

After the Archive

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Sometime soon, historians may well begin to account for the late-twentieth-century ‘archival turn’ across the humanities and social sciences. Perhaps some of these historical assessments will be able to determine what that ‘turn’ actually is (or was), and why it was not taken by many historians. Because it was unnecessary, is a short and simple answer to the question; or because historians were always already there, in the archive. The establishment of various kinds of state archive across Europe from the end of the eighteenth century and the research practices developed by scholars using them during the nineteenth century, are emblematic of the ‘professionalization’ of the discipline, and the coming into being of the modern, university-trained Western historian.¹ The archive emerged as the most important site in the production of historical knowledge a long time ago (although it has only recently acquired that name; it used to be called ‘the sources’). Some say that the archive is a sign of the historian’s professional integrity, to be evoked when the discipline suffers one of its periodic shifts in fortune and reputation. Then historians will claim it as their own special place, held safe within their protective custody.² Moreover, ‘going to the archives’ (the National Archives, Warwickshire County Record Office, the National Screen and Sound Archives of Wales, the Working Class Movement Library in Salford . . . anywhere holding primary sources for the use of researchers) is an important professional rite of passage and a defining procedure of doctoral research in history.

If the archive is an idea rather than a place, then historians’ lack of interest in the archival turn is further explained. In a 1967 lecture, Michel Foucault spoke of modernity’s

idée de tout accumuler, l’idée de constituer une sorte d’archive générale, la volonté d’enfermer dans un lieu tous les temps, toutes les époques, toutes les formes, tous les goûts, l’idée de constituer un lieu de tous les temps qui soit lui-même hors du temps,

et inaccessible à sa morsure, le projet d'organiser ainsi une sorte d'accumulation perpétuelle et indéfinie du temps dans un lieu qui ne bougerait pas [...].

(idea of accumulating everything, the idea of constituting a sort of general archive, the desire to contain all times, all ages, all forms, all tastes in one place, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside time and protected from its erosion, the project of thus organizing a kind of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in a place that will not move [...].)³

This whole idea of our 'modernity' is not much like the prosaic record offices and repositories in which historians measure out their time; those archives contain practically nothing, just disconnected fragments of documents and lists, collected for purposes forgotten or not to be known... rather than 'everything'.⁴ Many historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries do indeed explore the parameters of a modernity (many modernities) that Foucault named as the 'archive'; but that is an activity conducted in thought and writing, *after* visiting one of those prosaic repositories – or, increasingly, after working with its digitized holdings.

So perhaps it is not so strange that for historians the archival turn has been a turn untaken; but it *is* strange that they have had so little to say about the 'turn' as an historical phenomenon. Assessment of the philosophy and social theory that shapes their research and writing is a labour frequently undertaken by 'professional' academic historians. The 'linguistic turn' has been so firmly placed in its historical context that it is now possible to explain its origins and effects to audiences of undergraduate historians.⁵ So too with the impact of structuralism, post-structuralism and postmodernism on the practice of history: in the everyday language of an historical education, these too have been labelled 'turns' (turns of thought) so that students of history may understand the intellectual context that produced the history they read and perhaps also acquire a social history of the ideas that made both the modern world and the historical analysis of it.⁶

Historians like turns (the idea of a turn; or perhaps just the word 'turn'), for they imply change, and 'change' is what we do. Something has happened in the world, or something that was not there before is now apparent (the idea of evolution, say; or the increased pre-nuptial pregnancy rate in the West Riding woollen manufacturing areas in the late eighteenth century), and we attempt to account for that change in various ways. But it is difficult to imagine how the archival turn will be accounted for in our future historical accounts of the modern

period in the West: this is a road not taken, to that utterly ordinary place of work we are always already in.⁷ There is general acceptance that state archives inaugurated in the long European nineteenth century shaped the notion of historical practice and knowledge, and that they continue to operate in this way.⁸ Perhaps we will come to argue with this proposition, asking detailed questions about places and spaces and sites. For, although endless information is found in archives, no archive is the place where historical knowledge is produced. Historical knowledge is always produced *after* the archive, in the thought and writing of historians and other archival scholars.⁹

