Imagining Lost Literature— Some Preliminary Considerations on Literary Extinction

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Abstract

This paper examines how textual losses function as a creative space for reimagining the literary-historical past and promoting textual endurance. Research focused on book history has come up with new tools for studying destroyed books, but this article devises an alternative approach that investigates how textual losses invite fictitious supplements and creative rewritings. By focusing on three modes of textual loss—poetic fragments, intentionally constructed gaps, and extinct genres—this paper demonstrates how authors such as Ezra Pound have creatively engaged with literary forms of lostness. The paper suggests that much more work can be done on conceiving silences, losses, gaps and deaths within the realm of literature.

Literary history is usually written from the perspective of surviving works, although history is full of various modes of loss and disappearance—stolen manuscripts, text fragments, unwritten works, abandoned book projects. Think, for example, of an unwritten book: a planned, expected, and dreamed book, which may even have been mentioned in book catalogues somewhere, but was never written or published. Abandoned projects are like a void that can no longer be filled except by imagining.

This paper aims to present the trope of loss and disappearance as one possible and imaginative perspective on literary history. Forgotten books can be rediscovered in antiquarian bookshops or remote libraries (Russell), but some of the works have been destroyed for good. Disappearance has been influenced by different factors in history, such as fires, wars, chance or (self-)censorship. In (library) fires and wars, countless amounts of culture have been lost or destroyed (on lost libraries, see Raven). Other reasons include changes in literary taste and literacy, a decline in language skills and oral culture, secularization, globalization, modernization, technology, other changes in trends, the canon or the ethical environment, the book market and economic fluctuations. Given the ubiquity of disappearance, this paper suggests that instead of focusing on the surviving texts, we should also look at literary history from the perspective of weakness and loss. How can we examine and write about dying literature and literary losses? And, what would literary history look like if, instead of strong and preserved works, we focused on weak and lost works?

The study of lost literature is not an established or clearly defined field of research but one that consists of a variety of possible approaches. Recently, research on lost literature has been developed in book history by focusing on individual destroyed books (Bruni & Pettegree) or the role of libraries and monasteries in the preservation of medieval texts (Haye). Lost volumes can be found in bookstore catalogues, book advertisements, sales lists, and auction catalogues, or by comparing old

bibliographies with modern library catalogues.[1] Digital methods are also helpful when tracing individual lost works or editions (Bruni & Pettegree) or aiming for comprehensive encyclopedic information or the reconstruction of entire time periods (see USTC database and its lost books at www.ustc.ac.uk).

Yet, what is largely missing from previous research is an alternative approach that would investigate how the loss and the gaps left in literary history spark the imagination and invite readers to supplement the losses with the help of creativity. This approach is based on the notion that the disappearance of literature can offer a space for actively imagining old forms, lost books, ancient manuscripts, and historical genres. Lost books have fascinated many writers and detective-like plot twists have been woven around them since Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*. The fictional forms of disappearance have varied from wrongly shelved works in Paul Auster's *Invisible* to the graveyard of forgotten books in Carlos Ruiz Zafón's *Shadow of the Wind*. In Auster's novel, for example, the main character who works at the Butler Library in New York misplaces a couple of books, next to each other, but only about 12 inches apart. This small mistake can have devastating effects: "If a book is put in the wrong place, it can be lost for twenty years or more, maybe forever. […] Put something in the wrong place, and even though it is still there—quite possibly smack under your nose—it can vanish for the rest of time" (102).[2] Ruiz Zafón's novel, for its part, presents a graveyard of forgotten books, where the books that no one remembers anymore and have been lost in the flow of time live forever and just wait to one day get into the hands of a new reader, a new soul. The novel suggests that every volume kept in the graveyard of forgotten books has a soul; it is the soul of its author and the soul of those who read it and lived and dreamed with it. Thus, every time a book passes from one hand

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1   By examining bibliographical evidence, we may encounter reprints of lost editions but also so-called ghosts, if the work is listed in the catalogues incorrectly (e.g., different editions may be listed as separate works; see Hill 17).

