of the fore-edge which was exposed to light, dust and dirt when facing outward. Alternatively, if the fore-edge faced inward, this overhanging cover could create an extra layer of separation between the book and the wall of the bookshelf. This as well is an act of care because bookshelves should always have good air circulation to avoid dampness.[118] As for other binding-related elements, the paintings depict several books with textile fastening laces and metal clasps. As mentioned, both were ideal for preventing parchment leaves from fanning out. By the seventeenth century though, books were predominantly made of paper which is less reactive to humidity and thus does not require clasps per se. However, paper is not completely resistant to humidity, especially when shelving is loose and vertical.[119] Indeed, the pressure of thick wooden boards helped both clasped and unclasped books retain their flat form when stored horizontally.[120] Since fastenings of any kind became non-essential through the introduction of paper, their addition was a luxury added upon request.[121] Indeed, it must be noted that booksellers in the seventeenth century predominantly stacked books in loose gatherings meant to be subsequently custom-bound by the buyer.[122] In comparison to earlier traditions then, these protective elements are specific to the individual customer. As such, the responsibility (and the extent) of protection was partially dependent on their desires and economic capacity.

FIG 2.8. Hendrick ten Oever, cut-out from *Portrait of Barend Hakvoort* (1680), oil on canvas, 65.5cm × 55.5cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

[117] Pickwoad, 'Bookbinding', pp. 111–27.
[118] Douglas Cockerell, 'Injurious Influences to which Books are Subjected', in *Bookbinding and the Care of Books*, ed. by W.R. Lethaby (D. Appleton and Company, 1910), https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/26672/ [accessed 30 September 2024].
[119] Petroski, *The Book on the Bookshelf*, pp. 146-166.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.

Unfortunately, it is highly unlikely we are able to distinguish whether a book is made of parchment or paper from paintings unless there are binding elements which can date the depicted book. Nevertheless, a cross-analysis of our data source has highlighted how open clasps, or the absence thereof, typically lead to wavy folios which can be related to moisture absorption. For instance, in *Musical Company* (1626) by Rembrandt van Rijn, the book held by the woman and those stacked vertically in the bottom right do not feature any kind of fastenings, which leads the pages to curve and fan out. The absence of metal clasps on the book held by the woman particularly stands out because of a recurring metal clasps-corner piece pattern, which is here not followed. Similarly, the small booklet on the right with untied laces in *Vanitas Still Life* (1658-1697) by Gerrit van Vlucht (fig. 2.9) fans out with a prominent wavy first folio. Similar details are to be found in *Vanitas Still Life with Books* (1633) (fig. 2.10). Most of these cases include still-life paintings which are known for portraying brittle books. Most importantly, these intersections further underline a contemporary awareness of how improper care for the book shapes its physical form. How else could the painter know how improper storage, exposure to moisture, and open clasps affect the book? Besides being a sign of moisture absorption, the waviness of pages could very much be consequence of heavy wear, especially if the book is of practical nature. In both *Musical Company* and the anonymous *Vanitas*, some of the depicted books are music books and partbooks, which are a sub-category of the former. Partbooks are recognisable by their oblong format and floppiness which is practical for easier reading and for keeping them open for prolonged periods.[123] The flimsiness of most music books is connected to their ephemeral nature as printed products of a lively

Fig 2.9. Gerrit van Vucht, cut-out from *Vanitas Still Life* (1658-1697), oil on panel, 9.3cm × 12cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

Fig 2.10. Anonymous, *Vanitas Still Life with Books* (1633), panel, 73.5cm × 70cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

[123] Kate van Orden, *Materialities: Books, Readers, and the Chanson in Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 3–38.

urban music culture where songbooks – among almanacs, newspapers, and chapbooks – were sold on the street.[124] The very ephemeral and practical nature of these books implies an approach to care based on heavy interaction rather than material long-term care. For instance, partbooks were typically not bound – together or by themselves – because separated booklets allowed musicians to hold their individual parts while playing in a comfortable arrangement.[125] Despite the large production of songbooks, only a limited number of them survive; either because of their weak structure or because they were discarded as ephemeral printed matter.[126] What *Musical Company* (fig. 2.11) also highlights is the existence of various types of music books which targeted and circulated in different markets. Luxurious copies (such as that held by the woman) helped the survival of music books because the proper binding protected their physical form. Additionally, a bound book was more valuable on the market than loose prints.

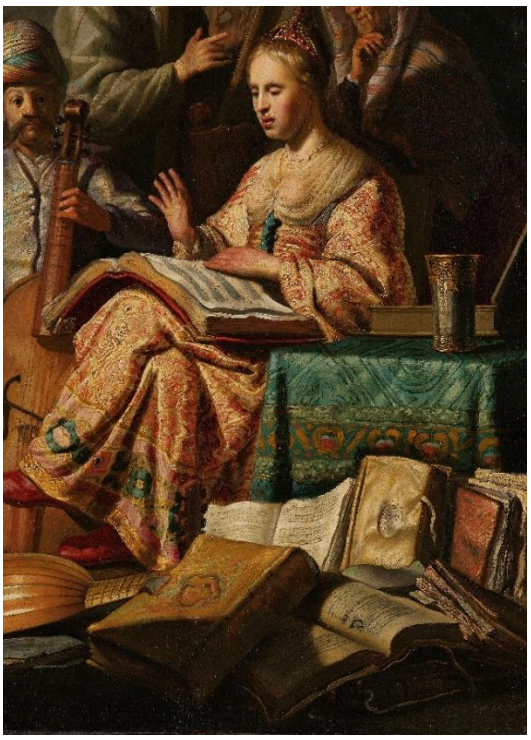

FIG 2.11. Rembrandt van Rijn, cut-out from *Musical Company* (1626), oil on panel, 63.5cm × 48cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

In the late Middle Ages, limp cover bindings were added to books of lesser value in order to withstand hard daily use.[127] As can be observed in both *Vanitas Still Life* by N.L. Peschier and Edwaert Colliert respectively, this extended to songbooks as well (fig. 2.12; 2.1). These limp bindings proved functional and were adopted to protect the integrity of books during transportation as well.[128] Such inexpensive limp covers were lightweight and similar to weaker bindings introduced after the advent of print.[129] Indeed, the wider availability of books to a bigger audience impacted the art of bookbinding which could not keep up with the fast-paced requirements of increasing demand. Bookbinders therefore embraced shortcuts and unexperienced workers, compromising on the long-term durability of their bindings with a general decrease in sturdiness and quality.[130] Moreover, to have a book bound was costly, and not

[124] Michael Harris, 'Printed Ephemera', in *The Book: A Global History*, ed. by Michael F. Suarez and H.R. Woudhuyen (Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 208–19.
[125] Van Orden, *Materialities*, pp. 3-38.
[126] Van Orden, *Materialities*, pp. 39–66.
[127] Pickwoad, 'Bookbinding', pp. 111-127.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Tribolet, 'Binding Practice as Related to the Preservation of Books', pp. 128-137.
[130] Pickwoad, 'Bookbinding', pp. 111-127.

affordable to all customers in the market. As a consequence, bookshops started stocking some pre-bounded cheap books which were made to look expensive despite their lower quality.[131] What results is that the structure of books turned weaker and more subject to decay, with increasing possibilities to simply replace rather than repair the book. This is reflected as well in the general lack of repairing acts recorded in the analysed paintings. The exception though is *A Scholar in his Study*, which juxtaposes the figure of the scholar to a scenario in which books are both neatly stored away and carelessly scattered around. A closer look at the desk though reveals some loose folios and what appear to be bookbinding needles (fig. 2.14). The latter are laid on the edge of the desk and are recognisable by their curved shape optimal for thicker fabrics and repair. If we take into consideration previous remarks on how the scholar stores and protects his books from harm, he could be in the process of repairing his collection. On one hand, this shows how those with means and intellectual motivations might have taken upon repair themselves in the comfort of their own home. Alternatively, the *vanitas* elements and the tired scholar could symbolise the vanity of engaging in repair since all earthly things eventually perish.

Lastly, there seems to be a connection between the binding structure and the level of damage depicted. In *A Scholar in his Study* (fig. 2.2) for instance, as well as in *Philosopher in his Study* (1645) by Jacob van Spreeuwen (fig. 2.15), the weaker spine support of limp bindings and the lack of hardboards is

Fig 2.13. Edwaert Collier, cut-out from *Vanitas Still Life* (1662), oil on canvas, 102.5cm × 132cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

Fig 2.12. N.L. Peschier, cut-out from *Vanitas still life* (1660), oil on canvas, 57cm × 70cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

Fig 2.14. Willem de Poorter (attributed to), cut-out from *A Scholar in his Study* (c. 1642 – c. 1650), oil on panel, 41.1cm × 34.2cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

Fig 2.15. Jacob van Spreeuwen, cut-out from *Philosopher in his Study* (1645), oil on panel, 34.6cm × 32.3cm, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam © Public Domain.