CONFESSING HISTORIANS

Intellectual and social histories of postmodernism and post-structuralism suggest that historical understanding of the archival turn may well be mapped out in the vast, all-encompassing archive of Michel Foucault's writings. This will include attention both to his theorization of the archive, as a way of seeing and knowing in the modern period, and to 'the birth of the confessing animal', in Foucault's philosophy and in the wider world.¹⁰ Perhaps confession—or playing the part of a confessing animal—is inevitable when historians discuss their relationship to archives and to the distant, bemusedly observed phenomenon of the archival turn. While preparing this article, I drifted through many lacunae of thought by inventing extended titles for it. 'After the Archive (She Bought a Digital Camera)' was highly satisfying and neatly descriptive of what I had to say. It would have allowed me to tell my audience about the strange discomposure of professional and personal identity that this purchase has brought about. No more slow train to the Midlands county town at crack of dawn (you take the train because you cannot park in the city centre); no more dreary filling of hours between five o'clock, when the record office closes, and the earliest possible time for bed; no more sleepless nights in the hotel room next to the extraction fan from the hotel kitchen; no more . . . archive fever. I could then reference my earlier diagnosis of the sickness that affects all workers in archives as anthrax meningitis as the joke it was always intended to be, and perhaps finally raise a laugh.¹¹ It is not that I shall never have to go to the archives again, for I have to take photographs of documents in the first place; but I do not have to *keep going back*. I am free of a place where I have spent forty years (intermittently), and which tells me who and what I am.

In the days when I used to write about archives, I wanted to produce a phenomenology (or perhaps a poetics) of the experience of a kind of place—an archive—and its deep quiet. It is not a literal silence; but the archival researcher may enter the quiet even though children are careering around the family-history search area, and a group looking (just as the historian is looking) for one of the lost ones is about to settle down for a picnic among the microfilm readers.¹² It is the quiet of libraries and of the examination hall: everybody together, separated, in a space of otherness; neither here (in this room) nor there (wherever *there* may be: in the head or in the notes they put on the page as they search).¹³ Foucault is inescapable in this phenomenology of the archive. He described *heterotopias* in the 1967 lecture, and his heterotopias are descriptive enough of *being in the archive* to be going on with. Archives are both *here* and *there* because of the imagined accumulation of what, in the historian's dream, they enclose: the living and the dead, and what has not yet been. In this phenomenology of working in the everyday, ordinary space of a county record office, you will briefly find yourself in Foucault's reverie, that 'place of all times that is itself outside time', and yet you know that there is practically nothing there.

The Romantic and post-Romantic contours of this somatic state are well known. I realize that I am Jules Michelet's child, just as modern social history is Michelet's child.¹⁴ Historians go to these places because of something that has happened *before* the archive, usually because of something they have read; something written by another historian (or by a philosopher, a sociologist or a literary critic) who has precipitated something out of the great everything of the past, and made an argument, a proposition or a history for the historian to pursue in the records. This is what Jules Michelet did. In 1824 he began reading the work of the eighteenth-century Neapolitan philosopher Giambattista Vico (1668–1744) and later recorded: 'I was seized by a frenzy caught from Vico, an incredible intoxication with his great historical principle.'¹⁵ Much later, in the 1869 preface to his *Histoire de France* (1833–1867), Michelet explained that this principle was the 'principe de la force vive, de l'*humanité qui se crée*' (principle of living force, of *humanity creating itself*).¹⁶ He referred to a striking passage in the third edition of Vico's *Scienza nuova* (1744), which proposes that

in tal densa notte di tenebre ond' è coverta la prima da noi lontanissima antichità, apparisce questo lume eterno, che non tramonta, di questa verità, la quale non si può a patto alcuno chiamar in dubbio: che questo mondo civile egli certamente è stato

fatto dagli uomini, onde se ne possono, perché se ne debbono, ritruovare i princípi dentro le modificazioni della nostra medesima mente umana.

