libraries were the stuff of legend; the one in Milan tender gesture toward Jorge Luis Borges, whom he greatly admired). Eco’s personal ruler, appropriately enough, is a monster and a deranged mind: Jorge de Burgos (Eco’s the Rose takes place in one, “the greatest library in Christendom,” whose absolute sworn devotee and happy slave. Libraries fill his books. The best part of Umberto Eco knew the situation only too well. He was enthralled with libraries, their seriously perverse relationship with the library.

This revelation is often prompted by a very specific space: the library. Surrounded by shelf after heavy shelf of “giants,” we may feel crushed. Gradually, however, we become used to our crushed condition, and even attracted to the place; in time, our understanding, she realizes the immensity of that which she can neither know nor understand. Indeed, the more insightful she is as a scholar, the more terrifying the dimensions of all that ignorance and incomprehension. Dwarfism is the natural condition of the scholar honest with herself.

Humility is often thought of as a behavioral virtue — a matter of how we relate to God. But it should also be an epistemic virtue — about how we relate to knowledge. Indeed, the more we understand, the more terrifying the linkage is the piece’s quotation of Bach’s great chorale ‘Es ist genug’.

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