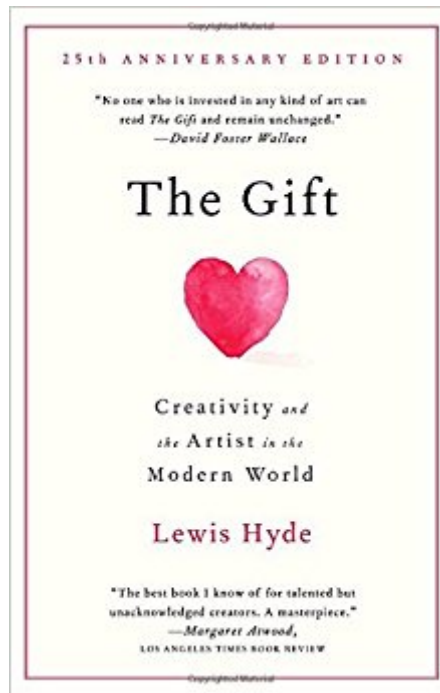


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The Gift: Creativity And The Artist In The Modern World



Synopsis

By now a modern classic, *The Gift* is a brilliantly orchestrated defense of the value of creativity and of its importance in a culture increasingly governed by money and overrun with commodities. Widely available again after twenty-five years, this book is even more necessary today than when it first appeared. An illuminating and transformative book, and completely original in its view of the world, *The Gift* is cherished by artists, writers, musicians, and thinkers. It is in itself a gift to all who discover the classic wisdom found in its pages.

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Customer Reviews

“The best book I know of for talented but unacknowledged creators. . . . A masterpiece.”
—Margaret Atwood
“No one who is invested in any kind of art . . . can read *The Gift* and remain unchanged.”
—David Foster Wallace
“Few books are such life-changers as *The Gift*: epiphany, in sculpted prose.”
—Jonathan Lethem
“A manifesto of sorts for anyone who makes art [and] cares for it.”
—Zadie Smith
“This long-awaited new edition of Lewis Hyde’s groundbreaking and influential study of creativity is a cause for across-the-board celebration.”
—Geoff Dyer

Lewis Hyde was born in Boston in 1945 and studied at both Minnesota and Iowa universities. His hugely acclaimed essay, “Alcohol and Poetry: John Berryman and the Booze Talking,” in part sprang out of his experiences as an alcoholism counselor, but he is also a highly regarded poet in

his own right whose poetry and essays have been widely published. He is a MacArthur Fellow, a former director of creative writing at Harvard and, alongside *The Gift*, he is the author of the equally acclaimed *Trickster Makes This World*. He lives in Ohio, where he is completing a third book.

Deserves a constellation of stars. I have read this book many times, and just recently read it again, and it is even better than I remembered. There is now an entire literature on the relationship between a gift economy and a market economy, spawned in part by work of Jacques Derrida and others in the higher reaches of theology (e.g. the grace of God as a gift). But this book was in there first, is still better to my mind, full of sudden insight, easy to read, beautifully written, life changing. The amusing thing is that the author is under the impression that it is about artists: that is a tiny fraction of its insight -- it is really an attack on the entire world view in which we operate, and opens up whole ranges of spiritual understanding. A well run society would send a free gift copy to everyone.

"It is an assumption of this book that art is a gift, not a commodity." Hyde opens his treatise on the nature of Art as a gift with anthropological studies of gift exchange coupled with folklore. The diverse sources provide an excellent depiction of the two economies in which the artist (and her art) must participate. One economy is the visible, capitalistic one of which we are all aware in a daily, accounting-ledger way. This is the economy of commerce, and Hyde traces the origins of capitalistic wealth and usury, plumbing the disconnect between the "evergreen value" of art and the banal "exhaustible" value of capitalistic wealth. In opposition is the second economy, that of the gift. The gift economy is spiritual in nature, and the primary difference between it and commercial economy is that grasping at or hoarding a gift destroys the gift economy. The gift must move to participate in the economy, and many of the folktales illustrate that treating a gift as a commodity results in loss, sorrow, or even death. Perhaps understanding how opposed such an economy is to our (Western) way of coalescing and amassing fortunes, Hyde provides a modern day example of the gift economy: Alcoholics Anonymous. In AA, the newcomer is taught that to keep the gift of sobriety, she must someday pass the gift of her hope, strength and experience to someone else. Like the gifts in the various anthropological studies, the value of the AA teachings are in the sharing of them, to wit the AA saying, "You have to give it away to keep it." In terms of an artist and her art, however, issues become blurry because there is the persistent need of the artist to clothe, feed, and shelter herself. If art is to be her living, how can she avoid killing the divinity of the gift and still traffic in it as a commodity? Hyde proposes that the artist must split herself into two modes of interacting with the

different economies. Whitman and Ezra Pound are presented as cases studies of (somewhat) modern artists encountering the modern world impinging on their gifts. Whitman, it seems, stayed truer to his gift whereas some unnamed disappointment led Pound to pervert his gift into a hateful ideology. Hyde's point here is that the artist, much like the ill-fated daughters of the opening folktale, will be damaged if he does not find a way to be true to his gift - despite all societal pressure to the contrary. A lost artist is one who cannot fulfill the gift by giving their art away, or who twist their art to some other purpose. This doesn't mean an artist must never accept money for her work, but that she must maintain the purity of her pursuit of producing and sharing the gift separate from her pursuit of money. How to do this, how to create and earn a living without subverting the nature of the gift? Hyde doesn't answer the question of how to preserve the gift in the modern world. Instead, he illustrates why it is imperiled by modern commerce. The epilog describes some common solutions for artists, including a long section on the rise and fall of American patronage (hint: it owes much to the Cold War). This section is the only place where the book, which was originally published in 1983, shows its age by failing to address the mechanism of crowdfunding. The employ of an agent is another common solution to the problem of working in two economies; the agent handles the commerce economy, thus freeing the artist to remain exclusively in the realm of the gift. The vast majority of modern artists, though, have solved the problem of money by having a "second job." As a writer myself, I love that Hyde puts the emphasis on the secondary nature of doing anything that is not a direct effort towards my gift and craft. **THE GIFT: CREATIVITY AND THE ARTIST IN THE MODERN WORLD** is a thought-provoking read for those who seek an understanding of the unseen forces that can cultivate or kill an artist's gift.

Lewis Hyde's latest version of "The Gift" is clearly a Masterpiece for human beings trapped and hypnotized by the modern world of commerce. It historically traces the differences between Commerce & Gift giving. It is not what we ordinary folks expect. Full of surprises and a must for any writer of fiction. It reveals the mystery of accessing the Creative Spirit within us all.

This is the classic book taking a look at the history, tradition types, and deeper meaning behind the act of gifting. It is a great asset to creative people looking to get in touch with a deeper sense of meaning when it comes to presenting their work to their audience, strangers, people of importance and people close to them. The book was hard to read for me because even though it is an important work, it spoke of a subject I was entirely unfamiliar with, and as I reread it, I realized a whole bunch of us are unfamiliar with a great and almost lost aspect of culture going back thousands of years. Of

course, not everybody looks at things as philosophically and culturally as I do, so read that into my review. Nonetheless, if you are a creator, or a culture fan, reading this will give you an amazing backdrop into the purpose, pleasure and reciprocation aspects of giving art, giving your gift of talent, and puts you in touch with how we all should be giving more, of all kinds of things to preserve the best parts of being human. Reviewingly yours, Arthur Hermansen The Lone Comic

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