(in the night of thick darkness enveloping the earliest antiquity, so remote from ourselves, there shines the eternal and never-failing light of a truth beyond all question: that the world of civil society has certainly been made by men, and that its principles are therefore to be found within the modifications of our own human mind.)¹⁷

That moment of understanding (the shocking, sudden *seeing* of something) is one symbolic birth of social history in its modern mode. But so too was the day the young historian went to the Archives Nationales in Paris, to quietly folded and bundled documents of state and judicial administration, where he already believed the past lived, where now (it is an eternal moment) he can make ink on parchment *speak*, where he will rescue the unconsidered myriads of the dead and write the People into being. As Edmund Wilson puts it: ‘When Michelet went into the Records, with Vico and the echoes of July [the July Revolution of 1830] in his head, a new past, for the first time the real past of France, seemed to revive for the imagination.’¹⁸ In the 1869 preface to his *Histoire de France*, Michelet remarks that he wandered for twenty years through ‘les galeries solitaires des Archives’ (the solitary galleries of the Archives), where the ‘souffrances lointaines de tant d’âmes étouffées’ (distant sufferings of so many smothered souls) were to be heard.¹⁹

This is the dream, or the romance, of social history: to enter a place where the past has its being, where ink on parchment can be made to *speak*, where the historian can bring to life those who exist only between the lines of state papers and legal documents. According to Arthur Mitzman, Michelet understood the historian’s task as pacifying the spirits of the dead, exorcizing them ‘by finding the meaning of their brief existences’.²⁰ This was done by writing, not by being in the archive. History is an imagined and written thing, always in dialogue with other written words: somebody else’s precipitation of a story, or a history, or a theory, from the everything of the past.

For Michelet, the dead were ghostly presences, shades of what *might have been* much more than representative of anything that actually happened. He identified with them; he did unto the dead as he hoped he would be done by:

J’ai donné à beaucoup de morts trop oubliés l’assistance dont moi-même j’aurai besoin. Je les ai exhumés pour une seconde vie. [...] Ils vivent maintenant avec nous qui nous sentons leurs parents, leurs amis. Ainsi se fait une famille, une cité commune entre les vivants et les morts.

(I have given to many of the forgotten dead the assistance that I myself shall need. I have exhumed them for a second life [...]. They live now among us, who feel ourselves to be their parents, their friends. Thus is made a family, a city community of the living and the dead.)²¹

This is very beautiful; it is also possibly a condition of the historian's professional existence that it is believed to be true. Michelet's point is taken up towards the end of W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* (2001), when its eponymous protagonist says: 'Es scheint mir nicht [...] daß wir die Gesetze verstehen, unter denen sich die Wiederkunft der Vergangenheit vollzieht' ('It does not seem to me [...] that we understand the laws governing the return of the past'), and continues:

doch ist es mir immer mehr, als gäbe es überhaupt keine Zeit, sondern nur verschiedene, nach einer höheren Stereometrie ineinander verschachtelte Räume, zwischen denen die Lebendigen und die Toten, je nachdem es ihnen zumute ist, hin und her gehen können, und je länger ich es bedenke, desto mehr kommt mir vor, daß wir, die wir uns noch am Leben befinden, in den Augen der Toten irreale und nur manchmal, unter bestimmten Lichtverhältnissen und atmosphärischen Bedingungen sichtbar werdende Wesen sind.

(but I feel more and more as if time did not exist at all, only various spaces interlocking according to the rules of a higher form of stereometry, between which the living and the dead can move back and forth as they like, and the longer I think about it the more it seems to me that we who are still alive are unreal in the eyes of the dead, that only occasionally, in certain lights and atmospheric conditions, do we appear in their field of vision.)²²

We may want to emphasize history as a form of writing, or as a cognitive form;²³ we may endlessly repeat to students Gareth Stedman-Jones's proclamation that history is 'an entirely intellectual operation that takes place in the present and in the head';²⁴ and I have so far urged the separation of a rather low-level phenomenology of archives from the production of history, which always happens *after* the archive. But paying attention to Michelet and his followers surely ought to alert us to the historian's relationship to death and to the dead, which is enacted in the National Archives or Somerset County Record Office quite as much as it is by sitting at a computer. Then another 'turn' will suggest itself, born from the practice and writing of history. 'After the Archive' is a way of predicting that death may be about to have its day. Freud's remark towards the end of 'Das Unheimliche' (1919) that '[u]nsere Biologie hat es noch nicht entscheiden können, ob der Tod das notwendige Schicksal jedes Lebewesens oder nur ein regelmäßiger, vielleicht aber vermeidlicher Zufall innerhalb des Lebens ist' ('Biology has not yet