[131] Howard Nixon as quoted in Tanitha Gangel, 'The Experience of the Book: the Interior of Bookshops in the Netherlands through the Years' (unpublished master thesis, Leiden University, 2015) <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/35590> [accessed 30 September 2024].

straining to the spine chords. This leads pages to rip apart. Moreover, the edges become more exposed to tear and damage as can be seen by the multitude of rips and folds. Limp bindings must have been more difficult to properly store as well due to the lack of structure. In *vanitas* too, comparisons among and within paintings which depict limp and/or hardcover bindings underline the fragility of the former and reflect it in their material condition. What results from the popularity of limp bindings – amongst scholarly collections too – is that cheaper and weaker bindings are part of a bigger shift in the history of the book, one where the book takes on a variety of symbolisms and purposes in just as many varying circumstances. The paintings narrate such expansion of the reality of the book, including a change in value and priorities which does not always contribute to its long-term survival as a material object.

Summary

This chapter provided an insightful discussion of ways of protecting books from damaging elements such as water, dust, light, fire, and even carelessness. The analysis first highlighted the importance of a correct and practical shelving system design which can safely house books while addressing the need for accessibility to them. In the seventeenth century, the most effective design seemed to be the open bookshelf. How bookshelves were filled with books and their placement within a room and/or building were also meant to provide books with a safe place while allowing consultation. Practices of placing books with spines inward have highlighted attention to deteriorating agents such as light and humidity, as well as how certain measures were mainly institutional, but mirrored in private settings regardless. Even the singular individual thus attempted to shield books from deteriorating agents as much as possible (e.g. curtain). Such attention to the physical integrity of the book is reflected in binding structures as well. Indeed, the analysis showed a variety of techniques which were intended to counteract the natural degradation of the book's materiality and to protect it from careless handling. Clasps for instance were first integrated into the structure of books to maintain the flatness of parchment, but were still added upon request after the introduction of paper. Sturdy structures and elements of protection though were not integral to all book typologies. The comparison between categories of books and their bindings highlighted the proliferation of less sturdy books onto the market, and how the very nature of a book affected its long-term material survival. Lastly, there is always a certain degree of exposure which is unavoidable because books were meant to be consulted and manipulated.

3. Images of Interaction

The aforementioned protective measures attempt to tackle potential threats and ensure the material longevity of the book through strategic storage, environmental control, and protective cases or sleeves. However, one of the simplest and perhaps most effective ways of protecting books is to regulate their handling. Indeed, to care for a book also means to handle it correctly and ensure its material integrity at best. That is because, as an expression of the book's cultural and iconic status, the materiality of the book is necessary for the maintenance of its symbolic significance. In the moment of its secularisation though, the book's cultural status partially rests upon its intensive use. Indeed, the book is not an object of divine worship, but rather a professional tool, a source of knowledge to be consulted, a source of entertainment (e.g. songbooks) and even of self-care. Therefore, discussions of acts of care towards the book in the seventeenth century must include guidelines and measures which consider such intensive use. By extension, those very signs of wear and tear caused by it must be considered as traces of care as well. On a symbolic dimension, they reinforce and represent deep engagement with the book and – paradoxically so – respect for its role and purpose in a close-knit relationship that is both physical and intellectual. Indeed, to entirely prohibit access and engagement with books with the purpose of preserving their material integrity would have been self-destructive and pointless since it would have stripped the book of the role and symbolisms which sustained its very resilience as a medium.

Touching the book

To touch books with clean hands has always been a priority among guardians of the book. See for instance an entry by a medieval monk claiming that '[…] washing one's hands counters the trouble to begin with […]'.[132] Centuries later, the appropriateness of handling books with clean hands was remarked upon as well by Greenfield in her 1988 guide titled *The Care of Fine Books*. Modes of handling the book are not only informed by a desire to protect the book's material form but by the symbolism attached to it as well. For instance, in the early Middle Ages, many regulations dictated how scriptures should be handled, including ritual purity before touching.[133] As such, it was common to cover one's hands with cloth when touching a book (e.g. tunic

[132] Dora Thornton, *The Scholar in His Study: Ownership and Experience in Renaissance Italy* (Yale University Press, 1997), p. 133.
[133] James W. Watts, *How and Why Books Matter: Essays on the Social Function of Iconic Texts* (Equinox Publishing, 2019), pp. 7-30.

sleeves or handkerchiefs) as a gesture of reverence towards the Holy.[134] Once the book is stripped of its holiness as the embodiment of the Word, such necessity supposedly diminishes. To a certain extent though, the book retains an aura of symbolic 'holiness' in the Dutch Republic as the ultimate source of human knowledge, and for the most part separately from the religious sphere. Yet, this does not refer to all book typologies and modes of engaging present in the seventeenth century – as previously exemplified with songbooks. Indeed, printed ephemera and accounting booklets were primarily utilitarian/for leisure and devoid of such holiness. These sorts of books were not valued as much in the long-term and their material care was disregarded in favour of frequent engagement. It seems then, that the book's partial/total loss of holiness mainly caused the disappearance of covering one's hands with cloth in day-to-day settings. At least, it definitely removed the painter's interest in portraying such cloth coverings as a way of underlining the religious value of books. In respect to the pictorial evidence of this thesis, the sole exception is *The Hunter's Present* (c. 1658- c.1661) by Gabriël Metsu (fig. 3.1) which portrays what appears to be a continuation of this practice. The lady's hand seems to be either reaching for the book or pushing it away upon the hunter's arrival. At the same time, she might be creating a physical barrier between the book and the nearby dog to prevent any damage. Most importantly, there is a pillow resting on the lady's lap and a white handkerchief, which is presumed to wrap around the book as a form of protection. Indeed, there are no other elements in the painting which suggest an alternative function to the handkerchief, and neither is she portrayed embroidering. The forward-leaning body language with which she pushes herself and the book away from the hunter's present freeze in paint a picture of regard for the clean state of her book. The small size and

FIG 3.1. Gabriël Metsu, *The Hunter's Present* (c. 1658 – c. 1661), oil on canvas, 51cm × 48cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

[134] Lucy Freeman Sandler, 'Introduction', in *Penned & Painted: The Art and Meaning of Books in Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts* (The British Library, 2022), pp. 6-35.

portability of the latter most likely make it a book of hours, which for centuries was among the most popular books to be commissioned and sold.[135] The book of hours was central for private and reflective devotional practice and was particularly prised by women.[136] As a possession of great value to be passed down generations, great care was usually taken of it – hence the handkerchief. Furthermore, the book is resting on a pillow, which prevents overweighting the spine.[137] Of note is that the disappearance of cloth coverings is related to shifts in the market and availability of books as well. The increasing quantity of circulating books and target markets reduced exclusiveness and rarity. The more accessible and less expensive books became, the more people were bound to grow careless, especially if books were not imbued with higher meanings/values. In contrast to when scriptures symbolised the word of God – when many were stored in a treasury or embellished by treasure bindings – the small number of available pre-bound books or their plainness might have diminished the need for protective cloths due to the lack of rich ornamentation.[138]

There are a few instances in which the portrayed figures wear/hold gloves. These however do not seem to be related to the book. Indeed, the overall attire worn by the individuals (e.g. hat and coat) suggests that these are gloves intended to protect one's hands from dirt and cold weather. To a certain extent, this could be an act of care because the removal of gloves – when worn as part of everyday attire – in proximity to the book could signify an environmental shift from outside to inside and attention to the decorum required. The naked hand is in this case much cleaner and adapt to handling the book with care, also because of the higher sensitivity of bare touch. The absence of protective cloths in the analysed paintings thus does not necessarily equal a lack of care because touching something with one's bare hands eliminates the boundaries between the two bodies. By creating direct contact with the book, the tracing finger becomes simultaneously an extension of one's body and of the book itself, demonstrating a desire to be closer to the book because fascinating or valuable to the reader as an object. As the two unite through bodily contact, a connection is formed between the book's content, the book object and our bodily reception of both which reveals different modes of reading and attitudes towards the book. For instance, to leaf through a book gently means taking care of the book and one's mind by immersing oneself in a reading experience that is exploratory and meditative.

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[135] Virginia Reinburg, "'For the Use of Women": Women and Books of Hours', *Early Modern Women*, 4 (2009), pp. 235-240.
[136] Ibid.
[137] John W. Clark, *The Care of Books* (Cambridge University Press, 1901), pp. 76-77.
[138] Anthony Mcgrath, 'Books in Art: The Meaning and Significance of Images of Books in Italian Religious Painting 1250-1400.' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sussex, 2012) <https://sussex.figshare.com/articles/thesis> [accessed 14 August 2024].

Similarly, such gentleness expresses a level of respect which reflects admiration and worship of the book object itself. Touch therefore has a symbolic weight which must be taken into consideration when analysing how and why books are taken care of. The gentle touch captured in three portraits of reading old women by Gerard Dou, Rembrandt, and Jan Lievens displays slightly different levels of care towards the book. Indeed, the body of all three women is leaning closely towards the book, which is cradled gently in a seemingly caring embrace. In Dou's portrait, the book's spine is properly supported by her hidden hand. This is evident when observing the book's pages which do not weight downwards as they do in Rembrandt's portrait. Moreover, the lady's finger is hooked in between the cover and the first folio, thus giving extra support. In Lieven's portrait too (fig. 3.2), the book is well supported with both hands. This ensures that the binding joints are not being stretched. In both cases, the books do not present serious damage such as broken spines, torn pages, visible smudges or frail bindings. The only minor signs of deterioration are curled corners and edges, which however are exposed and interactive zones. As such, they are more likely to be ripped, soiled, or display some (light) wear.

