

Books as Gifts: the Meaning and Function of a Personal Library

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Much of the evidence used in researching the history of individuals' reading preferences and practices is elusive and transient.¹ Most individuals do not leave material traces – why should they? – of an activity which nonetheless, in many cases, occupies a significant proportion of their waking lives; and the traces that some of them do leave are often enigmatic or ambiguous.² The 'personal library', however – by which I mean a collection of books acquired over a period of time by a specific individual (as distinct from a family or an institution) – may reasonably be regarded with some optimism as a potentially rich source of information, at least about that individual's reading history, and perhaps also about wider patterns of reading behaviour which he or she may exemplify.

Such libraries, however, seem harder to come by as discrete objects of study than one might expect, given the pervasiveness of private reading among the book-buying classes through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The main reason for this is undoubtedly the difficulty of preserving them as stand-alone collections (and the lack of interest in doing so). In Australia, personal libraries of this kind usually become publicly available by way of bequests to State or university libraries, where they may occasionally be preserved as 'special collections'. Such decisions are taken, in a framework of acquisition policy, space constraints and bequest conditions, on the basis of the previous owner's prominence and of the rarity, monetary value or specialist focus of the contents.³ Bequests that do not qualify – the overwhelming majority – are either dispersed (often without identifying catalogue tags or bookplates) through the receiving library's general collection, or consigned to used-book outlets, and thence into the general community or to the rubbish tip. An even

¹ For a concise but seminal account of the range of evidence available to the historian of reading, see Martyn Lyons, 'Texts, Books and Readers: Which Kind of Cultural History?' in *Books, Readers, Reading*, ed. David Walker, with Julia Horne and Martyn Lyons, *Australian Cultural History*, No. 11 (1992), 1-15.

² For some recent efforts to interpret such traces in the Australasian context, see Patrick Buckridge, 'Generations of Books: A Tasmanian Family Library, 1816-1994,' *Library Quarterly*, vol.76, no.4, 388-402 (a family library); and especially Lydia Wevers, *Reading on the Farm: Victorian Fiction and the Colonial World* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2010), 219-31, 261-82 (a Station library).

³ Information from long-time Reference Librarian at the University of Queensland, Mr. Spencer J. Routh, June 2010.

shorter and more familiar narrative is that of the personal library qua deceased estate, which usually makes its way directly to the secondhand book dealer, by whom it is seldom, if ever, sold as a single unit. In these circumstances, the chances of an ‘ordinary’ person’s library – one belonging to someone other than a famous writer or politician – surviving intact in the public domain are very small.

A personal library that has somehow managed to survive these hazards as a whole unit, especially one with marks of use, can therefore seem like a godsend to a reading-researcher. Finding conceptual frameworks that enable us to make sense of such collections, however, poses an interesting challenge. How can we analyse or contextualize such a library in a way that satisfies the feeling we often have that the collection as a whole is somehow greater than its parts? This paper moves towards some tentative answers to this question by examining a particular personal library of the kind just described, considering a range of possible ‘sense-making’ approaches to it, but focusing on the special relevance and value of ‘gift theory’ for an understanding of it.

The library in question is a kind of ‘found object,’ as, for the reasons just canvassed, most such libraries probably are; and the ‘finder’ in the case was the present researcher.⁴ It belonged to a Brisbane woman, Della Hills, the mother of a well-known Brisbane bibliophile and Catholic intellectual, Frank Hills (1930-2008), and it came to my attention somewhat serendipitously some years ago while I was inspecting her son’s extensive library of several thousand books.⁵ Standing against the wall of a central corridor in Frank’s family home, and surrounded on every side by book-filled rooms, was a small free-standing silky-oak bookcase containing a few dozen books. His mother, Frank informed me, had bought the cabinet in 1927, the year of her marriage, and he had brought it to his home, books and all, after her death in 1984, where it had stood ever since. It was known to his children as ‘Grandma’s Library’.⁶

⁴ Hereafter referred to as ‘I’. The reader’s indulgence is sought for the informality of this convention, which is adopted here in the interests of economy and clarity.

⁵ Frank Hills was a prominent Brisbane chartered accountant, who amassed a private library of great value and scope, including an internationally recognized collection on the Catholic Literary Revival of the early 20th century. He was also a historian and biographer, actively involved for many years with Catholic literary and historical organizations, notably the Aquinas Library in Brisbane, whose valuable collection he arranged to have donated intact after its demise in 1991 to the Australian Catholic University. See his Obituary, *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), 24 April 2008.

⁶ Interview with Frank Hills, Tarragindi, Brisbane, April 2002.