2   A similar event takes place in Jorge Luis Borges's short story "The Book of Sand", but this time a book is lost intentionally. The main character gets to read a monstrous book with an infinite number of pages, and he hides the book in a damp shelf of the National Library of Argentina. For absent textuality, invisible works, and imaginary fragments and manuscripts in Eco's work, Borges's Pierre Menard story and in Lovecraft's novels, see Braune 241-44.

to another and every time someone lets their eyes fly over its pages, its soul grows and strengthens. Such literary examples invite us to rethink literary history in terms of loss and disappearance. What forms of disappearance does literary history include? And how has disappearance inspired the literary imagination?

This paper sets out to offer preliminary perspectives on what the (re)-imagining of literary disappearance and its research could be like. To achieve this, it will focus on three modes of textual loss identified in (ancient) literature: poetic fragments, purposefully constructed textual losses, and extinct genres. The paper first explores ancient fragmentary poetry and how reading fragments requires special delicacy in filling in the gaps. Secondly, the paper demonstrates how fragments and gaps have provided fertile material for later rewritings for poets as Ezra Pound, who made particularly rich use of the different historical forms of disappearance in his poetry. Two of his poems are therefore studied here in more detail to illustrate his methods of intentionally rewriting textual losses and reimagining the past. Thirdly, the paper turns from textual fragments and gaps to lost literary genres, reading them as an analogy for the extinction of species in nature and commenting on the differences between these forms of extinction. In this section, the paper also suggests that understanding literature as cultural ecology—as has been recently suggested by the German ecocritic Hubert Zapf—opens new perspectives on the issues of textual sustainability. The concluding section highlights the central notion of this essay, namely that disappearance can contribute to textual durability in many imaginative ways. The sample materials are mainly from ancient literature and its rewritings (such as Pound), because disappearance concerns ancient (and medieval) literature on a large scale. What this paper aims to do is to suggest that disappearance is constitutive of literary history but—unlike losses of nature—literary losses can also provide continuity in literary history by way of allowing us to reimagine and rework lost texts.

Reading Ancient Fragments

It is a well-known fact that a large part of the works from Antiquity and the Middle Ages has been lost. We have no original manuscripts, ancient manuscripts, or the entire production of any ancient writer (except perhaps the productions of Plato, Virgil, or Horace). The loss of books was influenced by their use: a lot of occasional poetry and drama has been lost, while the works used in schools have proven more likely to survive. The more often the manuscript was copied in monastery libraries, the more likely it was preserved (Dewar). When pieces of literature died, whole worlds of knowledge became inaccessible to modern audiences.

One characteristic feature of ancient texts which have survived is their fragmentary nature: much of the surviving poetry has come down to us only in fragments.[3] Sappho's poetry is the most famous example of this phenomenon and includes many kinds of losses: we have lost both the performance and its context (her poems were presented at banquets, schools, and weddings). This development started already in Antiquity, when the ritual significance of archaic lyrics in war situations, religious festivals, harvest festivals, weddings, funerals, and sports competitions decreased, and the poems became 'just' poems in the Hellenistic period. Aristotle and Plato did no longer consider the performative context, but only concerned themselves with written poetry; instead of the social context, they emphasized mimesis and imitation of reality (see Ford 68). Along with the performative context, the music also disappeared, and songs became written poetry which survived largely only in fragments.

In her essay on Sappho's fragmentary poetry, Judith Schalansky makes clear that we can speak about Sappho only by using words of uncertainty: "some believe" or "others speculate" (119), because "we know nothing" (121) and every age creates "its own Sappho" (123) by rewriting her poetry and life. In modern editions, the missing words and gaps in the manuscripts can be marked with asterisks, zeros, blanks or three dots that have replaced papyrus holes. The three dots point to the loss of some text passage, but, as Schalansky (131) suggests, they can also be

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[3]   For fragments as open and infinite forms, see, e.g., Goebel & Koppenfels; for ancient fragments, see Most. For different forms of absences in ancient Roman literature, see Geue & Giusti.

reinterpreted as expressions of the unsaid, thoughts left open, something you do not want to say out loud, or, perhaps, even the truth left between the lines. In this regard, the role and responsibility of the reader as an interpreter of fragmentary texts becomes important. This dimension inspires one to ask—how much are we allowed to add to the lacunae documented in the poems?