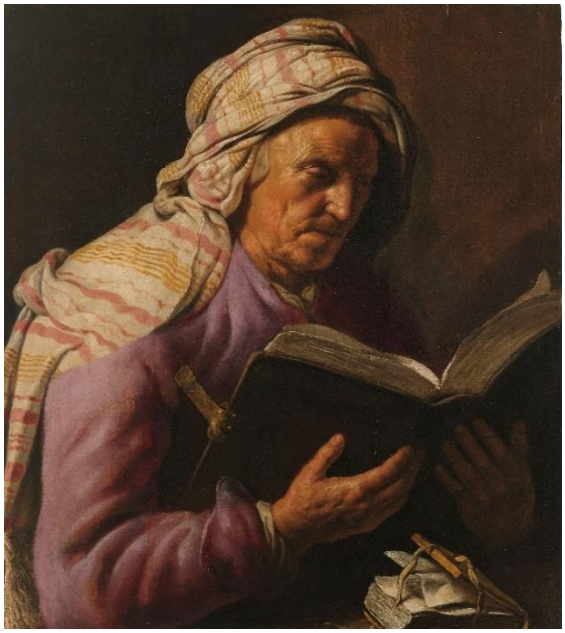

FIG 3.2. Jan Lievens, *Old Woman Reading* (1626-1633), oil on panel, 78cm × 68cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

FIG 3.3. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Old Woman Reading, probably the Prophetess Anna* (1631), oil on panel, 60cm × 48cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

In Rembrandt's painting (fig. 3.3) instead the spine is not supported as well, although it is partially resting on the woman's knees. The lack of proper support is causing the book to curve and deform its overall shape. Nevertheless, the open hand on the page fondly brings the book closer to the woman's body, indicating attentive engagement with the content. Alternatively, the positioning of the woman's hand could be a way of tracing words and facilitating reading. In this

instance, the poor condition of the book is inherent to a mode and level of reading which is reflected in its worn-out interactive zones. Such circumstances are visible in *Old Woman Meditating* by Gabriël Metsu as well – from curled corners to torn pages, and the lack of proper support (fig. 3.4). If fingers are used to mark the page – as in Dou and Metsu's portraits – signs of wear and tear are inherent to discontinuous ways of reading which were firmly established by the seventeenth century and are an element of 'handling the book'.

FIG 3.4. Gabriël Metsu, *Old Woman Meditating* (c. 1661-c. 1633), oil on panel, 27.3cm × 23.2cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

To briefly recap, portrayals of touching and holding the book can reveal the role and significance of books in the broader socio-historical context because ways of touching entail a symbolic dimension. For example, whether contact with one's bare hands is direct or not can reflect a certain attitude towards books. By extension, this reveals modalities and levels of care as well as the changing interpretations of it connected to broader contextual shifts. For instance, the majority of saints in thirteenth-century paintings hold the book while gesturing towards the viewer with a hand help up in a gesture named *adlocutio*.[139] The position of the hands in relation to the book suggests the saint's role in preaching the Word, his relationship to the divine, and his use of books as source.[140] Interestingly, the painting *Musical Company* by Rembrandt (fig. 3.5) seems to mirror the *adlocutio* gesture of saints in a new secular setting. Rather than showing the raised hand to the viewer, the woman holds it towards an invisible audience or perhaps towards her fellow musicians. The book is laid open on her knees with her other hand gently resting at the bottom to keep the pages in place. In combination with the stack of books surrounding the group, the composition at first hints towards the book's role as a source of inspiration and musical knowledge. As such, this composition would reminisce the medieval *adlocutio* tradition

[139] McGrath, ‚'Books in Art', pp. 16-17.
[140] Ibid.

and reinforce its message to both the silent audience and us as intended viewers of the painting. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore how the painting depicts a musical company and neither the reality of music and songbooks in the seventeenth century. The captured scene shows the woman holding a single bound music book to be shared, rather than separated partbooks, meaning that the raised hand could simply be a way of measuring music for her companions. Modes of handling the book are therefore not exclusive to modes of engagement, but also to purpose and type of books which ties into the symbolic, cultural, and monetary values associated with the book(s) in question. What results is that careless handling, improper storage, and the subsequent material deterioration of the book are not always intentional per se, but related to broader socio-cultural attitudes which divide books from Books with capital B.

Fig 3.5. Rembrandt van Rijn, cut-out from *Musical Company* (1626), oil on panel, 63.5cm × 48cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

Handling the book

Having already established some appropriate behaviour when touching books, it is equally important to not force books into 'doing' anything.[141] Hence, the structure of the book should not be weighted on and neither forced into unnatural positions. As William Blades wrote in *The Enemies of Books* – first published in 1880 – books ought to be treated as kin, hence with the uttermost care. Moreover, attention should be paid to books during transportation and consultation, when most damage occurs.[142] To leave a book open for a long time is strongly discouraged as well because it exposes it to unexpected accidents.[143] For example, a book open in proximity of liquids (e.g. ink, paint, wine etc.) heightens the possibility of accidental spills which will leave traces on the pages. Such would be the case in circumstances similar to those depicted in *Portrait of Hadriaan Beverland with a prostitute* (c. 1676) by Ary de Vois or in *The Doctor* (1650-1669) by Jan Adriaensz van Staveren. Whereas one expects a general admonition against liquids

[141] Jane Greenfield, 'The Handling of Books', in *The Care of Fine Books* (Skyhorse Publishing, 2014), pp. 81-124.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Thijs Porck and Henk Porck, 'Eight Guidelines on Book Preservation from 1527', *Journal of Paper Conservation*, 13 (2012), pp. 17-25.

to be present – such as that against fire – a full non-exposure rule to liquids was realistically unattainable due to the very practical and contextual use of books. Another consequence of leaving books open without support for prolonged time is the strain on the chords' tension.[144] As previously seen in Rembrandt's portrait of a reading old woman, no or little support to the spine affects the structure of a book and ultimately its durability. Clearer examples of how detrimental this can truly be are perhaps *The Doctor* (fig. 3.6), *Philosopher in his Study* (fig. 2.15) and all *vanitas* compositions in the corpus. In *The Doctor*, the depicted book rests vertically on an architectural element which provides zero support to the spine. This is evident by how the book slouches downwards, bending its limp structure to the shape of the nook. Similarly, the book on the philosopher's table is barely upheld by the globe behind it. The lack of support in this case is even more destructive, as indicated by the central tear on the spine which will eventually cause pages to fall out. The lack of proper spine support is a pattern frequently found in most of the analysed pictorial evidence. The few instances in which the book is resting on a proper bookstand are in depictions of private studies. Nonetheless, even in those paintings, it is likely that some books will be laying on the floor or unsupported (see *Young Man in a Study,* fig. 2.2). The fact that books are sometimes depicted scattered on the ground is of particular interest, especially when juxtaposed with books safely stored or resting on lectern stands. In *Musical Company* for example this can be explained by the nature of some songbooks as plain utilitarian and entertainment literature. As previously mentioned, this brought little attention to their material long-term integrity. In the philosopher and scholar's study, this can be related to visual codes of *vanitas* which will be further explored in the following chapter. Odd though is the open book on the ground in *Young Man in a Study*. Given that other elements of the painting (e.g. the protective curtain, the spine-inward system, and the lectern stand) suggest proper care of one's books, and given its non-utilitarian nature – see the word 'historien' which suggests a historical work – such carelessness lacks justification. Even more contrasting is the songbook resting on a tabletop instead.

FIG 3.6. Jan Adriaensz van Staveren, *The Doctor* (1650-1669), oil on copper, 49cm × 37cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

[144] Porck and Porck, 'Eight Guidelines on Book Preservation from 1527', pp. 17-25.

Another often cited guideline to preserve physical integrity is to never pull or apply pressure to the top of the spine.[145] Doing so when grabbing a book from its storage can tear the binding.[146] None of the studied paintings depict the removal of a book from its storage and none of the books present signs of damage which can be (solely) attributed to such behaviour. However, there are other examples of how regard for the integrity of the book is not consistent and neither prioritised. The beginning of this paragraph for instance remarks how the book should not be weighted on. Yet, in *An Old Scholar* (1645-1672) by Karel van der Pluym (fig. 3.7), the scholar is using the book as a hand rest. His weight is supported by firmly gripping the book from the top. Additionally, weight seems to be put on the outer ends of the book which is the least structured part, and thus the most fragile and prone to bending. The book in Rembrandt's self-portrait too is rolled up one side in a manner that is undoubtedly destructive to its structure, despite its flexible limp binding. In conclusion, the analysis of pictorial sources registers a number of material damages or disregard for the book's physical integrity. Most relate to incorrect handling measures. Of note though is that the framework of reference for what is considered 'correct' is mostly written guidelines from monastic guardians or later eighteenth and nineteenth-century collectors. Whereas these guidelines share some rules, the target of care, the attitude towards books, and the cultural and economic reality they exist in have somewhat changed between Medieval and Modern times. For one, the target of care shifted from exclusively religious books to rare or 'fine' ones. The latter are defined by Basbanes as books finely bound and printed on high-quality paper, and thus of high mechanical quality.[147] Most importantly, these guidelines refer to the book as an object of historical value, recognising that the natural materials they are made of are subject to deterioration over time. In this instance, religious books remained target of care as valuable historical artefacts despite their loss of ritual purpose after the Protestant