Della Hills was not herself a bibliophile of the kind that her son became, but she enjoyed reading (magazines like the *Women's Weekly* as well as books), and was a regular and frequent patron of the local circulating library. This last fact may account for a slightly odd feature of her collection, which is that while it contains many works by popular contemporary novelists, they are usually not their most popular or well-known books. This suggests that having developed a taste for a particular author by borrowing his or her best-known book or books from the local library, she then pursued her interest in those authors by purchasing copies of the less popular titles which the library did not hold.⁷

Della influenced Frank in his strong inclination towards reading in general, and to some extent in his early reading preferences. For that reason her modest collection can and will be related to her son's very much larger collection, which forms part of its physical and historical context. But the smaller collection, with its lack of annotations, commentaries, or purchase records – with only some ambiguous marks of use, some inscriptions, and a few tipped-in review clippings – deserves careful consideration in its own right. Its position in her son's family home, and its preservation as a separate entity over many decades imply a function or functions above and beyond the books themselves.

Della's birth name was Bridget Mary Clancy, and she was born in Ireland, in Kilrush, County Clare, in 1893. She received little formal education, probably nothing beyond eighth-grade equivalent. In 1915, at the age of 23, she emigrated to Brisbane with a younger sister on the *SS Waipari*, and took a job behind the bar at Owen O'Donoghue's Shamrock Hotel in Fortitude Valley. She worked in the hotel industry for several years during which time she was able to help the remaining members of her immediate family to join her in Australia. In 1927 she married Frank's father, an English immigrant who also worked in the hotel industry, and they set up house together in the Brisbane suburb of Annerley. Frank, born three years later, was their only child.⁸

This is probably as far down the biographical track as we need to travel, except to say that Della was a devout Roman Catholic all her life; that she was proud of her

⁷ In this way, she might have escaped the situation described by Q.D. Leavis in which the borrowing 'routine' for most ordinary patrons of London circulating libraries between the Wars involved having their 'next book' determined for them by the library assistant. Q.D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1932), pp. 6-7.

⁸ Interview with Frank Hills, April 2002.

Irish-ness (not in a radical or even political way, though one of her brothers served time in prison during the ‘Troubles’ of the early 1920s); that she considered Australia to be, in her words, 'a mighty country'; and that she passed away, full of years – 91 of them, to be precise – in 1984. There is nothing remarkable or unusual in such a life. Indeed it can quite properly be regarded – and was regarded by her son – as ‘typical’ for an Irish-Australian Catholic working-class woman in Brisbane in the first half of the 20th century. And the library she acquired in the course of her life is the more unusual as an object of study precisely because, in its relative paucity of reading-evidence, it is entirely unexceptional. As Simon Eliot once observed (perhaps overstating the case a little, but the paradox is real), ‘any reading documented in an historically recoverable way is, almost by definition, an exceptional recording of an uncharacteristic event by an untypical person;’ to that extent such reading-records may not be very revealing of broader social patterns of reading behaviour.⁹

Della Hills’s library comprised 73 books in all. They are listed in the Appendix, in the order in which they stood on the shelves, to which I attribute no particular significance: moving books and bookcase from one house to another in 1984 presumably meant that the grouping of multiple titles by the same author reflected Frank’s notion of bibliographic orderliness rather than his mother’s. For each book I have provided a reference number, a year of first edition in round parentheses (included merely for historical identification), a year or decade of known or conjectured acquisition in square brackets and bold type, the derivation of which will be explained more fully below, and, for some of them, a ‘gift notation’ (GS, GG), the meaning of which will also be explained shortly.

How, then, might this collection be analysed into its component parts? As can readily be seen, several kinds of groupings are possible: the most obvious (given the ‘found’ shelving) is by author. There are four novels by the popular romance novelist Ethel M. Dell. No other author is quite as well represented as this, but there are several authors with three titles each, and they are not all of the same type: Anne Duffield (an English writer of light romantic upper middle class fiction from the

⁹ Simon Eliot, 'The Reading Experience Database; or, What Are We To Do about the History of Reading?' distributed on sharp-l@iubvm.ucs.indiana.edu (electronic discussion group sponsored by the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing), 21 July 1994; archive available at listserv@iubvm.ucs.indiana.edu. Quoted in Alison Scott, "'The Cultivated Mind": Reading and Identity in a Nineteenth-Century Reader', in *Reading Acts: U.S. Readers' Interactions with Literature, 1880-1950*, edited by Barbara Ryan and Amy M. Thomas (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002), p.31.