been able to decide whether death is the inevitable fate of every living being or whether it is only a regular but yet perhaps avoidable event in life') has received remarkably little attention.²⁵ There has been little attempt to theorize the place of the dead and death in the human and social sciences.²⁶ And yet contemplation of and interaction with the dead was a foundational activity of history in its modern mode; the modern social history Michelet inaugurated could as well be called Death Studies.

I do not believe, with Michelet, that the dead and nameless ones for whom I am searching never really lived, for like many English-language social historians I work under the propulsion of 'experience', which is the second great paradigm of social history, bequeathed to us by E. P. Thompson.²⁷ The narrative focus of *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) is how people lived, thought and felt the years of revolution and counter-revolution in England between 1780 and 1850: how they interrogated and resisted an emerging industrial capitalism to make themselves into a class. Thompson took his own appropriation of Vico beyond Michelet's uses, yet both of them, disciples of the eighteenth-century philosopher, knew beyond doubt that the social world had been made by men, not by God, and both of them resurrected the dead for political purposes. Thompson did not wish to return those he had rescued to their tombs and urns (a grave would be a more appropriate repository for West Yorkshire, c. 1780–1840, for that is where, as historians sometimes cruelly say, he invented the English working class).²⁸ Thompson believed that the words he found for the dead (in trial material, other legal records, local newspapers, political pamphlets and collections of threatening letters in the Home Office archives) were their own, or something as close to their own as the historian could possibly determine—and that they could be put to work in the modern (1960s) world for political purposes. But there are now new technologies of retrieval for the words of the dead that complicate older historical epistemologies of reading, note-taking and transcription (*in* the archive) and thinking and writing (*after* the archive).

TECHNOLOGIES OF RETRIEVAL

One page from a Nottinghamshire magistrate's notebooks, filled intermittently between 1772 and 1815, inscribes the historian's experience of the strange somatic and cognitive state that is one aspect of

after the archive (see Fig. 1). The notebooks have been transcribed from photographs taken of their c. 350 pages. There are many entries like the one reproduced here, which reads (in my transcription):

Nottinghamshire To Wit Nov 17th 1806 The Petition of William Kirman touching Ann Elliott a pauper of the parish of Wilford who Married her Daughter says that she is in a very distressed state & wishes to have her come & live with him and her Daughter so that she may be better taken care of & kept from want or troubling the said parish of Wilford & he did apply to George Pyatt who was the overseer of the poor for that purpose but was refused by him He says that she married Henry Hooley of Tollerton & brought a many good with her & such as a beds & other goods Since when it was agreed upon her husband dying and becoming a Widow that she would take into the cottage where she then lived Thos Hooley her son & Mary Hooley his wife & one child & she did agree that if they would take care of her during her Life & allow her good victuals drinks firing & good cloathing.

This particular page is reproduced because it contains such a riveting story of everyday life and the narrativization of that life, and is much to the purposes of my current research, which is an attempt to understand how the law framed everyday life for the poorer sort, and the better sort, in the long English eighteenth century.²⁹ The technical problem here is a simple one: just one word that I could not decipher (at the beginning of the second line), and that I certainly would not be able to decipher had I sat transcribing in the Nottinghamshire Archives search room. But by increasing the size of the image and by altering contrast and brightness on my computer screen, I can see that it is the word 'Petition'. I could have relied upon a much older technology of reading, which might have worked: just going away for ten minutes and then looking at the word again sometimes enables you to read it. But in the archive, where time is money, ten minutes constitutes a worrying loss of both.³⁰ With an electronic scan, on the other hand, I can read words that I would not be able to see, let alone read, sitting in a search room.

