

Miha Kovač, PhD

The Book as a Material Object: the stories e-books can't tell

The paper will reconstruct personal history of one of the copies of the first Slovene edition of the Pickwick papers published at the beginning of the 20th Century. The paper will analyze how the copy traveled around the globe and what kind of personal stories were linked to it. It will be shown that the copy existed and was read in four different social, cultural and emotional settings linked to the changing fortune of its owners (after it was purchased in one of the Ljubljana bookshops in thirties, the copy found its home in one of the Ljubljana bourgeois families and was widely read in the evenings in its dining room during the German and Italian occupation in WW2; then, after the end of WW2, the family lost significant part of its fortune in the communist revolution and the book travelled with one of the family members to USA. The copy returned home after the death of its last owner as a part of her unwritten will). The paper will focus on how the materiality of the book (its binding, layout, design of covers, smell...) interplayed with the understanding of the Dickens story in various social circumstances. It will be shown that the book as a material object was more significant to its owners than its content. In its final part, the paper will address the issue how and on what way might such personal experiences with the materiality of the book be substituted in an era of e-reading.

Miha Kovač is professor of publishing studies at the University of Ljubljana, Department for Information and Library science and Book Studies.