1940s); Gene Stratton Porter (a popular woman writer of sentimental North American backwoods adventures); A. J. Cronin, Daphne Du Maurier, Catherine Gaskin and Herbert Jenkins (English author of a series of humorous novels about the Cockney Bindle family). Some authors are represented by two titles: D.E.Stevenson (a hugely prolific English romance writer), Isabel C. Clarke (a militantly Catholic romance novelist), Jeffrey Farnol (author of picaresque swashbucklers set in the Regency) , Lucy M. Montgomery (Canadian author of the ‘Anne of Green Gables’ novels), Louisa May Alcott, and Alden Hatch (a biographer of 20th century popes). And just over half the library – about forty books – are by authors whose names appear only once: they include Marcus Clarke, John Galsworthy, Baroness Orczy (not a ‘Scarlet Pimpernel’ novel), Ruth Park, Rachel Field, Ernestine Hill, R.D.Blackmore, Joan Conquest, Paul Gallico, Zane Grey, Bernard O'Reilly and Canon Sheehan.

Some provisional generalisations seem possible. The thirteen novels by Dell, Duffield, Du Maurier and Gaskin, for example, might suggest a predilection for romance fiction, but they exemplify four very different kinds of romance, and most of the other authors in the library are not romance writers by any definition. One could reshuffle the collection according to other immanent criteria – by period or by nationality, for example, rather than by author – and one would find a similar diversity. Not an unlimited diversity, by any means: there are many kinds of texts and many famous authors that are simply not there – no Shakespeare, no Dickens, no Austen, no Brontes, no poetry or drama – and, with one exception (Gaboriau, a translation from the French) – only English-language nationalities; and nothing earlier than nineteenth century. But the diversity is still sufficient to make it difficult to characterise the collection in terms of some unifying synthesis of the qualities of the books as texts that might in turn enable us to construct generalisations except of the most banal kind either about Della Hills’s individual reading tastes or consciousness. Jill Roe has observed that the biographer’s ‘main concern must be with what light the library casts on the life, especially the life of the mind,’¹⁰ and this approach has stood her in good stead in her study of Miles Franklin. But the library of a writer, especially one as thoughtful and productive as Franklin (and comprising nearly a thousand volumes) offers very different opportunities for meaningful psychological synthesis.

¹⁰ Jill Roe, 'Miles Franklin's Library', in *Books, Readers, Reading* (1992), p.52.

The historian of 'ordinary' reading and readers cannot afford to be tongue-tied in the absence of evidence of that quantity and quality.

But how else, we might ask, is it possible to connect this complex cultural artefact – Della Hills's personal library – with the history that produced it, if not through the books as textual expressions of their owner's subjectivity? One other possibility is to think about the books not primarily as texts but as acquisitions. That shift of perspective enables us to conceptualise the library as a repository of accumulated knowledge and wisdom – in short, as cultural capital. But its content – decidedly un-canonical, mainly popular or middlebrow, and recreational rather than edifying – makes this a difficult concept to deploy, at least in its usual form. There is an almost complete absence not only of canonical books themselves (the only possible exceptions are Lorna Doone, *Little Women* and *His Natural Life*), but also of any of the digests, outlines, abridgments or advice books about the classics that were so popular in the first half of last century.¹¹ This feature of the collection tends to disable the familiar Victorian bootstrap narrative of ethical and cultural self-improvement through reading (so well evoked and exemplified by Jonathan Rose in his magisterial study of the British working class readers of the 19th and early 20th centuries).¹² It does not, on the other hand, quite rule out the possibility of seeing the process as self-involving: not so much fashioning the self, perhaps, as 'completing the self', a phrase used by the anthropologist Grant McCracken to describe the 'cultural project' of consumption in general.¹³

Considering the books as purchases enables us to construct a rough chronology of acquisition. This cannot be done with precision: unlike her son, Della did not record her purchases as and when they were made,¹⁴ nor, when she inscribed the books with her own name and address, as she did on about half of them – 'D. Hills, Chester Road, Annerley' – did she date the inscription. But the dates of most of these imprints provide a probable approximation of date of purchase, allowing for the fact that books

¹¹ Patrick Buckridge, 'Reading the Classics in Australia: Great Books Anthologies, 1900-1960,' *Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand Bulletin*, 23 #1 (1999), 38-48.

¹² Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the English Working Class* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

¹³ Grant McCracken, *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1988), p.71.

¹⁴ Frank Hills, by contrast, kept a continuous handwritten record of his book purchases from the age of seventeen into late middle age.

were kept on the shelves by booksellers for longer periods than they are today.¹⁵ Secondhand books and library discards would obviously distort a chronology so derived, but there seem to be only two or three of these in the collection (tagged as such on the list). On the whole, Della seems to have preferred, and been able to afford, to buy new books.