In the case of ancient lost texts, we thus need to develop a special way of reading textual fragments. Matthew Wright, who has studied the lost tragedies of Antiquity, has proposed that 'reading' fragmentary texts is inherently different from reading complete texts. To describe such a reading process, one often must "unwrite literary history" (Wright xviii) and resort to metaphors or analogies, which depict the reading of fragments as "salvaging the flotsam from shipwrecks, or solving cross-words or jigsaw-puzzles, or interpreting dreams, or practising divination, or writing private poetry, or ghost-hunting, or solving crimes in the manner of Sherlock Holmes" (xxiii-xxiv). In this process, the reader becomes a writer as she constantly completes what she reads and fills in the gaps between the fragments.

As Wright (xxv) notes, disappearance makes even an experienced researcher tell their favorite stories about loss, and this temptation is worth admitting openly: disappearance sets our imagination in motion. The ambiguities created by the fragmentary form place certain demands and obligations on the researcher: interpretations must actively make room for alternative and competing views (Wright xxvi). In addition to considering alternative interpretations, conditional expressions such as 'maybe', 'probably', or 'possibly' should be used abundantly to avoid any kind of dogmatism (see also Haye 13). The study of lost literature thus enables an open examination of different development trajectories, from which only possible and suggestive conclusions can be drawn.

Rewriting Textual Losses

While being traces of larger writings, fragments and other textual losses spark the literary-historical imagination and invite us to reinvent the literary-historical past. We complement the lost whole with various

continuations, sequels, and adaptations by imitating lost passages, or, as it were, by 'fixing' parts of the literary torso. This perspective co-incides with Sean Braune (240) who approaches fragments in Jacques Derrida's sense as potential wholes, because fragments can create imaginary totalities and virtual plenitudes around them. Braune claims that the fragmentary form evokes multiple potential significations and "supplemental textualities" (253) which lie at the heart of creative textual production.

The imaginary space can thus be filled with supplementary textuali-ties evoked by historical fragments. In fact, some early modern authors and philologists already took this imitation seriously and wrote im-aginary supplements to famous ancient works, such as Virgil's *Aeneid* or works written by Lucan (see Korenjak & Zuenelli). Some writers went even further and, instead of restoring ancient texts to their supposed completeness, deliberately left gaps in their texts to imitate the fragmen-tary nature of ancient works (see IJsewijn & Sacré 5). For example, the early sixteenth-century historian Paolo Giovio made up blank passages in his *Historiarum sui temporis libri* to imitate Livy's missing books.[4] Giovio ends the first ten-book section with the words that the last six books of the section have been lost in the war, and trying to control his imagi-nation, the author does not dare to complete them from memory, but he nevertheless gives short summaries of them (430). The fragmentary nature becomes, as it were, part of ancient historical writing and at the same time underlines the interpretative nature of all historical writing. Similarly, the Polish nobleman Antoni Poninski who published his col-lection of verse satires *Sarmatides* (1741) under the pseudonym Johann Maximilian Krolikiewicz, mentioned in a marginal comment that the satires from ten to twelve on friendship and court life are missing from the collection because they were stolen (see Kivistö 94-95).[5] The author creates an intentional gap in his own work to simulate fragmentary

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[4] In the case of ancient genres, the disappearance concerned, for example, extensive historical works consisting of several books. Only five books of Polybius's 40-volume history have survived, Livy's extensive history or Tacitus's *Historiae* (see Dewar 471) have been similarly reduced, and nothing remains of Varro's 700 Greek and Roman biographies.

[5] Various forgeries and forged sequels were also common in the early modern period (see Kivistö 2018).

ancient poetry, and he does not reveal anything about the missing parts other than their general subject.