If I can read the transcribed words of the dead by means of a technology that I obviously should have embraced fifteen years ago, what is the epistemological status of that writing, and of the reading of it? Some of the words in the Clifton notebooks could not have been read by anyone, including the justice's clerk who penned them, over the 200 years since they were written. What is the historian doing here? What has this particular archive become? I am reading words that were never there in the first place, for they were never written *as I read them*. In this particular case, Sir Gervase Clifton's clerk would probably have been able to read his own writing and know that he had inscribed 'Petition', for almost all of the entries in these notebooks open with 'Nottinghamshire, To Wit

Nottinghamshire to wit Nov. 17th 1806
 The Relation of William Hurman touching Can-
 Elliott a pauper of the parish of Wilford &
 who married her Daughter says that she is
 in a very distressed state & wishes to have
 her come to live with him and her
 Daughter so that she may be better
 taken care of & kept from wanton
 trouting the said parish of Wilford
 & he did apply to George Pyatt who
 was the overseer of the poor for that
 purpose but was refused by him
 He says that she married Henry Hooley
 of Lollerton & brought a many good
 with her such as beds & other goods
 Since when it was agreed upon her death
 dying and becoming a widow that she
 would take into the Cottage where she
 then lived Mrs. Hooley her son & Mary
 Hooley her wife & one Child & she did
 agree that if they would take her
 care of her during her life & allow her
 good victuals drinks firing & good
 cloathing

181

Figure 1. Page from the notebooks of Sir Gervase Clifton JP.³¹

[...] the Information of, the Complaint of [someone or other]'. And the clerk (a whole series of clerks) had a lot of experience in writing Latinate legal terms such as 'recognizance' and 'mittimus'.

With names the technology of digital photography becomes really useful, and the epistemological questions more profound: it is only by magnification that I can tell that the agitated and anxious petitioner was 'Kirman', not 'Kerman', and in other examples 'Baker', not 'Barker'. But then the names of these men and women actually were Kirman *and* Kerman, Baker *and* Barker. The names of the eighteenth-century poorer sort were not fixed *in writing* (although they were probably fixed in everyday pronunciation): a woman may appear as Hodley *and* Hoadly in the various registers of the state (birth, marriage and death entries in church registers) that record her passing.

This is not only the historian's problem; it was also Sir Gervase's problem, although his was practical rather than epistemological. All the cumbersome, reluctant police administration of eighteenth-century Nottinghamshire had the same problem with names. In a notice from 1777 (if the order of the bound pages is reliably chronological, which it is probably not), Clifton deals practically with the legal consequences of unstable naming – and handwriting (see Fig. 2). This entry reads (again, in my transcription):

Nottinghamshire to Wit To the Constables of Sutton Bonnington & to all other Constables within the County of Nottingham Oath having been made before me Sir Gervas Clifton Bart one of his ~~ Peace for the County of Nottingham that the Sineture T Parkenkson is the proper handwriting of the Revd Thomas Parkinson Doctor in Daventry & one of his majesties Justices of the Peace for the County of Leicester I do hereby order the writting warants to be served upon Frederick Cressey Parkyns if he can or may be found in any of your districts within the Said County.

Here, the name 'really' was 'Parkinson'; the constables had been unable to serve the warrants they were obliged to serve on Frederick Cressey because the Leicestershire magistrate's signature on them did not match the known Thomas Parkinson of Daventry. Naming falls into some other, empty space of the past.

However, the point for social historians is not the proper name of a landowner, clerical magistrate and gentleman of Daventry, but rather the names of all the lost ones such as William Kirman and Ann Elliott. It is the search for the names of the lost ones that inscribes and defines the social historian, according to Jacques Rancière. In *Les Noms de l'histoire* (1992), in which he discusses Michelet at great length, we can see an historian hunched over some minor register of church or local state,