A further aid to constructing a chronology of acquisition is the fact that about a third of the books are gifts, mainly birthday or Christmas gifts. Most are from her son (tagged GS), a few from a favourite niece, and the rest from Frank's own children to their grandmother some decades later (tagged GG). These books are all inscribed and dated by the givers, and Della did not add her own inscription to them.

These gift-inscriptions do double duty. They not only contribute, together with the imprint dates, to a chronology of acquisition; they also help to map the mode of acquisition, which is to say their immediate provenance – whether Della bought them for herself or received them as gifts from her son, grandchildren, or other relatives. Combining these two axes of acquisition – chronology and provenance – and projecting them onto the books as texts, can reveal some interesting patterns.

The largest chronological concentration is of books published in the late 1920s. Frank, born in 1930, was unable to confirm this directly, but it seems likely that, while a handful of books pre-date her marriage in 1927 (10,17, 60), Della went on something of a book-buying spree in the first few years after that happy event. Presumably the new purchases – added to the circulating library fare – functioned partly as entertainment for a new, perhaps slightly bored housewife who had stopped working at a full-time, social, and responsible job after twelve years; and partly as furnishings for a new home. Specifically, the books purchased at this time (late 1920s-early 1930s) include all the Ethel Dells and some of the other romances, the pioneering and adventure tales set in Africa and North America, the two ‘Anne of Green Gables’ novels, a couple of books with sentimental-Irish themes, Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* and *Good Wives*, and Marcus Clarke's *For the Term of His Natural Life*. There are others in the same cluster, but even these suggest an interesting range of personal ‘use-values’ for the books she bought (and presumably

¹⁵ A key factor in determining display periods for books was the opportunity for booksellers to return unsold books to the publisher for credit. This became more common after the Second World War. For the history of book returns policy in Australia, see Lorien Kaye and Katya Johanson, ‘Publishing and Bookselling’ in *Making Books: Contemporary Australian Publishing*, edited by David Carter and Anne Galligan (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2007), pp. 68-80.

borrowed) at this particular time. These might be listed as follows (numerals in square brackets are keyed to the Appendix):

- Expanding her geographical and historical knowledge and imagination (9, 11-13, 18, 33, 34, 43]
- Affirming her own personal past and ethnic identity [10, 35, 44, 50]
- Reflecting on her Catholic faith [7,8, 50]
- Exploring her emotional needs and sexual desires (in the highly mediated terms available to an ordinary woman of her religious and social background) [16, 18, 19-22, 33, 61]¹⁶
- Discovering the history of her adopted country. [39, 70]
- Indulging a taste for broad British humour [42, 71-73]

The above allocations of books to use-values are not exclusive. Some books might have answered to more than one need, and the categories themselves are not rigorously distinct; but they are sufficiently so, I believe, to indicate a genuine range of different ways in which these books – and others like them which she would also have read – would have been serviceable to her in her early married life as an ‘ordinary’ woman of a certain class, culture and ethnic background placed in a particular, but by no means unique, combination of social, cultural and historical circumstances.

Her later acquisitions, in the 1940s and 1950s mainly, are more thinly distributed, but seem to reflect a developing interest in darker, more historically-grounded styles of romance fiction: the mystery thrillers of Daphne Du Maurier, and the historical family sagas of Catherine Gaskin. There is also some evidence, in the 1950s, of an impulse to affirm the continuities in her life, by re-purchasing books read twenty or thirty years earlier.

The gift-books fall into two main groups: those given to her by her son Frank, which begin in the 1940s, and those given by her grandchildren, which begin in the 1960s. Frank's gifts, all through the 1940s and 1950s, are generated by the existing stock: that is, he bought new or different books by authors his mother already owned (novels by Duffield, Du Maurier, and Gaskin, for example), or else books of a type he

¹⁶ One of the Ethel Dell novels contains a newspaper clipping of an article from the 1950s arguing that Dell's romances were full of repressed sexual desire.

knew she liked (for example books with a touch of Asian exoticism). In that sense he was perhaps extending or amplifying the 'reading self' he found already quite strongly delineated in her own book-purchases.

The grandchildren's gifts speak of a somewhat different relationship to Della. They include most of the religious non-fiction – the papal biographies, fictionalised versions of New Testament stories, and some modern saints' lives – and most of the Irish books: several biographies of Irish men of note. The self being assumed or, as it were, 'donated' to Della by the grandchildren's gifts is more generic, more familial, more 'tribal', than her son's gifts, which donate or contribute to the more fragmented self-in-process embodied in Della's own purchases. Yet both might be seen as reciprocating the different selves or identities they received, and were continuing to receive, from her: in the case of the grandchildren this was the familial self of the benevolent matriarch – and also, less personally, the ethnic or 'tribal' identity of the exemplary Irish Catholic old lady. In the case of her son Frank, it was the mothering and mentoring identity of the parent.

