

Forgotten Books and Cultural Memory

May 27–28, 2016, Taipei Tech

<https://forgottenbookstaipei.wordpress.com/>

Conference Theme

Literary history is full of forgetting—both forced and natural. Manuscripts and books have been forgotten as a result of conquest, language changes, and politics. Other texts have been forgotten due to their physical condition: sole manuscripts are hidden away in archives, libraries burn, and paper disintegrates. Many medieval texts that are now central to the English literary canon, such as *Beowulf*, *Piers Plowman*, and the *Book of Margery Kempe*, were virtually unknown until the nineteenth, or even twentieth, centuries. Later texts, from the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, have been forgotten due to changes in taste, to their originally ephemeral nature, or to the sheer quantity of works that were published. As Franco Moretti writes in “The Slaughterhouse of Literature,” “The majority of books disappear forever—and ‘majority’ actually misses the point: if we set today’s canon of nineteenth-century British novels at two hundred titles (which is a very high figure), they would still be only about 0.5 per cent of all published novels. . . . But . . . how can we [know twenty thousand novels?] What does ‘knowledge’ mean in this scenario?” (64–65, 66).

In this conference, we will investigate how the process of forgetting and remembering literary texts impacts cultural memory (at the local, national, and globalized level). We welcome papers that are descriptive: these papers may make a claim about how the process of forgetting and remembering a text has worked in a particular time or place, or they may describe the significance of still-forgotten genres and texts to literary history. We also welcome papers that are prescriptive: how can and should scholars or general readers approach once-forgotten or still-little known (or even unknowable) texts? How should these texts be understood and contextualized?

While most papers given at this conference will address literatures in English, and we hope to have several panels on texts from the medieval, early modern, eighteenth-century, Romantic, Victorian, and twentieth- and twenty-first century periods, we also welcome papers (in English) from scholars working on non-English texts, either Eastern or Western. As our conference is in Taipei, Taiwan, we particularly hope to organize several panels that address the forgetting and remembering of texts in interactions between the East and the West.

Call for Papers

Please see the list of topics below and **submit a 250–300 word abstract and the requested presenter information** in one Word or PDF file to <forgottenbookstaipei@gmail.com> by **Monday, February 1, 2016**.

We also have an early-consideration deadline, **Monday, January 4**, because we will have a significant number of papers from international scholars, who often have an earlier semester break and who may need more time to make long-distance travel plans. Anyone may choose to apply by the January 4 early deadline, and we will respond within two weeks of that date. Abstracts received after January 4 and before February 1 will be considered in early February with results sent by February 15. Papers will be limited to 20 minutes.

1. [Forgotten Books Abstract and Presenter Info Form](#)
2. [Forgotten Books and Cultural Memory Printable CFP](#)

Topics of papers may include (but are not limited to) the following:

- What is a forgotten book? How do we define the term?
- Contextualizing the forgotten book
- Recovering (or failing to adequately recover) literary history using digital methods, macroanalysis, distant reading, sampling, statistics, etc.
- Famous unrecoverable, unreadable books. (Books, influential in the past, that have been lost or destroyed and are now only known from summaries or excerpts quoted elsewhere)
- Books forgotten for decades or centuries that subsequently became key parts of the canon (*Beowulf*, *Piers Plowman*, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Blake's work, etc.)
- Books that have never been and should not be canonical but which tell us something important about literary history
- Once popular and influential books that have now been forgotten (or books and authors that were once greatly admired but are now usually read only by specialists)
- Once-popular forms and genres that have since gone out of fashion (e.g. miracle plays, epistolary novels, the blank verse epic, volumes of famous sermons, serialized fiction, clerical novels, three-volume novels, etc.). Papers may also address whether these genres have since reappeared in another form, e.g. modern equivalents to miracle and morality plays.
- Highly successful books that once languished unprinted, either in the authors' possession or in publishers' offices (e.g. *Northanger Abbey*)
- Particular unique manuscripts which had (or may still have) a limited number of readers, and these manuscripts' reception history
- The significance of books on esoteric subjects that have always had a limited appeal.
- Forced forgetfulness (when conflicts, revolutions [e.g. The French Revolution, China's Cultural Revolution], censorship, and changes in government have made publishing or procuring certain kinds of books difficult).
- The significance of forgotten or nearly-forgotten Mandarin, Japanese, Taiwanese, Hakka, aboriginal-language, and English texts in Taiwanese history.
- Politically motivated remembering or forgetting
- Books written by marginalized authors and/or communities
- Transported/Transplanted books. Books originally written in one place for one culture that, while forgotten or ignored by that culture, have become influential in another place and/or time. Similarly, books that are more popular in translation than they ever were in their original language.
- The reception history of translations of works that were highly successful in one country, were translated to meet a particular interest or need in another country, and have since been forgotten either in their original or in their translated form.
- Academic monographs as forgotten books
- Marketing's effect on the loss or survival of books (e.g. *The Great Gatsby*'s increase in popularity after World War II [*When Books Went to War*]). Papers may address the creation of readership markets or books that failed to fit prescribed markets.
- Film adaptations as (in part) erasure of the text they adapt.
- The effect of the internet, e-readers, or other technology on literary memory and books' survival.

Keynote Speakers

James Mussell is Associate Professor in Victorian Literature at the University of Leeds. He specialises in nineteenth-century print culture, focusing particularly on the place of historical printed objects in the digital present. His first book, *Science, Time and Space in the Late Nineteenth-Century Periodical Press* (2007), examined the way that periodical publication structured science in the period. His second, *The Nineteenth-Century Press in the Digital Age* (2012), extended this analysis to consider what happens to newspapers and periodicals when digitized. This book came out of his work on *Nineteenth-Century Serials Edition*, a digital edition of six periodicals and newspapers published in 2008. Recently, Jim has published widely on different aspects of print and digital culture, as well as returning to science with a research project on the physicist and spiritualist, Oliver Lodge. His current project, *Whispers of Print*, uses the figure of the secret to examine what print tells us other than what it says.

Rebecca Krug is Associate Professor at the University of Minnesota, where she specializes in late medieval English literature and culture. She is the author of *Reading Families: Women's Literate Practice in Late Medieval England* (Cornell University Press, 2002) and of a number of essays, including recent pieces in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Culture* and in *A Cultural History of Gardens in the Medieval Age*. Her forthcoming book is entitled *Margery Kempe and the Lonely Reader*. She is particularly interested in forgotten readers and why they matter.