A later example of the process of rewriting losses is Ezra Pound's famous poem "Papyrus" from 1916 (*Lustra*, poem 138) where the tension between presence and absence prevails (see, e.g., Kahane; Utell). The poem consists of only four disconnected words surrounded by gaps and ellipses:

> Spring.......
> Too long......
> Gongula ...... (ll. 1-3)

The poem is marked by the silence from which the historical sources emerge in their fragmentary form for later readers. Pound's poem was an attempt to translate Sappho's fragment into English. At the same time, the poem asks what the documentary value of the fragments is. How much does the reader herself add to the poem? "Papyrus" examines how readers supplement the text with their imaginations and underlines the uncertainty of historical knowledge by means of an open-ended form. In his collection *The Cantos*, Pound also uses other historical forms, such as torn letters. The blanks reveal the interpretive openness with which we approach and complete old texts precisely by engaging with this aesthetics of suggestiveness: "there was virtue in scraps, mysterium in fragments," as the Pound scholar Hugh Kenner stated in his *The Pound Era* (1972). Pound thus 'stole' from history and made his own poetry out of its materials, just as other imagists (e.g., H.D. or Hilda Doolittle) used Sapphic fragments to create new poems. The fragment was a popular form already during the Romantic period, but its heavy emptiness also appealed to the modernists, who lived equally from history.

Pound also experimented with the *ubi sunt* form, an elegiac form remembering and mourning the dead and lost generations. *Ubi sunt* poems were a commonly used form in medieval epic (e.g., Song of Roland) and performed after a battle as dirges to mourn dead heroes, whose names were repeated to recall the hero (Gilead 269). For instance, Victor Hugo's poem "Oceano nox" is a later representative of this

genre. The poem borrows its name from the passage in Virgil's *Aeneid*, where "night falls over the sea" (2.250). The poem ponders the fate of sailors lost and drowned at sea by asking where they are—perhaps kings on some distant island? Gradually, however, time buries the dead in the sea, drowns even the memory of the sailors and erases their names in the stream of time. Yet, this poetic form is not just a nostalgic return to the past, but rather it expresses the heightened historical awareness of the speaker and the search for one's own place in time in relation to predecessors and previous generations. Expressing loss thus aims to restore the past in language and preserves the memory of what was lost. At the same time, the speaker's own position as a maintainer and mediator of memory is emphasised.

Similarly, in his early poem from 1915, "Provincia deserta", (*Provença*, poem 158) Pound builds his position as a poet with the *ubi sunt* form. He experiments with the possibility of reviving the past through a local setting and imitates the rhythmic flow of troubadour poetry. The title of the poem refers to a land once inhabited by medieval troubadours in southern France, but which is now deserted of these historical layers. The poem rewrites losses in multiple ways. On the one hand, the poem is marked by visual gaps and lacunae in the form of three dots and dashes which illustrate losses through the absence of verse:

> At Rochecoart,
> Where the hills part
>   in three ways,
> And three valleys, full of winding roads,
> Fork out to south and north,
> There is a place of trees ... gray with lichen.
> I have walked there
>   thinking of old days.
> At Chalais
>   is a pleached arbour;
> Old pensioners and old protected women
> Have the right there—
>   it is charity. (ll. 1-13)

The visual form supports the poem's main idea of a broken connection with the past. On the other hand, loss is also written into the poem with words: the space consists of multiple temporal layers as the poet walks through the old landscape, not exactly as a pathfinder, but more like a wanderer, climbing over old rafters, and crossing old streams:

> I have crept over old rafters,
>   peering down
> Over the Dronne,
>   over a stream full of lilies (ll. 14-17)