As the last few sentences indicate, I have found that the language of 'gift theory' can provide a useful perspective on the everyday acts of giving and receiving books that occur within many families in modern Western societies. The notion of the gift has been extended and elaborated in various different directions in the last half century: into cultural anthropology (Mauss, 1954), medical policy (Titmuss, 1970), economic anthropology (Sahlins, 1972), the creative arts (Hyde, 1983), gender studies (Weiner, 1992), business studies (Godbout, 1998), the information economy (Frow, 1996), and others.¹⁷ None of this work engages much with the quotidian, apparently straightforward giving and receiving of books within the modern extended family. As John Frow remarks – after considering, and criticizing, claims to the contrary – neither the modern state nor the modern marketplace is a true 'gift domain', despite occasional appearances to the contrary: 'In any strict sense, the concept of gift is

¹⁷ This is not the place to attempt an adequate overview of a vast literature the gift. Some of the key contributors to it have been Marcel Mauss (whose classic essay *The Gift* (1923) was first translated into English in 1954, and from then on became a common (though not uncontested) reference point for nearly all subsequent gift scholarship (Mauss, *The Gift: the Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London: Routledge, 2002), Richard Titmuss, *The Gift Relationship: from Human Blood to Social Policy* (London: Geo. Allen & Unwin, 1970), Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (Chicago: Aldine Transaction, 1972), Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic life of Property* (New York: Vintage, 1983), Annette B. Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-while-Giving* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), Jacques Godbout, et al., *The World of the Gift*, trans. Donald Winkler (Montreal; London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998)), John Frow, 'Information as Gift and Commodity' *New Left Review*, 1/219 (Sept-Oct, 1996), 89-108.

irrelevant to the structural understanding of modern societies, with the exception of the micro-level of everyday life.’¹⁸

At precisely that level, however, gift-exchange has been as important an element of social existence in the last hundred years as it was in earlier historical periods when the gift economy – mainly in the form of patronage or the quest for it – was also a significant part of the ‘public sphere’. The kind and degree of continuity between earlier and later gift cultures is a subject of ongoing debate, and books have a special significance as gifts in this context. Recent studies of books as gifts in early modern Europe, notably those of Natalie Zemon Davis¹⁹ and Jason Scott-Warren,²⁰ embedded as they are in the courtly occasions and aristocratic cultures of the Renaissance, would not seem to be readily translatable to the very different social situations and family relations I have been describing. Davis, however, would not necessarily agree: she argues that the ‘spirit of the gift’ – that is to say, the quasi-magical supplement of virtue that the gift-object accumulates in its passage through successive giftings and reciprocities – remained active for longer in books than in other gift-objects because books retained something of the medieval association with knowledge which, as the gift of God, was common property and so could not be sold.²¹ Even after the advent of print technology (her argument runs) with its massively increased edition sizes and its embryonic arrangements for marketing books as commodities, and in the great variety of gift-relations in which books played a part, ‘the book was a privileged object that resisted permanent appropriation and which it was especially wrong to view only as a source of profit.’²² Some residue of this special quality, she argues, continues to influence (at least) the ethos of the antiquarian’s library and the preferences of the modern book collector.²³

Scott-Warren is critical of Davis’s acceptance of what he calls a ‘hard-and-fast dichotomy between early modern gift and market economies’ which he attributes to her reliance on economic anthropologists like Marcel Mauss.²⁴ Indeed, Davis is even

¹⁸ Frow, ‘Information as Gift and Commodity,’ 108.

¹⁹ Natalie Zemon Davis, ‘Beyond the Market: Books as Gifts in Sixteenth Century France,’ *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 33 (1983), 69-88; and *The Gift in Sixteenth Century France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000).

²⁰ Jason Scott-Warren, *Sir John Harington and the Book as Gift* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

²¹ Davis, ‘Beyond the Market,’ 70-73.

²² *Ibid.*, 87.

²³ Scott-Warren, p. 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

mildly sympathetic to the erotic idealism of Lewis Hyde and Georges Bataille who credit the gift-dynamic with untold potentialities for creating communal involvement and social harmony, benefits that the commodity marketplace can never produce.²⁵ Like Frow, Scott-Warren sets out to show, by careful analysis of concrete instances – in this case the gift-books of Sir John Harrington – that resemblances to the traditional gift-economy are more apparent than real, and merely serve to disguise the self-fashioning motives and self-promoting actions of an individual courtier in a relentlessly commercial environment.²⁶

Whether or not the two-way ‘porosity’ Scott-Warren finds in the early modern relationship between gifted and marketed books survives into the 20th century in a recognizable form, one thing is very clear, and that is that by that stage the ‘gift-book’ had become an integral part of the commercial book trade proper. In 1927, the year of Della Hills’s marriage, the following advertisement appeared in *The Muses’ Magazine*, a magazine devoted to the discussion of science and the arts in Brisbane:

Give a Book~

There is something most "personal" about the gift of a book. It expresses, as perhaps nothing else can, your esteem for the recipient. Our shelves and show tables are laden with the choicest and most beautiful books in general literature, poetry, travel, etc. All the latest and best novels are also included in the showing. Annuals and books, suitable gifts for girls and boys. We shall be delighted to have you call and inspect our stock. You may stroll around at your own sweet will and choose the books you like best.