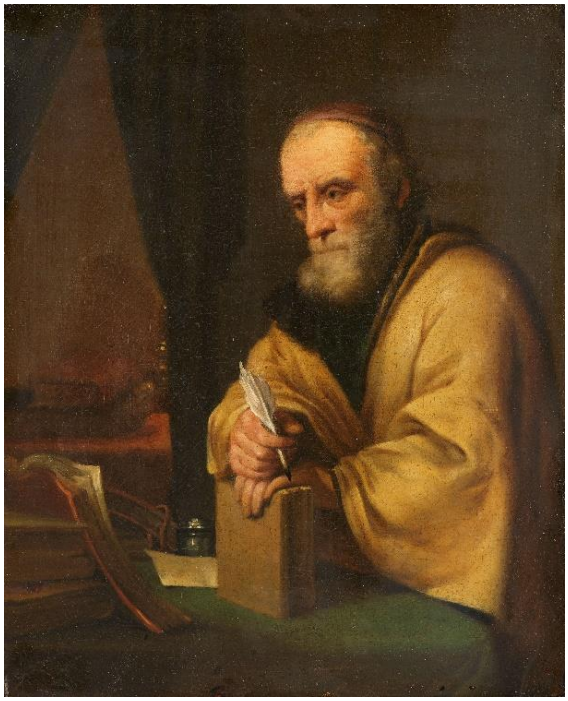

FIG 3.7. Karel van der Pluym, *An Old Scholar* (1645-1672), oil on canvas, 29.5cm × 24cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

[145] Clark, *The Care of Books,* pp. 76-77.
[146] Henry Petroski, *The Book on the Bookshelf* (Vintage Books, 1999), pp. 215-231.
[147] As written in Nicholas A. Basbanes' foreword in Greenfield, 'The Handling of Books', pp.11-12.

Reformation.[148] What results is that these reference guidelines are often in contradiction with the actual uses of a book when its value is considered to be utilitarian. Indeed, the collectors writing these measures of care valued the book as a collection piece and therefore did not want to risk damaging it. Yet, this does not properly mirror the full reality in which the book existed in the seventeenth century when utility was sometimes valued over long-term preservation. Consequently, the user will interact physically in ways that will cause forms of degradation – in particular to the spine – and leave traces of user wear.[149] As such, the analysis of this thesis' corpus nuances the gaps in the theoretical discourse by extending questions of care to non-historical books and by underlining how they are used and taken care of in everyday environments. Additionally, traces of user wear or physically damaging ways of engaging with the book are not inherently intentional but related to the everyday uses and perceptions of books in a set moment in time. In the seventeenth century, this relates to the book as a professional instrument or to the book as a non-luxurious good which can be easily replaced. Intentionality is here essential in distinguishing acts of violence against the book – crimes – from natural wear and tear caused by user manipulation. Of course, this does not neglect the general carelessness with which some users handled books as well as the disregard of proper ways of interacting with them, or ignorance thereof.

Previous paragraphs address how modes of engagement with the book are deeply connected to the meaning we attach to them. If a gentle hand signified adoration, for example, a more violent immersion might indicate instead a raptured thirst for knowledge. In this case, caring for the book becomes synonymous with intellectual engagement. Here, the book fulfils its purpose and is therefore cared for by showcasing a deep appreciation for it through intensive interaction. In such circumstances, the contents of the book are valued more than its physical perfection. A practical attitude towards the book as a tool or ephemera therefore diminishes its historical/artistic value, which impacts the perceived necessity for special care too. What results from the analysis is an expanded and altered appreciation of books as material objects. This aspect is further underlined by the wide availability of cheap books to most social strata during the seventeenth century, which undoubtedly made the book a less 'rare' item in terms of its accessibility. Nevertheless, the shift should not be interpreted as negligence and neither as a total abstention from caring for the book on average terms. On the contrary, it should highlight how contextual changes can create different understandings and degrees of care which are dependent on several external factors.

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[148] Kathryn M. Rudy, 'Feeling One's Way Through the Book', in *Touching Parchment: How Medieval Users Rubbed, Handled, and Kissed Their Manuscripts* (Open Book Publishers, 2023), pp. 1-28.
[149] Ibid.

Summary

This chapter discussed how touching and handling books refers to both the physical and symbolic dimensions of care. Firstly, the symbolic weight of touch was analysed to showcase how it can reveal attitudes towards the book, which are then reflected in how it is cared for. Moreover, the initial paragraph highlighted how the secularisation of the book for the most part stripped it of its ritualisation and, therefore, the acts of care connected to it. Similarly, it noted new contextual depictions of gestures which continue to communicate the significance of books in society at large. The chapter has also taken into consideration the new uses of books in the seventeenth century and how those affected the rationale and circumstances of their care. For example, certain elements of wear and tear are simply part of the book's everyday reality rather than indications of intentional carelessness. For ephemera and other books of utilitarian nature these indicate a fulfilment of their purpose which prioritises use over physical perfection. The new practicality of the book therefore introduced a new understanding of *what* should be taken care of and *how*, altering its appreciation as a material object. At last, the chapter has addressed well-known measures of correct handling and subsequently analysed the pictorial evidence in search thereof. Overall, the conclusion of such analysis has highlighted the bias of these guidelines towards books of historical value, which ultimately excludes both everyday interactions and the variety in binding structures.

4. Images of abstracted care

Why and how books are taken care of relates to their material corporeality, their perceived availability and symbolic value in a set socio-historical context. As a result, modes and rationale may vary across different periods, geographical regions, and book typologies. Some concrete actions of care have been aptly discussed in the previous chapters of this thesis and are undoubtedly 'how' components of care in practical terms. In those cases, care primarily entailed the book as a material object. This chapter aims to broaden the discussion by looking at acts of care such as collecting, and by addressing more conceptual aspects. These extend caring beyond physicality by focusing on the care and survival of the book as a medium and symbol.

Collecting the book

Caring for the book intertwines with the act of collecting and the institution of private/public libraries, which exemplify the expanded role of the book in everyday life and the proliferation of printed matter among new audiences. Collecting remains one of the oldest approaches to the long-term preservation of texts, and books as their carriers. In fact, preservation – the act of caring for materials in the aggregate[150] – and collecting were interchangeable terms prior to the mid-twentieth century.[151] On one hand, collecting recognises the book as an active vehicle for text and the necessity of its survival for securing future access to knowledge. Caring for the book in this case is caring for it as a medium. Depending on the collection, the recognition of books as repositories of knowledge can incentivise material care too. On the other hand, the seventeenth century marked an intensification of collectors interested exclusively in the physical value of the book rather than its textual qualities.[152] In this case, the book is considered more as an object of value by itself. Indeed, bibliophiles included an aesthetic type of appreciation based on artistic/historical values.[153] By the end of the century, this form of bibliophile collecting was fully legitimised.[154] As boundaries between collecting approaches blurred, the different levels of caring (medium, object and symbol) continued to coexist, sometimes blending into each other. Moreover, the intensive and broad presence of books in all layers of society during the

[150] Garrett Channell, 'A Critical History of Preservation: A Study of Preservation Practices and Evolutions', *The Macksey Journal*, 1 (2020), pp. 1-22, <https://mackseyjournal.scholasticahq.com/article/21750> [accessed 16 August 2024].
[151] Michele V. Cloonan, 'The Paradox of Preservation', *Library Trends*, 56 (2007), pp. 133-147, doi:10.1353/lib.2007.0047.
[152] Jaqueline Glomski, 'Book Collecting And Bookselling In The Seventeenth Century: Notions Of Rarity And Identification Of Value', *Publishing History*, 39 (1996), pp. 5–21.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid.

seventeenth century reinforced collecting outside the boundaries of a single institutional entity. A network of care was therefore established, made of single unrelated efforts by individual and institutional 'guardians'. The networked form of these actions effectively aided the long-term preservation of collections and their artefacts by saving more of the total cultural record.[155] For example, the bibliophile's ambitions aided the preservation of books by contributing to the institution of public collections through donations upon death.[156] Similarly, the prospect of high monetary return for a well-kept book incentivised collectors and relatives alike to care for the material survival of a collection.[157]

The expansion of book ownership was gradual and proportionate to the increasing supply and accessibility of books.[158] In the seventeenth century, the size as well as the type of collections amongst Dutch households varied. By the end of it, book ownership was well-established in the upper-middle classes, but was still increasing among the lower-middle class.[159] Market changes in the supply and demand of books also intensified private collecting among certain professional entities (e.g. ministers and university professors).[160] Concerning the pictorial evidence, examples of professionals owning a book collection can be observed in Table 1.1. The analysed paintings though reflect only a fraction of the extent to which books pervaded different types of Dutch households. Indeed, the corpus fails to capture how collections of a few volumes were popular among less intellectual circuits too. The fact that most paintings featuring a book collection belong to the individual/family portrait genre might explain why. Indeed, portraits of this kind were a demonstration of one's social standing and a projection of one's desired image according to the morale of the age.[161] The portrayal with a book was a means to communicate a lifelong dedication to knowledge, declare one's religious affiliation, or display one's professional affinity to books.[162] In all cases, the book is a cherished symbol because the commissioning parties – part of a social elite – used the depiction of books as a symbolic reinforcement of their status.[163] Even if these collections were fictitious and merely symbolic, they highlight relations between status, the nature of a collection, the material dimension of the book, and care.

