

David Hume Collections at the McGill Library

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Consisting of a wide and varied range of manuscript and especially printed material, McGill has one of the largest collections of David Hume material in the world outside of Edinburgh. As an expert in the history of the book with a specific interest in the publication and reception history of Hume's works, McGill's collections are especially important in several ways. McGill holds an unusually large number of editions of Hume's principal works in various formats and sizes, providing scholars and students with an opportunity to study the evolution of his ideas in exceptional detail, appreciating how Hume responded in print to critical commentary and repackaged his works physically for new audiences. Manuscript letters to and from Hume provide explanatory detail on some of these changes, while also showing how Hume embraced his role as a leading member of the international 'republic of letters'. McGill holds multiple copies of the most prominent published commentaries on Hume's works, including Daniel McQueen's *Letters on Mr. Hume's History*, whose forensic arguments against two lengthy passages on the Reformation prompted Hume to expunge them from subsequent editions.

McGill's collections also open up different ways of studying Hume's reception. These include Hume's own efforts to cultivate literary celebrity, with no less than six stand-alone copies of Hume's 'My Own Life', and an important early printed edition of Hume's correspondence published by Henry Colburn in 1820. Hume's autobiographical sketch was intended to preface all posthumous editions of his *History of England* (thereby influencing how subsequent readers engaged with his work), but also circulated widely as a separate commemorative duodecimo. McGill's copies of 'My Own Life' demonstrate effectively some of the means by which readers could adapt texts for themselves, whether binding their copy with other relevant printed material of a similar size, or adapting the printed text with newspaper clippings and manuscript notations about Hume's life and death.

McGill's collection documents the wide transnational and transatlantic reception of Hume's ideas, including copies of early translations into French, German and Italian, not least an exceptionally rare sixteen-page pamphlet produced in Venice at the height of the campaign against the Jesuits in 1767, which excerpted Hume's account of the role of the Jesuits in the Gunpowder Plot. Unique surviving catalogues of subscription libraries in Montreal and Quebec from the 1780s and 90s show that Hume's works were widely available to readers of varying means in early Canada, while book stamps and manuscript inscriptions show that Hume's *History of England* remained a highly valued pedagogical text well into the nineteenth century. One copy was originally presented to the Osgoode Law Society in Toronto by William Warren Baldwin, a notable reforming politician and former treasurer of the society, from whence it eventually made its way into McGill's collections during the Second World War. Another copy of an early German edition evidently came from the library of a high school in Friedland, in Mecklenburg.

Finally, there are a wide range of manuscript and material traces of reader response in copies of Hume's works at McGill, ranging from juvenile doodles all the way through to detailed critical commentary in a copy of Hume's controversial *Dialogues of Natural Religion*. Although we are rarely able to identify the readers responsible for these

marginalia, they nevertheless reveal in often startling detail how Hume's original readers made sense of his ideas – and thereby complete the 'communications circuit' of Hume's works, from author to publisher, bookseller, reviewers, libraries, owners and readers.