OUR PRICES, TOO, WILL PLEASE YOU."

QUEENSLAND BOOK DEPOT

ALBERT STREET, BRISBANE.²⁷

We might be tempted to see such a text as proof positive that the ‘gift-hood’ of books had been irrevocably commodified and co-opted, leaving nothing but the empty husk of an ideal pre-market order of property exchange. But this is surely to miss two important points: first, that the rhetoric of the advertisement both invokes and evokes – calls upon and calls forth – powerful ideas and feelings about the nature and value of gift-exchange which are clearly still present and available to communal consciousness; and second, that however the object is initially acquired, its transmission as a gift from that point on is in principle unaffected and

²⁵ Davis, *The Gift*, p. 132

²⁶ Scott-Warren, *passim*.

²⁷ Advertisement for the Queensland Book Depot, *The Muses’ Magazine* (Brisbane), Vol. 2 (1 Dec 1927), 13.

‘uncontaminated’ by its commercial origin. No less than in traditional societies, modern gift-exchange within families is capable of nourishing affective bonds between individuals, premised on the mutual affirmation of valued roles, relationships and aspirations, and of entering into the same cycle of giving, receiving and reciprocation as that described by cultural anthropologists like Mauss and Hyde.²⁸

I earlier indicated one way in which it might be useful to think about the actual gift-books in Della Hills’s library in these terms, as representing not acts of primary giving but acts of reciprocation for a more intangible but socially and situationally differentiated range of anterior gifts, those of the recipient's personal and generic selves to the donors. There may be some potential for elaborating, on this basis, a set of connections between family relations – not just fixed genetic relations, but changing, affective ones – and acts of book-giving. The challenge would be to find ways, within this sort of analysis, to recognise the special characteristics of books as gifts in these interpersonal transactions; and here is where cultural, religious, ethnic and educational factors would become crucial. It is these factors, after all, that determine the nature and value attributed to books as cultural objects, which in turn influence how they function as gifts – and also how they can malfunction, and what steps might need to be taken to prevent or remedy that. Natalie Davis, in a chapter entitled ‘Gifts Gone Wrong,’ examines some of the ways in which miscalculated or malicious or even well-intended gifts could cause embarrassment, humiliation, suffering and even deadly conflict in sixteenth-century French society.²⁹ And the potential for the cycle of donation and obligatory reciprocity to be used for hostile purposes has long been a recognized theme in traditional anthropology.³⁰

In the case of this particular family, the Hillses, it is difficult to imagine that the exchange of gifts ever took on that darker tinge, but in families where tension, conflict, resentment and mutual suspicion are rife – and they are not rare! – it is easy to envisage the gift-cycle as a quite effective means of provoking, entrenching and exacerbating division and discord. It is important, I think, to acknowledge that both possibilities (clearly not equal possibilities) have survived into the family gift-culture of the last hundred years; and this is as true for books as for other gifts. In the modern

²⁸ See especially Hyde, *The Gift*, Chapter 4 ‘The Bond’, and Chapter 5 ‘The Gift Community’, pp. 58-94.

²⁹ Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth Century France*, pp. 67-84.

³⁰ See, for example, discussions by Mauss (2002) and others of the widespread institution of the ‘potlatch’ among Pacific and North American indigenous peoples.

period, what perhaps distinguishes the gift of a book from most other material gifts, is the added edge of uncertainty and unpredictability, not just in its immediate reception, but in its effect when read. Everything from genuine inspiration to dutiful boredom is a real possibility for the recipient, even for a papal biography; and the possibilities for an Ethel Dell romance are even more daunting to the donor.

The simple act of giving a book is, or can be, 'utopian' in a quite complex way. Giving a book to someone may be less like saying 'I think you're worth this', or 'I think you're like this', and more like saying 'I believe you can rise to this' or – somewhat more ominously – 'I hope you can rise to this.' Full acceptance of such a gift involves both reading and keeping the book – in Della's case, in the silky-oak bookcase – and brings the transaction to a satisfactory and successful close.