The *ubi sunt* form emphasizes the observer's perceptions ("I have walked," "I have seen," "I have looked back"), giving a catalogue of places and people he has seen. These places do not feel real, but they echo the sounds of the absent past. The poet hears "whirling laughter" (l. 32) from another time and meets aged local people (ll. 11, 20, 25) who are like from some old painting. He looks at "distant castles" (l. 55) reminiscent of medieval romances, and old buildings behind him across the stream (ll. 33-34) recalls the streams of death. All these expressions related to temporal and spatial distance—the poem is permeated with things perceived from afar, sunsets and mountain peaks—attest to the separateness of times and the remoteness of the past recorded by the wandering poet. The landscape around him is now almost deserted and only the place names (such as Perigord, Ribeyrac, Sarlat) repeated by the poet—the poem has sometimes been called a litany—evoke the memory of the lost medieval world. The place names are like verbal ruins or remnants that create a tenuous connection to a lost time. The poet also explicitly refers to literary history by evoking the names of earlier troubadours and poets ("Riquier! Guido.", l. 63). Consequently, the emptiness of the present is filled with the names and memories from the past, maintained by the poet whose role here it is to take care of the transience of culture. The poem ends with a strong closure underlining the disappearance of past times and leaving the last word to the poet:

> So ends that story.
> That age is gone;
> Pieire de Maensac is gone.
> I have walked over these roads;
> I have thought of them living. (ll. 77-81)

By highlighting the historical absence in the landscape and pointing out his distance from the medieval past, Pound asserts himself as a modern poet (note the emphatic 'I' in the concluding sequence). The medieval world is palpable in the poem only because it is remembered and reimagined by the poet. "Provincia deserta" has often been read in nostalgic or melancholic terms as deriding the present for its emptiness, and successfully evoking the past. Arguably, the poet does not aim to regenerate the medieval world by simply imitating its songs. Pound's poem is not a reenactment of troubadour lyric, and it does not indicate the poet's nostalgia for the lost age, but, on the contrary, it underlines in multiple ways his claims to authorial independence and a (modernist) sense of disconnectedness from the past.

Such complex engagements with absence are not only characteristic of poetry, but can also be found in other arts, from architectural ruins to interrupted narratives (see, e.g., Harbison). In her essay "Disruption, hesitation, silence", Louise Glück writes that she has always been interested in gaps and lacunae that are open to interpretation. Damaged or incomplete artworks allude to larger contexts and invite to imagine other times precisely because they are not whole. Glück refers to Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "Archaic torso of Apollo" and sees in its poetic void and description of a broken thing some hints of human agency; for her, breakage is "the dark complement to the act of making" (75). Glück sees disappearance as a remarkable counterpart to creation and as an activity that calls for completing the missing parts. Similarly, Ralph Waldo Emerson writes in his essay "Love" that objects like statues are beautiful when they begin "to be incomprehensible" and when they demand "an active imagination to go with"; in Emerson's view, "the god or hero of the sculptor is always represented in transition *from* that which is representable to the senses, *to* that which is not. Then first it ceases to be

a stone" (qtd. in Walsh 17). The experience of beauty arises from the openness of the artwork and invites one to complete the missing parts by imagining.

Studying Extinct Genres

In general, this kind of rewriting has been examined through the concept of imitation, which draws from the poetic devices and themes of earlier literature. However, alongside the concept of imitation, which describes the relation between a string of single texts throughout history, Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of genre memory is useful for understanding the larger trends of literary loss and preservation. In his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin proposes that a genre carries persistent forms through literary history, preserving "undying elements of the archaic" (106) from the past to the present. Bakhtin also claims that the genre lives in the present, but never forgets its past; instead, the genre is reborn in new works. Genre represents "creative memory" (106) in literary history and, according to Bakhtin, can guarantee its continuity.[6] When fragmentation has become one of the characteristics of ancient literature, fragmentation and openness can also be considered persistent forms that allow ancient texts to cross historical boundaries.

Genres are important here also because book historians have noted that literary disappearances are often genre-specific (see, e.g., Wilson; Haye 421; Hill): for example, such widely disseminated ephemeral prints as ABC-books or religious books may have become unreadable over the years, and many lost works have been cheap temporary literature. Pamphlets, ballads, flyers, almanacs, and magazines were widely printed but not well-preserved in libraries—that is why they were destroyed more easily. These genres represented everyday texts that have only begun to be studied in more detail in recent years. In the case of ancient genres, the disappearance concerns most obviously ancient tragedy (Wright; Steiner), but also historical multi-volume works and occasional oral poetry or dramatic forms such as dithyrambs, satyr-plays, and mimes of which we have only scant traces left. Wright concludes

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[6]   For genre memory in Bakhtin, see Kliger.

that such genres "have to be regarded not simply as lost but as more or less extinct" (xi).