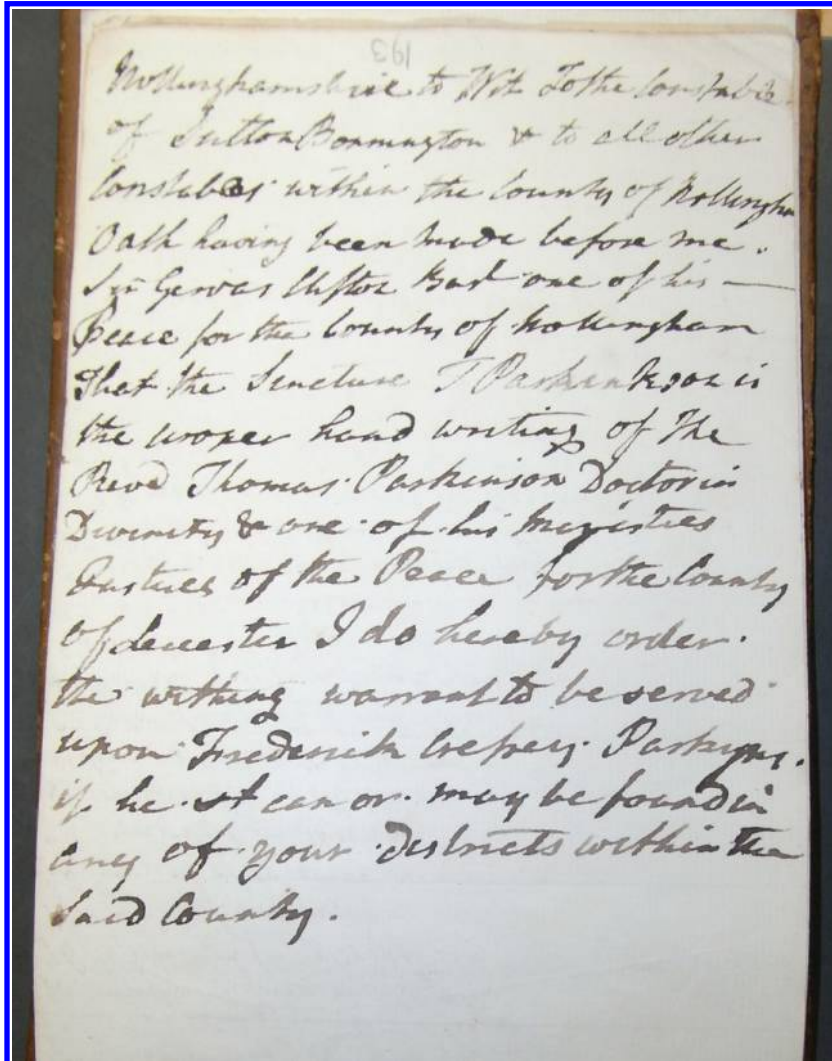


Figure 2. Page from the notebooks of Sir Gervase Clifton JP.³²

grimly, doggedly in pursuit of one of the nameless, one of Michelet's subjects.³³

NAMES AND NAMING IN THE ARCHIVE

In a fine article published in 2004, Marlene Manoff surveys the archival turn across many disciplines. She finds it an entirely good thing,

productive of many conversations across formal academic boundaries, between archivists and librarians, literary scholars and social theorists. Archival theory, as it has emerged after Foucault, after Derrida, has promoted a re-imagining of the limits 'of what we have come to believe are disciplines', she says. It will give us 'the courage to rethink them'.³⁴ There are historians in Manoff's survey, but not many, and those few of a specific kind.

The archive as a site of colonial and class power, and the practical and political effects of archivization in the long nineteenth century, have been thoroughly explored by various historians. Historians of the colonial era (particularly British colonial rule in India) have dwelled on the *archive as power*, on its practical role in the making and sustaining of a vast empire. Empire was made through the listing, registration and classification of its subjects. There are many detailed accounts of interpellation and management of subaltern subjects through the wielding of knowledge as power. The 'colonial archive' is the name for that which is known to be 'true' about a subjugated people, that by which they are governed and by which they come to know and fashion themselves.³⁵ This is all exhilarating work, and the lens of the paradigm has also been focused – with much reference to Foucault's *Surveiller et punir* (1975) – on the poor citizens of the nineteenth-century metropolis, also subjected by inventory to the same kind of archival power.