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[155] Sherri Berger, 'The Evolving Ethics of Preservation: Redefining Practices and Responsibilities in the 21st Century', *The Serials Librarian*, 57(2009), pp. 57-68, doi:10.1080/03615260802669086.
[156] Andrew Pettegree and Arthur der Weduwen, *The Library: A Fragile History* (Basic Books, 2021), p.183.
[157] Pettegree and Der Weduwen, *The Library*, pp. 123-142.
[158] Lotte Kemps and Bas Spliet, 'Domesticating Human Capital: The Material Culture of Knowledge in Early Modern Amsterdam', *Early Modern Low Countries*, 8 (2024), pp. 25–50, doi:10.51750/emlc18538.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Pettegree and Der Weduwen, *The Library*, pp. 123-142.
[161] Norbert Schneider, 'The Great Age of the Portrait', in *The Art of the Portrait: Masterpieces of European Portrait Painting 1420-1670* (Taschen, 2002), pp. 6-29.
[162] Jan Białostocki, *Bücher Der Weisheit Und Bücher Der Vergänglichkeit: Zur Symbolik Des Buches in Der Kunst* (Schimper, 1985), pp.1-42.
[163] Glomski, 'Book Collecting And Bookselling In The Seventeenth Century', pp. 5–21.

Table 1.1 Professions of the individuals depicted with a book (collection).[164]

Name	**Profession**
Pieter Cornelisz Hooft	Historian, poet, and playwright
Thomas Hees	Diplomat
Hadriaan Beverland	Humanist scholar
Maritge Claesdr Vooght	Wife of the mayor
Abraham Casteleyn	Printer
Barend Hakvoort	Teacher and bookseller
Johannes Wtenbogaert	Minister
Caspar Commelin	Bookseller and publisher
Cornelisz Jansz Meyer	Engineer
Margarita Trip and Anna Maria Trip	Daughters of a wealthy merchant
Anthoine van Leeuwenhoek	Microbiologist
Constantijn Sennepart	Art and silk dealer
Johannes Hudde	Mayor, governor, and mathematician

In reference to Table 1.1, the individuals depicted with a multi-volume collection are Constantijn Sennepart, Barend Hakvoort, Johannes Hudde, Hadriaan Beverland, Abraham Casteleyn, and Caspar Commelin. Each is part of that upper-middle class of intellectuals who possessed private libraries brimming with secular books.[165] Each of them is also professionally involved or connected to the world of the book as an art dealer, scholar, printer, bookseller or publisher respectively. These depictions stress the role of books in their lives and perhaps the extent of their financial ability and motivation to take care of them. The good condition of the books jointly with how these portraits were a (self-)curated image, suggest that the book's symbolic role underscored a level of material refinement. These were finely bound works of scholarship to be collected and consulted in the home atmosphere and displayed as symbols of monetary, spiritual, and intellectual wealth.[166] Moreover, the depicted book typologies recall those owned by the gentleman-scholar, who pursued curiosity and learning as a pastime rather than as a professional obligation.[167] There are other elements of these portraits which recall the

[164] The professions have been compiled by searching the individuals on Wikipedia, E-Cartigo, and RKD Research.
[165] Kemps and Spliet, 'Domesticating Human Capital', pp. 25–50.
[166] Laura E. Thiel, 'The Gentleman-Scholar at Home: Domesticity, Masculinity, and Civility in Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Queen's University, 2016), pp. 312-393, <http://hdl.handle.net/1974/15031> [accessed 29 November 2024].
[167] Thiel, 'The Gentleman-Scholar at Home', p.11

imagery of the gentleman-scholar; for example the joint depiction of books with a globe. Indeed, the gentleman-scholar typically engages in solitary intellectual pursuits while surrounded by tools of discovery and learning.[168] This book-globe combination is present in Hooft, Hees, Casteleyn, Meyer, van Leeuwenhoek and Hudde's portraits (fig. 4.1; 4.2). Preferences for secular works of scholarship highlight an appreciation of the book as the repository of knowledge, and medium thereof. Together, the use of books for intellectual endeavours, the social performance of these portraits, and the symbolic functions of the depicted books showcase how the curation of one's image entailed a dimension of care for books.

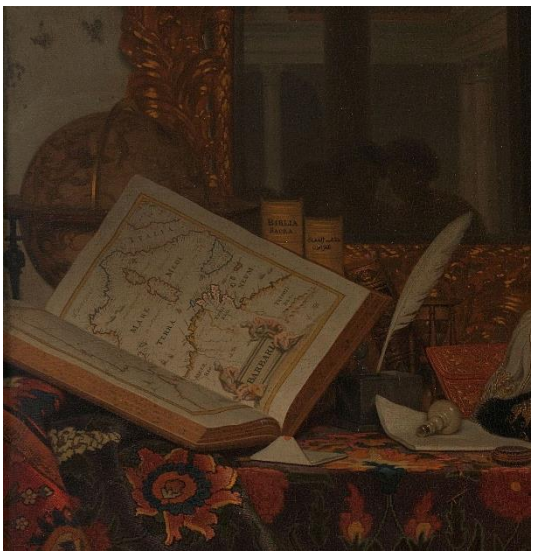

FIG 4.1. Michiel van Musscher, cut-out from *Thomas Hees with his Nephews and a Servant* (1687), oil on canvas, 76cm × 63cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

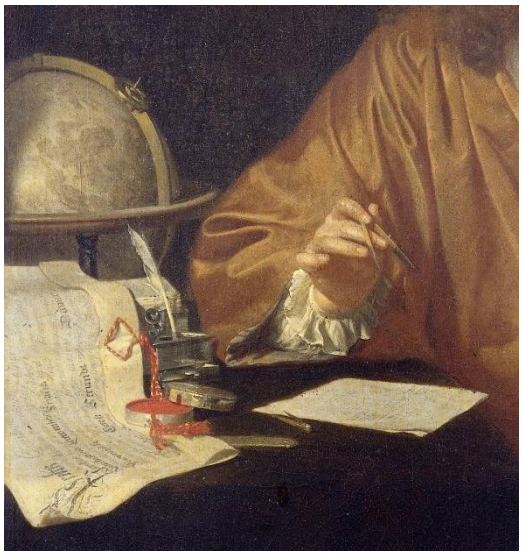

FIG 4.2. Jan Verkolje, cut-out from *Portrait of Anthoine van Leeuwenhoek* (1680-1686), oil on canvas, 56cm × 47.5cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

The social function of a book therefore informed attitudes and modalities of care. For instance, the portrayal and collection of Hadriaan Beverland differ greatly from *A Scholar in his Study* and *A Philosopher in his Study*. Beverland is portrayed with his fine collection, next to a prostitute reading his own work *De Prostibulus Veterum*. The two archetypes instead are portrayed with a heavy head resting on their hands, in deep melancholy. In contrast to Beverland's pristine collection, the books surrounding the scholar/philosopher show heavy signs of wear and tear. The crucial difference is that the scholar's collection is predominantly purpose-built and that the portrait is not meant to construct a desired social identity. Moreover, his pose, the paintings' tones, and the books' condition are reminiscent of *vanitas* compositions. These paintings recognise the transiency of the book's materiality, but exploit representations of decay and use as a means to celebrate notions of caring for the book as a medium. Indeed, *vanitas* interpretations sometimes associate books with the overcoming of true death via eternal dedication to

[168] Thiel, 'The Gentleman-Scholar at Home', pp. 1-42.

knowledge.[169] The old age and melancholy of the scholar/philosopher mirrors the frailty and transience of books and the knowledge they contain. The human body is but a temporary box to the human mind as the book is but a box to knowledge. Yet, if the scholar/philosopher can overcome true death by dedicating himself to knowledge – which requires deep engagement with books – the book too overcomes true death by strengthening its position as a medium and symbol of such knowledge. The comparison between Beverland and these generic figures therefore highlights how the individual portrait limits an understanding of how collecting and care intertwine. That is because they narrow perceptions of collections to one purpose, book typology, and social class.