One attempt to explain such disappearances of entire genres is offered by the well-known scholar of genre theory, Alastair Fowler, who in his article "The Life and Death of Literary Forms" and later in *Kinds of Literature* briefly examined the death of genres in analogy to biological evolution.[7] Fowler asks whether a genre dies when the public no longer appreciates or understands the conventions of the genre and cannot read it without the help of researchers who can explain its language, poetic form, and rhetorical conventions (see "The Life and Death" 205). Fowler notes that it helps to understand Homer's epics if one knows a little about the earlier genre dealing with homecomings (*nostoi*) and the conventions of formulaic diction ("The Life and Death" 208-209). But since no book is open to all readers and there is no universal reader, how many readers are needed for the genre to survive? Or how many works? Is one work enough to preserve the genre? Or perhaps seemingly dead genres have just adapted to new conditions and changed their shape? Fowler (164-167) proposes that a genre dies when repetition replaces innovation, and the composition is slowly reduced to its mechanical and conventional features.

Another notable study of the disappearance of entire genres is Franco Moretti's economical and evolutionary model of literary history. This model abandons traditional genre research and examines fluctuations in literary popularity and long-term hidden rhythms in literary history by using digital methods. His work is a systematic empirical study of why certain genres survive and others perish. Moretti studies large text corpora over a long period of time and sheds light on invisible objects, i.e., long-term processes that no one has been able to observe. According to Moretti, the genres that best adapt to their environment and the needs of the market and readership will survive.[8]

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[7]   The evolution of genres is a Darwinian epistemological metaphor that has been used literally in the material-systemic descriptions of the development of literary history (e.g., Taine, Brunetière, Moretti). For a critical discussion on such scientific understandings of literary-historical changes, modern literary Darwinism, and literary evolution, see, e.g., Juvan.

[8]   Moretti examines 44 prose genres of British literature from the years 1700-1900. For him, genres are temporal structures with a typical duration of about 30 years.

However, Moretti's evolutionary model of genre development does not explain the reasons why some forms and genres return to popularity. Unlike extinct animal species, literary genres can be reborn through rewritings, and old genres can come back into fashion or adapt to new historical settings. For example, the Baroque period turned its gaze towards the library and fragments of old knowledge, leading to decorative hybrid forms. Many medieval forms of rhyming poetry, which Renaissance humanists did not appreciate—except for students' drinking songs—returned to popularity during the Romantic period. Moreover, sometimes the history of lost genres reaches almost to our own time: the *Saniucta* epic (1957) by the Italian diplomat Ippolito Galante, set in ancient India and imitating Virgil, has been called the last representative of its genre in Latin (IJsewijn & Sacré 24).

The biological analogy also does not consider the versatile backgrounds of literary forms: the model used by Moretti describing the development of genres is too simple for literature, because literary types usually have many backgrounds. By merging genres one can create epistemological and aesthetic bridges between different cultural discourses and enable new cultural forms to emerge from the margins. In general, literary genres are not as clear-cut as biological species. Literary types are not pure or timeless classifications, but rather hybrid, politically shaped, constantly changing, and contingent groupings (Jauss). Even *ubi sunt* poetry is still alive in modern-day elegy, which mourns extinction in nature and, at the same time, maintains awareness of past species, both in nature and culture (for the non-survival of the humanities combined with the non-survival of many species in nature, see Dimock).