Describing the social and political functions of archives and archivization in the past is not, however, the same as participating in the archival turn. The conversations across disciplines provoked by it have not involved the majority of historians. And writing from the US, Manoff possibly does not know how institutionally constrained interdisciplinary conversations are in post-1988 Education Reform Act Britain. The 1988 Act ushered in the Research Assessment Exercise, now transmogrified into the Research Excellence Framework. The system does not reward either interdisciplinary work or conversation.³⁶

More recently, Anjali Arondekar has asked questions about the fictionality of the colonial archive – by which fictionality much fashioning of identity was nevertheless done, both by rulers and by subjugated. Arondekar's *For the Record* (2009) opens with a scene from the Maharashtra State Archives in Mumbai, and its director's exasperated question to the historian: 'What are you looking for, Madam?' Her inarticulateness, she says, came from 'a sense of archival aporia [...] an unrepresentable search for an impossible object'.³⁷ The condition of the

search is its impossibility. Every historian knows what Rancière tells us: that the past is a double absence. The past is gone, and it was never there in the first place, because whatever we find, and whatever and however we write, it cannot be the thing that happened, once upon a time – perhaps – in the lost realm of the past. ‘Il y a de l’histoire’, Rancière says, after his long contemplation of Michelet, ‘parce qu’il y a du révolu et une passion spécifique du révolu. Et il y a de l’histoire parce qu’il y a une absence [. . .]. Le statut de l’histoire dépend du traitement de cette double absence de la “chose même” qui n’est *plus là* – qui est révolue – et qui n’y a jamais été – parce qu’elle n’a jamais été *telle ce qui a été dit*’ (‘There is history because there is the past and a specific passion for the past. And there is history because there is an absence [. . .]. The status of history depends on the treatment of this twofold absence of the “thing itself” that is *no longer there* – that is in the past; and that never was – because it never was *such as it was told*’).³⁸

WHAT HISTORIANS DO

A number of twentieth-century novels are set in archives, or are about archives, archivists, the archival romance and the archival sublime.³⁹ Marlene Manoff mentions several in her survey, in which the ‘archive novel’ is an aspect of the archival turn. Some of them are versions of the quest romance, in which the central character (a user of archives, a researcher) has not found what she or he is looking for. But these fictional researchers can usually *name* whatever it is they are searching for; these characters know what they are after. Some archive romances involve literary historians, and some collections of literary manuscripts. In Martha Cooley’s *The Archivist* (1998) the hero is the ‘grey-mustached warden of the obscure Mason Room’ (the Special Collections Room of a university library), whose archived ‘objects of desire’ are ‘among the finest anywhere’, for it houses a collection of T. S. Eliot’s letters.⁴⁰ In these literary circumstances it would be odd indeed if the woman researcher who finds the hero’s heart did not know the name of the person she was researching – and know how to spell it, into the bargain. Régine Robert has discussed this literary fascination with archives, and archivists as a function of modern memory, in *La Mémoire saturée* (2003).⁴¹

Manoff does not list José Saramago’s *Todos os nomes* (1997) as an archival novel. But it concerns names and naming in the archive, and the long quest of social history, as imagined by Vico (when it certainly did not have *that* name), reified by Michelet and adumbrated

by E. P. Thompson. It is a novel that tells about a way of being in the world, as well as a research protocol. It is, I suggest, about the historian rather than the archivist. The view of Saramago's novels is usually 'from below', or from the sidelines: an ordinary, inconsequential character provides the unofficial, unsanctioned story that lies beneath the official version. Isolated figures struggle to make meaning out of vast impersonal economic and social structures, unknowingly producing subversive political commentary on the institutions and organization of modern states. Often, these characters are not given names. Perhaps namelessness is an aspect of the alienation and isolation Saramago seeks to describe. Yet this particular novel proclaims that it will be about *all* the names.

The central character of *Todos os nomes* does have a name, the only name (rather than a title, function or office) in the entire book: he is Senhor José. We are assured that he also has surnames, 'very ordinary ones, nothing extravagant';⁴² but he is never called anything but Senhor José. In some nameless city, Senhor José labours away as a filing clerk in the Central Registry of Births, Marriages and Deaths. The Central Registry contains the names of all the living and all the dead. All the living and all the dead inhabitants and former inhabitants of the city have been archived; all their records are stored in labyrinthine avenues of files. Who knows how big the Central Registry is? Like all its workers, Senhor José knows only a part of it. His shabby little house is attached to one of its massive walls. His domestic life belongs as much to the state as does his labour: not only does his house belong to the Central Registry, but he has direct access to it through his back door.

