

The Anthropology of the Book, beyond the Gift

Although 'the gift' has provided a useful rubric for thinking about the place of the book in the texture of social life, there are of course many other ways in which literary studies, the history of the book and anthropology might be brought into dialogue. This paper will explore the value of early modern diaries and inventories as sources for thinking about relationships between books, material things and identities in the period. Focusing on archival remains relating to Richard Stonley (c.1520-1601), the first documented reader of Shakespeare, it will argue that the inventory's enfolding of the textual within the material and the social poses questions about the nature of the book as a cultural artefact. With a glance ahead to the rather better-known case of Samuel Pepys, it will argue that some of those questions can be answered by thinking about the book's relationship with early modern identity as it was constructed through an individual's social and economic life, and documented in the emergent form of the diary.