It is important to distinguish between book typologies to acknowledge the different attitudes towards books and their intended purpose. Indeed, there is a category of utilitarian books omitted almost entirely from collections captured in individual portraits. In the analysed corpus, only two paintings juxtapose a finely bound collection to a single limp booklet; the portrait of Johannes Hudde and *Portrait of a Collector* (fig. 4.3; 4.4). The plain parchment-bound booklet located between a gold-tooled volume and the inkpot in Hudde's portrait seems to be a ledger book, hence a practical and mostly handwritten compilation of files. The nature of the book in the collector's portrait instead is more difficult to define, but its signs of wear and limp-parchment binding indicate utilitarian use as well. In both cases, their depiction has a representative function because they illustrate the individual's professional occupation. The booklet's purpose is finite to itself by testifying day-to-day business. Contrary to the collection, these booklets do not construct desired images of intellectual wealth or dedication to knowledge. Nevertheless, this does not eliminate them as meaningful in discussions of care. Indeed, they recall the fragile collections of the scholar/philosopher which

FIG 4.3. Michiel van Musscher, cut-out from *Portrait of Johannes Hudde* (1686), oil on canvas, 57cm × 49cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

FIG 4.4. Adriaen van Ostade, cut-out from *Portrait of a Collector* (c. 1665), oil on canvas, 20cm × 17.8cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

[169] Sabine Schwarz, *Das Bücherstilleben in der Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts* (O. Harassowitz, 1987), pp. 45-62.

emphasised material impermanence caused by intensive/frequent use. Perhaps paradoxically, this constructs a conceptual dimension of care which considers functional and historical context. Such an understanding of care does not extend the appreciation of books as material objects to all categories. Still, it respects the ephemeral existence of some books as living instruments rather than artefacts. The *Portrait of the Three Regentesses of the Leprozenhuis* by Ferdinand Bol (c. 1668-c.1671) and *The Sampling Officials* by Rembrandt (1662) for example demonstrate such booklets in a functional setting (fig. 4.5; 4.6). However, better examples of these environments are most likely found outside the analysed corpus in illustrative pictorial evidence (e.g. generic prints). Such instances which respect books as living instruments acknowledge the everyday reality of certain books, and therefore construct care as the fulfilment of a book's purpose. This recalls aforementioned practices of purpose-built collections separate from the bibliophile, where caring prioritised the book as a medium rather than object.

FIG 4.5. Ferdinand Bol, cut-out from *Portrait of the Three Regentesses of the Leprosenhuis* (c. 1668 – c.1671), oil on canvas, 170cm × 208cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

FIG 4.6. Rembrandt van Rijn, cut-out from *The Sampling Officials* (1662), oil on canvas, 191.5cm × 279cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

Books in vanitas

Having established how collecting relates to caring for the book, the subsequent analysis of still-life paintings will further underline the care for books as mediums and symbols. The genre developed as a distinct branch of Dutch art around the beginning of the seventeenth century, when the Republic was a modern land with a thriving trade, art, and book market. Throughout it, still-life paintings commented on and communicated the shifting relation to consumption and wealth as a whole.[170] A sub-category of still-lives called *vanitas* compositions distinguished itself for its moralising messages, reminding the observer of the vanity and brevity of all worldly

[170] Dawn Woolley, 'Still Life, Vanitas, and Commodity Culture', unpublished paper delivered at the 'Expanding Communities of Sustainable Practice Symposium' (Leeds Arts University, 16 November 2018), https://lau.repository.guildhe.ac.uk/id/eprint/17412 [accessed 21 October 2024].

objects.[171] The analysed still-life paintings belong to this category, of which visual code adopts books as symbols of earthly existence.[172] The inclusion of books to symbolise this demonstrates their omnipresence in everyday matters, referring to how they were a source of knowledge, an item of devotion, a source of entertainment or a practical professional instrument. Through books, one could also construct and navigate social life. Such analysis of book symbolisms in still-lives though is an art historical subject matter, with complex multilayered meanings. Therefore, the intricate interpretational discussions surrounding books in these compositions are only useful for book historical research when combined with the type of books, their material conditions, and the actual circumstances of their circulation. Considering that *vanitas* paintings warn about the temporality of all earthly things, it should not surprise that these books are mostly damaged. Eventually, the book as a material object is destined to perish. An overview of the corpus confirms some degree of material wear and tear in the majority of book still-lives; mostly wrinkled pages, dog ears and folded page corners, but a few wrecked spines as well.

The detailed accuracy in these portrayals of frailty testifies the undoubted encounters with run-down books. Of note though is how the depicted books belong to various categories. Symbolically, such varied representation addresses the different dimensions of transient earthly existence. What is of interest for this analysis though, is how the degree of deterioration is disparate between kinds of books and their binding structures. There seems to be a relation between representation and material condition, which reflects the types of uses associated with each book. Songbooks, ledger books and other limp bindings usually have more explicit or serious signs of wear and tear than finely bound books. See for example *Vanitas Still Life with Spinario* by Pieter Claesz as well as the composition by Gerrit van Vlucht (fig. 4.7; 4.8). As previously shown, varying perceptions and attitudes had not extended the same regard for care, protection, and reverence to all books. Exemplary is also the juxtaposition in Collier's painting between the wrinkled songbook and the finely bound

FIG 4.7. Pieter Claesz, cut-out from *Vanitas Still Life with Spinario* (1628), oil on panel, 70.5cm × 80.5cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

[171] Ingvar Bergström, *Dutch Still-Life Painting in the Seventeenth Century* (Faber and Faber Limited, 1956), pp. 154-190.
[172] Ibid.

books fitted with luxurious metal clasps (fig. 4.9). The songbook symbolically strengthens notions of frivolity because preoccupation with trivial acts of entertainment was morally frowned upon. The songbook's purpose is finite to the scope of entertainment – it cannot guarantee eternal spiritual survival – and ends with the death of its material self. By extension, caring for it as an object is a futile endeavour. The frivolity it represents also attempts to morally dissuade excessive engagement with it, therefore discouraging caring for it as a medium too. Considering the moral critique inherent to these compositions, the inclusion and condition of these oblong songbooks reflect their ephemeral uses as a practical tool of entertainment which prioritises function. Perhaps paradoxically so, their presence for moralising means is indicative of the extent to which users frequently and extensively engaged with these objects for entertainment. The decadence of their depiction mirrors the real condition of many songbooks, as depicted in non-*vanitas* paintings too.

Fig 4.8. Gerrit van Vucht, cut-out from *Vanitas Still Life* (1658-1697), oil on panel, 9.3cm × 12cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

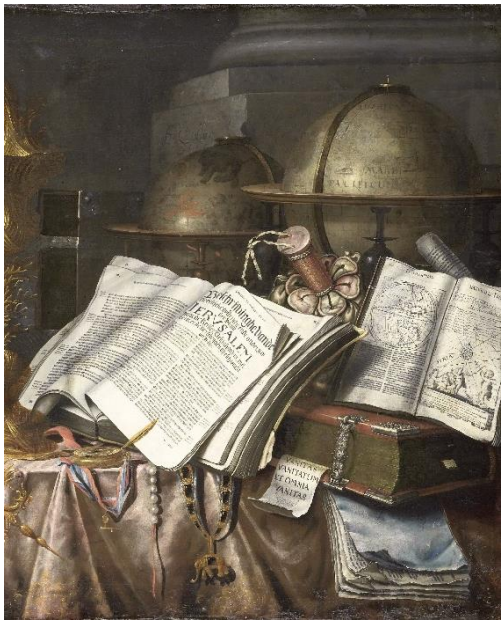

Fig 4.9. Edwaert Collier, cut-out from *Vanitas Still Life* (1662), oil on canvas, 102.5cm × 132cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

Similar considerations to those of songbooks apply to the depiction of ledger books as well. The latter are recognisable by their limp binding, often with a fore-edge flap, strip fastenings, and laced-in slip supports for the spine.[173] Such are the books in Lievens' *Still Life with Books* (fig. 4.10). In his observations on the nature of Lievens' books, Van Thiel (2011) claims that the depiction of ledger books in still-life is remarkably rare. That however appears to be untrue for the still-lives analysed here. On the contrary, the majority of the corpus depicts at least one limp-binding, often associable to ledger or other account-books. See for instance the cut-outs from some *vanitas* compositions (fig. 4.11; 4.12; 4.13).

[173] Pieter J.J. van Thiel, 'An Interpretation of the *Still Life with Books, Jug, Glass and Bread Roll,* Attributed to Jan Lievens', *The Rijksmuseum Bulletin*, 59 (2011), pp. 286–99, doi:10.52476/trb.11606.

Moreover, Yamey (1989) had already underlined a high concentration of account-book representations in seventeenth-century paintings from the Low Countries.[174]

FIG 4.10. Jan Lievens, *Still Life with Books* (c.1627- c.1628), oil on panel, 91cm × 120cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

As previously mentioned, the ledger book is commonly a compilation of files intended for commercial usage. The identification of Lievens' books allows a new interpretation of this painting centred around the theme of degeneracy.[175] Degeneracy by definition refers to low moral standards which here address the accumulation of material wealth. The presence of ledger books thus underlines such immoral interests because of their utilitarian nature in the administration of businesses. Indeed, their depiction potentially reminded onlookers not to occupy themselves with business matters on Sundays, and neither to pursue accumulation of material wealth, which is meaningless beyond life on Earth.[176] Their very ephemeral finality – comparable to that of songbooks – is remarked upon by their damaged state. The damages recognise the fragility and transience of their nature while remarking how a lack of material care was perhaps morally required. The emphasis in *vanitas* compositions on the ephemerality of earthly things therefore extends notions of caring to recognising and accepting the finite end of a physical object. To indulge in the care and reverence of such books would disrespect condemnations of vanity and luxury. On the other hand, their fragility implies extensive use, and as such highlight the extent to which individuals were striving for wealth. This stresses how the book was intensively used, and thus cared for as a medium.

[174] Basil S. Yamey, *Art & Accounting* (Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 1-18.
[175] Van Thiel, 'An Interpretation of the *Still Life with Books, Jug, Glass and Bread Roll,* Attributed to Jan Lievens', pp. 286–99.
[176] Yamey, *Art & Accounting*, pp. 108-114.