Analysis of this kind can help to model the familial functions of a library like Della Hills's. It may even be of some use in understanding certain aspects of her son Frank's much larger personal library, in which some of the books are of course inscribed gifts, including some from his mother. Indeed it may not be too fanciful to suggest that the relationship between the two libraries was itself gift-like in the sense that they interacted symbolically, as gift and reciprocal gift, in a dynamic memorial to the mother's initiating contribution to her son's burgeoning interest in, and relationships with books for the rest of his life.

The gift analysis does not, on the face of it, seem to tell us much about Della's own purchases which, it will be remembered, comprise over half of her library. It may be possible, however – without forcing the issue too much – to enclose even this portion of the collection within the circle of the gift. This would be done by extending the idea of the gift-cycle a little beyond its literal meaning in order to see the individual's own book purchases as acts of giving-to-oneself, thereby triggering the sequence of donation and reciprocity. Buying yourself a book, in other words, can be seen as the equivalent of giving yourself a present – a familiar enough advertising trope, undoubtedly, but one that 'works' partly because it draws on something real and probably transhistorical in human experience, namely the 'self-fashioning,' 'self-completing' or 'self-dilating' impulse by which individuals first frame and then rise to conceptions of their own emotional, ethical and cognitive development in a dialectic of 'self-division' leading to reconciliations on a higher plane. The most sophisticated account of this process is probably that by Carl Jung, in his discussion of the 'inner

friend' with whom the self enters into dialogue: 'The gift to oneself ... refers to the inner friend, since giving implies a duality, a donor and recipient.'³¹

This leads, in turn, to a slightly different way of contextualising Della's book purchases of the 1920s and early 1930s. The half-dozen 'use values' I referred to earlier, to which I suggested that most of the books she bought at that time could be related, might now be seen, using gift theory, as a set of expectations she posed to herself, and no doubt responded to, by the mechanism of 'self-donation' – by buying and giving herself books. The pleasure, knowledge and inspiration she received from herself, through books, in those early years of her marriage returned to her, in two successive cycles of reciprocity in her later years; and these too are recorded on the shelves of the bookcase.

³¹ Mary Henle, 'Some Aspects of the Phenomenology of the Personality,' first published in *Psychologische Beiträge*, Band VI, Heft 3-4, 1962, S. 395-404. <http://www.gestalttheory.net/archive/henlpers.html> [accessed 30 Jan 2012]. A more remote analogue can be found in the area of blood-donation. See 'Blood Banks, Risk and Autologous Donation: The Gift of Blood to Oneself,' in Catherine Waldby and Robert Mitchell, *Tissue Economies: Blood, Organs and Cell Lines in Late Capitalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), pp.35-58.

APPENDIX

Catalogue of the Library of Bridget Mary (Della) Hills, née Clancy (1893-1984)

Dates in round parentheses indicate the year of the first edition.

Dates in square brackets, bold, indicate either the known year of acquisition, or the year of the imprint. (Uninscribed books with no date of imprint are given as 'n.d.').

GS = Gift from son

GG = Gift from grandchildren

1. Bernard O'Reilly, Green Mountains (1940) [1948]
2. Anne Duffield, Out of the Shadows (1944) [1945]
3. Anne Duffield, Taffy Came to Cairo (1944) [1945] GS
4. Anne Duffield, Song of the Mocking Bird (1946) [1948] GS
5. D.E.Stevenson, The Two Mrs. Abbots (1943) [1945] GS
6. D.E.Stevenson, Celia's House (1943) [1944]
7. Isabel C. Clarke, We That Are Left (1929) [1930s]
8. Isabel C. Clarke, Young Cymbeline (1917) [1920s]
9. Gertrude Page, Far from the Limelight (1918) [1925]
10. Allen Raine, Torn Sails: A Tale of a Welsh Village (1898) [n.d.]
11. Gene Stratton Porter, Freckles (1904) [1927]
12. Gene Stratton Porter, A Girl of the Limberlost (1911) [1927]
13. Gene Stratton Porter, Laddie (1913) [1927]
14. Mary Purcell, Matt Talbot and His Times (1954) [1963] GG
15. Christine Chaundler, Just Gerry (1920) [1920s]
16. Margaret Peterson, Dust of Desire (1922) [1923]
17. R.D.Blackmore, Lorna Doone (1869) [n.d.]
18. Joan Conquest, Forbidden (1927) [1928]
19. Ethel M. Dell, The Top of the World (1920) [1928]
20. Ethel M. Dell, Charles Rex (1922) [n.d.]
21. Ethel M. Dell, The Keeper of the Door (1915) [1927]
22. Ethel M. Dell, The Way of an Eagle (1912) [1927]
23. Louis Bromfield, The Rains Came (1937) [1941] GS
24. Jane Lindsay, Trip No Further (1930) [1930]
25. A.J.Cronin, The Keys of the Kingdom (1942) [1948]
26. A.J.Cronin, Shannon's Way (1948) [1948] GS
27. A.J.Cronin, The Green Years (1945) [1948] GS
28. Ruth Park, Pink Flannel (1955) [1955]
29. Lily McCormack, I Hear You Calling Me (1950) [1952]
30. Baroness Orczy, Meadowsweet (1912) [n.d.]
31. Jeffrey Farnol, The Broad Highway (1910) [1927]
32. Jeffrey Farnol, Peregrine's Progress (1922) [1927]
33. Robert Hichens, Bella Donna (1910) [1928]
34. Sheila Macdonald, Sally in Rhodesia (1927) [1928]
35. Gerald Griffin, The Collegian, or The Colleen Bawn (1857) [n.d.]
36. Zane Grey, The Roaring U. P. Trail (1918) [1935]
37. L.M.Montgomery, Anne's House of Dreams (1917) [1928]
38. L.M.Montgomery, Kilmeny of the Orchard (1910) [1928]
39. Marcus Clarke, For the Term of his Natural Life (1874) [1928]
40. John Galsworthy, Maid in Waiting (1931) [1938]