Following this idea, we can look for ways to approach cultural transience by bearing in mind that literature is both a tradition-sustaining form and renewable creative energy that acts as an ecological force in culture. The idea of literature as cultural ecology has been recently developed by Zapf (see, e.g., "Handbook" 135-153; "Sustainable texts") who argues that literature is a platform of creative processes and imaginative reunions that renew culture from its margins. Literature can bring together epistemological and aesthetic areas of life that were previously far apart, and thus create opportunities for new beginnings and

openings. While focusing on the dialectic of disappearance and conti-
nuity, we can further suggest that literature can function as a cultural
ecological form precisely because it is semantically open, incomplete,
and constantly changing. Textual vulnerability can be seen as an evo-
lutionary and transformative force in the sense in which Zapf spoke of
literature as cultural ecology: it can dismantle literary-historical power
structures (Zapf's 'cultural-critical metadiscourse', "Handbook" 147),
empower those left on the margins ('imaginative counter-discourse',
148), and offer opportunities for cultural renewal ('reintegrative inter-
discourse', 148). Starting from losses is a fruitful way to study literary
history: literature can always be supplemented and reimagined, pre-
cisely because it is interminable.[9]

Conclusions on Textual Sustainability

There is a lot of public discussion about biodiversity loss in nature, but
literary extinction has received less scholarly attention, although not
only nature but also culture is vulnerable and disappearing in many
ways. Furthermore, if one considers literary losses in more detail,
it turns out that they provide a rich source of inspiration for forms of
textual endurance. In his *L'Espace littéraire*, Maurice Blanchot, a French
philosopher, writes that an oblivion can even protect the book; it can
find in its exile a space where it is preserved and remains open to new
beginnings (200-201). Although the book is displaced, thrown into the
hell of libraries, burned, or forgotten, to a certain extent, the disappear-
ing in the burning of fire or in the warmth of oblivion also continues
the book's ageless existence by opening a new duration originating in
its distance. Although these reflections are just isolated examples of the

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[9]   As Dimock (7) has recently observed, literary history is "necessarily imperfect and incessant",
because literature is "never finished" and "never without new input", and its persistence
"stems from that very incompleteness." However, we must be careful about what we place in
the category of the lost. The very traditional 'lost writer' category is women writers of the early
modern era, many of whom have fallen outside the traditional canon, but Jennifer Summit has
reminded us that the emphasis on disappearance can also be harmful if loss and outsideness
become a central defining characteristic of women writers. Summit argues that the trope of
women's outsideness has itself created a certain suspicious cultural pattern, in which women
are placed in the category of outsiders and identified with the embodiment of loss.

significance of absence for art and imagination, they are united by the desire to see value in something we have assumed to be lost and they show how much we use our imagination when we study dying words.

This essay has tried to demonstrate that, firstly, if we look at literary history from the perspective of disappearance, the fragments and other textual losses are not merely isolated fractions from the past; instead, as potential remainders of unrealized wholes, they provide continuity by creating an active space for reimagining the gap left by the loss. Ancient textual fragments are one notable reminder of the imperfection of literary history, but at the same time they invite readers to supplement the lacunae with imaginary fillings and rewritings. Ezra Pound's poems are particularly sensitive to the historical forms of transience and frequently employ techniques that are inspired by a variety of textual losses. By telling stories about lost literature, their memory is preserved, and they are, as it were, reinvented. However, Pound is careful not to reproduce the past; instead of reenacting or simply imitating ancient or medieval songs that would allow the difference between past and present to collapse, he makes the historical distance visible by reproducing the multiple forms of losses, thereby investing his own voice with modern poetic authority.

Secondly, this paper has suggested that dying genres are another notable form of disappearance that also contributes to textual continuity: genres compensate for the feeling of loss and carry generic features from the past to the present. Therefore, notions as the Bakhtinian genre memory according to which genres exist as living forms, or Zapf's cultural ecology which highlights literature as a creative cultural ecosystem are highly relevant for our understanding of textual sustainability. This topic requires further research, particularly on such questions as: What kinds of historical genres have been completely forgotten and why? How does the extinction of genres provide opportunities for the imagination to supplement and reimagine history? How does genre memory work for creating continuity in literary history? Can genres be considered cultural ecological forces? Finally, to what extent is the analogy

of biological extinction useful for research on the complex dynamics of dead and dying literature throughout history and present?[10]

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Biography

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