The identification of book typologies allows to deepen interpretations of degeneracy. Hence, it reinforces the moral critique that condemned frivolity, accumulation, and excessive attachment to material possessions. The impermanence of material wealth is also commented on in *Vanitas Still Life* by Edwaert Collier. In comparison to the songbook, the rest of the depicted volumes are finely bound scholarly works with little to no damage (fig. 4.9). However, they are displayed with jewels and golden medals in a recurrent theme of decadence consistent throughout Collier's work and other *vanitas* paintings alike. In this case, degeneracy is revealed through the compositional elements of the painting rather than the conditions of books per se. The combination of objects signifying power and wealth (e.g. jewels) and the book inscription – referencing Flavius Josephus' work on the destruction of Jerusalem – underlines the limitations of mundane power.[177] By criticising the pursuit of what does not last, this composition reinforces ideals of caring for books as a medium. Indeed, the pristine condition of Collier's scholarly works suggests an approach of care focused on the reverence of the book as an object, which is emphasised by the luxurious bindings and their predominantly closed state. This refers back to acts of collecting aimed at self-promotion or interested solely in the physical qualities of the book. Thus, it is not the act of collecting by itself which is critiqued as vain, but rather the type of engagement with the collected books, or the lack thereof. What ultimately results from the analysis of still-life *vanitas* compositions is that moral symbolisms, when combined with a book historical perspective, provide insights into the circumstances of use of a book, as well as how perceived value and purpose impact modalities of care. Beyond and apart from symbolic discussions, these still-lives also show how morale encouraged or discouraged the

FIG 4.11. Cornelis Brisé, cut-out from *Vanitas Still Life* (1665), oil on canvas, 107cm × 90cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

FIG 4.12. Aelbert Jansz, cut-out from *Vanitas Still Life* (c. 1660- c.1665), oil on canvas, 63.5cm × 73cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain

FIG 4.13. Anonymous, cut-out from *Vanitas Still Life with Books* (1633), panel, 73.5cm × 70cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam © Public Domain.

[177] Minna Tuominen, 'The Still Lifes of Edwaert Collier (1642-1708)' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Helsinki, 2014), p.76, < http://hdl.handle.net/10138/136436> [accessed 6 December 2024].

care of certain books, and certain approaches to care. Regardless of the ethical correctness – or not – of these moralising messages, what matters is how the identified circumstances of use stress ways of caring focused on the fulfilment of the book's purpose as a tool while referring to the accumulation of material wealth, which nonetheless assured long-term material care of books.

Summary

This chapter concluded the analysis by discussing the care of books on a more conceptual level. The first section connected the act of collecting to the institution of (private) collections which aided the long-term preservation of the book as object, symbol, and medium. Whereas the paintings fail to show the true extent of how collecting intensified among different social circles, the analysis stressed how the portrayal with books was a symbolic play. The curation of one's social image thus impacted approaches to care and the level of material refinement intrinsic to them. Comparisons among collections have also highlighted how the appreciation of books as artefacts is not prioritised in purpose-built collections which instead celebrate the book as a living instrument. The second section focused on a targeted analysis of *vanitas* still-life paintings which unveiled the complex – and at times paradoxical – relationship between morale and material wealth. Morale encouraged or discouraged certain approaches to care, and the degrees of engagement with certain books. When combined with book historical insights, this underlined the circumstances of use of a book, as well as the relation between a finite material self and the perceived value of content. The moral admonition against engaging with some books or against the accumulation of material wealth nevertheless showcase the extent to which these were actual realities. Likewise, the very inclusion of various book typologies to represent earthly existence is telling of how much books were an omnipresent item in different circles of society.

Conclusion

This thesis researched acts of caring for the book in seventeenth-century paintings from the Dutch Republic through an analysis of selected artworks from the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. In response to existing research on depictions of books in artworks, the aim was to address the lack of interest in discussing these depictions with a book historical finality. The chosen focus on practices of care was related and justified by the shifting role, yet consistent significance of books over centuries. Indeed, the book has remained a valuable material object, symbol, and medium whose rationale and modes of care are intrinsic to a variety of cultural developments. The secularisation of the book for instance extended its purpose to being a source of knowledge, a professional tool, and a source of entertainment. Such various uses of books impacted decisions on what should be taken care of and how, thus underlining how ways of caring are embedded in their perceived value. Accordingly, caring for the book entails taking their reality, including their practical use, into consideration. This thesis therefore discussed care for the book in the well-defined socio-cultural and economic context of the seventeenth century. The concept of care was first approached from a concrete perspective focused on 'how' components, which elaborated on modalities of protecting and maintaining the book's physical integrity. Afterwards, care was approached from a more conceptual perspective, which instead elaborated on the care of the book as a medium and symbol.

The first analysis chapter provided insights into the ways books were protected from deterioration through appropriate storage, structured bindings, and other forms of protection. What resulted from the analysis is ways of caring which responded to the necessity of balancing protection with accessibility. For instance, depictions of books stacked on tables, stools or the floor showcased how prioritising consultation sometimes denied them appropriate storage. The pervasion of books in every sphere of society, as well as the differentiation between book typologies and their purpose, highlighted how protection and non-exposure to deteriorating agents was to a certain extent impossible, if not futile. The analysis demonstrated how caring nonetheless entailed an awareness of the surrounding environment. Indeed, storing books with spines inward or applying curtains to shelves protected the physical book from agents such as light and dust. Protective elements were also added to bindings to help preserve the physical integrity of the book. The addition of these elements in the seventeenth century though was upon customer request and was not provided to all book typologies. Lastly, there is a relation between the intended purpose of books and their binding structure. For instance, plain limp bindings reflect the ephemeral and practical nature of partbooks and account-books. Their

ephemerality did not contribute to their long-term material survival, but the poor conditions resulting from intensive use indicate an appreciation as a medium.

Chapter 3 elaborated on the symbolic weight of touch as a demonstration of care. How we handle books reflects why we touch them, and thus why and/or how we care for them. For instance, the lack of 'holiness' and the increasing circulation of some books reduced the necessity of cloth-covered hands as a symbol of reverence. The chapter thus investigated the handling of books as a practice of care which acknowledges new uses and attitudes towards them. As mentioned, the long-term material care of ledger books or songbooks was disregarded in favour of intensive use. Their ease of access, affordability, and utilitarian nature often led to seeming carelessness. Yet, caring for the book at times entails the fulfilment of its purpose, as well as the recognition of its finite material existence which translates into an altered appreciation of it as a material object. Moreover, the interactions between the book's content, the book object and our body reveal modes of reading and attitudes towards books which affect their materiality and express our care for them as either artefact, medium, or both. The deterioration of interactive zones (e.g. corners) or dog ears for example were connected to discontinuous ways of reading. These damages and traces of user wear were not inherently intentional, but rather testimony of the everyday reality of books. The analysis of the physical condition of the portrayed books therefore emphasised different perceptions of how, and to what extent, a book should be cared for based on its value and function. Most importantly, the chapter addressed handling practices using 'correct' measures written in collectors' or institutional guidelines. However, it did so from a critical distance, refining our understanding of care by showing how such guidelines excluded the actual uses of books and the functions associated with diverse book typologies.

Chapter 4 concluded the analysis by discussing collecting and *vanitas* compositions. Differences between collecting approaches informed the care for books as both mediums and artefacts. For instance, the legitimisation of bibliophile collecting reserved attentive material care for books of artistic/historical value. This overlapped with an expansion of collecting among different social circles and professions. Whereas the size and purpose of collections varied, the pictorial evidence limits an understanding of how collecting and care intertwine to a selected upper-middle class who exploited the portrayal with books to project a desired social image. Besides strengthening the symbolic role of books, the curation of one's social image corresponded to some level of material refinement – not extended to all books. The sporadic inclusion of plain ledger books in these portraits for example, is illustrative and not constructive of an ideal social status. Nonetheless, it emphasises their role in commercial purposes, which celebrates them as living instruments. The omnipresence of books in seventeenth-century Dutch

society is remarked upon as well by *vanitas* compositions which adopt them as symbols of earthly existence. The analysis outlined a complex relationship between morale, material wealth, and the condition of depicted book typologies. For instance, the inclusion of songbooks to criticise frivolity – and a necessity thereof – is indicative of how much they were used for 'frivolous' entertainment. Moreover, the accurate depictions of material deterioration reflect the undoubted encounter with damaged books. The extensive uses though implied by themes of degeneracy and moral premonitions highlight once again the significance of the book as a medium, which is reinforced by its symbolic inclusion as dimensions of earthly existence.

In conclusion, this book-historical informed investigation of artworks featuring books successfully expanded our understanding of historical practices of book care. How books were stored and handled for instance outlined a reality in which books were increasingly omnipresent and multi-purpose. As such, exposure to deteriorating agents or user wear damage were intrinsic to the seventeenth-century's socio-cultural and economic contexts. The expanding circulation of books and their non-religious roles exposed the book to a variety of settings and interactions which not only altered their physical form but also an appreciation towards it. Therefore, the analysis added to existing written guidelines of care by refining notions of it which include the book's everyday circumstances of use. The material condition of the portrayed books emphasised as well different perceptions of how, and to what extent, a book should be cared for based on its perceived value and function. Indeed, the distinction between book typologies and their associated value and purpose outlined very distinctive forms of caring which extend beyond material preservation. The contextual analysis of these depictions ultimately reflected on the multilayered significance of books, explaining how acts of care are balanced and/or informed by questions of accessibility, value, use, and even morale. The persistent inclusion of books in paintings, their shifting yet ongoing symbolisms, and the distinct ways societies and individuals alike have cared for them continue to prove the significance of books which are prised as objects as well as a medium.