41. Paul Trent, *The Craven Mystery* (1929) [1929]
42. Seymour Hicks, *Chestnuts Reroasted* (1924) [n.d.]
43. Emil Gaboriau, *The Honour of the Name* (1920) [1930]
44. B.M.Crocker, *The Company's Servant* (1907) [n.d.]
45. Richard Llewellyn, *How Green Was My Valley?* (1939) [1949] GS
46. Alden Hatch, *His Name Was John* [John XXIII] (1963) [1964] GG
47. Alden Hatch, *Crown of Glory* [Pius XII] (1957) [1959] GG
48. L.M.Alcott, *Little Women* (1868) [1928]
49. L.M.Alcott, *Good Wives* (1869) [1928]
50. Canon Sheehan, *Miriam Lucas* (1912) [1917] – secondhand
51. Canon Sheehan, *Miriam Lucas* (1955) [1963]
52. Joy Packer, *Valley of the Vines* (1955) [1957]
53. Rachel Field, *And Now Tomorrow* (1943) [1943]
54. Crosbie Garstin, *The Sunshine Settlers* (1918) [1919] – library discard
55. Paul Gallico, *The Steadfast Man: A Life of St. Patrick* (1954) [1963] GG
56. Vingie E. Roe, *Tharon of Lost Valley* (1920) [1927-8]
57. Daphne du Maurier, *Frenchman's Creek* (1941) [1949] GS
58. Daphne du Maurier, *Jamaica Inn* (1936) [1949]
59. Daphne du Maurier, *The Parasites* (1949) [1950] GS
60. Charles Clark Munn, *The Heart of Uncle Terry* (1900) [1915] – secondhand
61. Margaret Pedler, *Tomorrow's Tangle* (1926) [1927]
62. Elizabeth Goudge, *Green Dolphin Country* (1944) [1954]
63. E.Phillips Oppenheim, *A Lost Leader* (1906) [1930]
64. Audrey Erskine Lindop, *The Singer Not the Song* (1953) [1963] GG
65. Catherine Gaskin, *With Every Year* (1949) [1950] GS
66. Catherine Gaskin, *Sara Dane* (1954) [1955] GS
67. Catherine Gaskin, *This Other Eden* (1947) [1947] GS
68. Jim Bishop, *The Day Christ Died* (1957) [1965] GG
69. Joseph Brady, *The Big Sycamore* (1958) [1959]
70. Ernestine Hill, *My Love Must Wait* (1941) [1954] GS
71. Herbert Jenkins, *Mrs Bindle* (1922) [1927-8]
72. Herbert Jenkins, *The Night Club* (1918) [1927-8]
73. Herbert Jenkins, *The Bindles on the Rocks* (1924) [1927-8]

If the person you are gifting is not a reader (but make sure the book matches their interests), you can go with these liners, To the person who loves __, Fromâ€. Continue Reading. Hello Brij ParmarÂ The best idea is a personal message that strongly connects the book to your friend. For instance: if he is ambitious by nature and youâ€™re gifting him â€˜Steve Jobsâ€™, then Charles William Eliotâ€™s quote: â€œBooks are the quietest and most constant of friends; they are the most accessible and wisest of counselors, and the most patient of teachers.â€ may be apt.Â I usually get books as gifts, especially from my sister who has been spoiling me. She makes sure to either write or quote something meaningful related to that particular book.