A corollary of this study was to emphasise the relevance of pictorial sources as a tool of book historical research. While this thesis has attested to the importance of maintaining a critical distance, it has also demonstrated how a contextual and critical analysis of pictorial sources can enhance and freshen book historical research. The framework of the seventeenth century, of the Dutch Republic and art historical connotations jointly allowed to reflect on symbolisms and context-specific circumstances. When combined with a differentiation between book typologies and existing book historical insights, this approach refined notions of care while unravelling its complexity and shifting background-specific modalities. The analysis further highlighted the

importance of interdisciplinarity to justify and explain the history of the book. Whereas the corpus was limited in number, impacting the generalisation of findings, it was not the aim to explain and neither unravel the care of the book on an exhaustive level. On the contrary, the smaller focus allowed to make targeted considerations with an in-depth analysis of the paintings. The chosen focus on care though is only a facet of many book historical elements which are undoubtedly captured by book depictions throughout centuries. The noted – yet unaddressed – presence of paper bookmarks for instance could broaden conversations on discontinuous forms of reading. Chronological and geographical comparisons could stress potential differences and/or similarities between notions of care, or other book historical topics. Interesting could also be extending this research to other forms of art such as prints and sculptures. Going forward, may this thesis be of inspiration to other researchers who are interested in the development and varying facets of caring for books, as well as to those curious about the intersection of book history and books *within* art.

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Appendix A

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	N	N/A	N	N	N	N	Art tools	N
2	Clasps	N/A	Damaged corners	N	N	N	Globe-book combo, vanitas	N
3	Clasps, over-edge binding, corner piece	Under arm with support	Broken spine	Shelves, lectern, private study	Curtain, gloves	N	Globe-book combo	N
4	Clasps, over-edge binding	N/A	Slightly damaged corners	Bookshelf, private study	Curtain	N	N	Collector
5	Clasps	N/A	Slightly damaged corners	Shelf	N	N	Vanitas	N
6	Clasps	N/A	N	N	N	N	N	N
7	Clasps, over-edge binding, corner piece	N/A	Broken spine, bended pages, damaged corners	N	N	N	Vanitas	N
8	N	Hand resting on top	Broken spine	Bookshelf, private study	Curtain	N	N	N
9	Over-edge binding	N/A	N	N	N	N	Vanitas	N
10	Clasps, extra spine support	N/A	Broken bindings, bended pages, broken clasps	N	N	N	Globe-book combo, vanitas	N
11	N	Single hand top holding of spine	N	N	N	N	N	Author
12	Clasps, over-edge binding, corner piece	N/A	Broken spine, bended pages, damaged corners	N	N	N	Globe-book combo, vanitas	N
13	Clasps, over-edge binding, corner piece	Supported spines	Slightly damaged corners	N	N	N	N	N
14	N	Finger bookmarking	N	N	N	N	N	N
15	Clasps, corner piece	Held at bottom of spine	N	N	N	N	N	N
16	N	Half-resting on knee	Torn pages, broken spine, damaged corners	N	N	N	N	N
17	Over-edge binding	N/A	N	N	Pillow, handkerchief	N	N	N
18	N	Hand resting on losely hanging book	Broken binding, damaged corners	N	N	N	N	N
19	Clasps, over-edge binding	Supported spine, finger bookmarking	N	N	N	N	N	N
20	Over-edge binding	N/A	Broken spine, damaged corners	N	N	N	Globe-book combo	N
21	N	N/A	N	School, lectern	N	N	N	N
22	Over-edge binding	Supported spine	Slightly damaged corners	N	N	N	Religious	St. Jerome
23	Clasps, over-edge binding	N/A	Broken spine, bended pages, damaged corners	N	N	N	Vanitas	N
24	Clasps, over-edge binding, corner piece	N/A	N	Shelf	N	N	N	N
25	Over-edge binding	Arm is resting on top	Broken spine, damaged corners	N	N	N	N	N
26	N	N/A	Broken spine, bended pages, damaged corners	N	N	N	Globe-book combo, vanitas	N
27	Y - corner pieces	N/A	N	N	N	N	Vanitas	N
28	Clasps	N/A	Torn pages, broken binding	Private study	N	N	Globe-book combo	Philosopher
29	Clasps, corner piece, metal boss	N/A	Damaged corners, bended pages	N	N	N	Globe-book combo, vanitas	N
30	Clasps, over-edge binding	N/A	N	Bookshelf	N	N	Globe-book combo	N
31	Clasps, over-edge binding	Supported spine	Slightly damaged corners	N	N	N	N	N
32	Flap binding, clasps, over-edge binding	N/A	Broken spine, bended pages, damaged corners	N	N	N	Globe-book combo, vanitas	N
33	Clasps, corner piece	N/A	N	N	N	N	Globe-book combo	N
34	N	Finger bookmarking	Bended pages	N	Gloves	N	Globe-book combo	N
35	Clasps, over-edge binding	Hand resting on top	Slightly bended pages	No shelves, private study	Curtain	N	N	Scholar
36	N	N/A	N	N	N	N	Religious	St. Jerome
37	Clasps, over-edge binding	N/A	Damaged corners	Bookshelf, lectern, private study	N	N	Globe-book combo	N
38	Clasps	N/A	N	N	N	N	Globe-book combo	N
39	Over-edge binding, flap binding	N/A	Damaged corners, wrinckled pages	N	N	N	Vanitas	N
40	Clasps, over-edge binding, corner piece	N/A	Slightly damaged corners	N	N	N	Vanitas	N
41	N	N/A	Damaged corners	N	Gloves	N	N	N
42	Clasps, over-edge binding, corner piece	Knee support, hand resting on top	Broken spine, bended pages, damaged corners	N	N	N	N	N
43	Clasps	Weak spine support	Damagedcorners	N	N	N	N	N
44	N	Bending spine with one hand	Damaged corners	N	N	N	N	N
45	N	Leafing, finger bookmarking	Slightly damaged corners	Private study	N	N	N	N
46	N	N/A	N	Shelf	N	N	N	N
47	Clasps, over-edge binding, corner piece	N/A	Bended pages, damaged corners	Bookshelf, lectern, private study	Duster	Y	N	Scholar

Questions

A – Does the binding have visible protective elements?

B – How is the book held?

C – Are there indications of wear and tear or damage?

D – Is the book in a controlled space and/or is it safely stored?

E – Are there indications of an effort to clean/protect?

F – Are there elements of repair?

G – Are there symbolic elements which indicate significance and why it should be preserved?

H – Are there figures which imply book care?

Artworks and Rijksmuseum id

1 *Self-Portrait* id: 20026913

2 *Cornelis Jansz. Meyer* id: 20028014

3 *Young Man in a Study* id: 200109294

4 *Portrait of a Collector* id: 20025954

5 *Vanitas Still Life* id: 20026298

6 *A Man Reading* id: 2001215

7 *Vanitas Still Life with Books* id: 200108938

8 *Portrait of Hadriaan Beverland* id: 20026895

9 *Vanitas Still Life* id: 20026274

10 *Vanitas Still Life* id: 20026797

11 *Portrait of Caspar Commelin* id: 20026046

12 *Vanitas Still Life* id: 20027716

13 *Margarita Trip as Minerva* id: 200108257

14 *Portrait of the Three Regentesses* id: 200108248

15 *Portrait of Maritge Claesdr Vooght* id: 200109374

16 *Old Woman Meditating* id: 200109479

17 *The Hunter's Present* id: 200109481

18 *Man Smoking a Pipe* id: 20027803

19 *Old Woman Reading* id: 20027805

20 *The Doctor* id: 200108951

21 *The Night School* id: 200109262

22 *St. Jerome* id: 20027991

23 *Vanitas Still Life* id: 20026923

24 *Portrait of Barend Hakvoort* id: 20025939

25 *The Smoker Allegory* id: 20026320

26 *Still Life with Books, Sheet Music* id: 200507525

27 *Vanitas Still Life with Skull with Laurel* id: 200507520

28 *Philosopher in his Study* id: 20026343

29 *Vanitas Still Life* id: 20027970

30 *The Married Couple* id: 20026744

31 *Old Woman Reading* id: 200109433

32 *Still Life with Books* id: 200107940

33 *Portrait of Anthoine Leeuwenhoek* id: 200108635

34 *Portrait of Pieter Corneliszoon* id: 200108418

35 *An Old Scholar* id: 20026047

36 *St. Jerome* id: 20025788

37 *Portrait of Johannes Hudde* id: 200107778

38 *Thomas Hees and his Servant Thomas* id: 200107776

39 *Vanitas Still Life* id: 20026023

40 *Vanitas Still Life with Spinario* id: 200109184

41 *Johannes Wtenbogaert* id: 200138946

42 *Musical Company* id: 200107935

43 *Old Woman Reading* id: 200107947

44 *Self-Portrait* id: 200107952

45 *The Sampling Officials* id: 200107929

46 *Tobit and Anna* id: 200107945

47 *A Scholar in his Study* id: 20029305