Senhor José is compelled by a chance encounter with one random, insignificant record card, to pursue one 'unknown woman'. We are not told her name. At first he does not look for her in the paper catacombs of the Central Registry – like all the workers, he is watched; he is frightened that a break in his routine will be noticed by the all-knowing, all-powerful Registrar. He goes out into the streets, shops and schools of the capital city to look for her. But what is he seeking? A living woman or a dead woman? A person – a human being with a life – or yet more records of that life? He breaks into the woman's former school to find details that the Central Registry does not hold. He damages his knee clambering over the wall. In a bungling comedy reminiscent of Don Quixote, he spends the night in a lavatory because he believes he has heard someone coming to discover him in his illicit enterprise. The meek and self-effacing Senhor José is not very much like Orpheus, but, as it turns out,

he does lose the unknown woman to the kingdom of the dead, for she is already there.

On his return to work, the suspicious Registrar orders the Registry Nurse to pay Senhor José a house call. As the Nurse (a male nurse) attends his knee, he explains what happens to all the documents stored in the archive. He describes what happens to time when documents and records are catalogued and stored. He contemplates the official report he will have to write about the injury Senhor José has sustained:

What report, Mine, I can't see that a few simple grazes can be significant enough to be mentioned in a report, Even the simplest graze is significant, Once mine have healed they'll leave nothing but a few small scars that will disappear in time, Ah, yes, wounds heal over on the body, but in the report they always stay open, they neither close up nor disappear [...].⁴³

The records deposited in the archive transcend life and death.

Senhor José has not only identified the school where the unknown woman was a pupil; as a thief in the night he has found new records of her existence. He goes on to discover where she lived. He gets into her empty apartment. He reads the signs – all the papers left behind: she had been married and divorced; she could have gone back to live with her parents after the divorce, but preferred to be alone. He finds records of her childhood; in photographs he sees that even as a child she was already the woman she was going to be – a mathematics teacher at her old school. He discovers that she is dead, that she committed suicide. When she was alive her name was in the Central Registry, along with all the names of all the inhabitants of the city. Is the unknown woman's name – on the record card he carries with him on his search – borne into the world of the living because Senhor José went to rescue her from the world of the dead? But only her name, not her. Senhor José behaves as an historian, not as an archivist, for he gives her a life story rather than life itself.

At one point, in the course of a long address to the Central Registry workers, the Registrar proclaims that '[j]ust as definitive death is the ultimate fruit of the will to forget, so the will to remember will perpetuate our lives'.⁴⁴ Like Senhor José, the historian pursues fragments of paper, incomplete lists, missing birth certificates, in order to give meaning – above all to give a name or a personal identity – to the anonymous dead. In modern times, the historian uses a technology of remembering – historical research – which appears to be very much like Senhor José's pursuit of the unknown woman. But the problem with this reading is that it would occur only to a professional historian, and

professional historians make up a very small proportion of Saramago's readers.

This particular reader's identification with Senhor José is a simple one. He is the humble, obscure worker in some vast, anonymous system of recording and enumeration who attempts through detective work that is so much like historical research to give a name, an identity and a story to one of the nameless. And the historian wants a literary familiar, some image of creatures like herself. Historians (as opposed to literary scholars and archivists) are pretty thin on the pages of twentieth-century fiction.⁴⁵ Poets do much better by historians, even though W. H. Auden's fabulous and frequent musings – 'Makers of History' (1955), 'Homage to Clio' (1955), 'Objects' (1956) – are about the meaning and theory of history, as a fashioned thing, not about historians' practices in national archives and county record offices. Indeed, they are about Clio herself, and it would be an act of dramatic self-aggrandizement to align oneself with her. Auden concludes his homage to the muse of history by remarking that

Approachable as you seem,
I dare not ask you if you bless the poets,
For you do not look as if you ever read them,
Nor can I see a reason why you should.⁴⁶

And though many of us must have read and taught students about the poetic and philosophical engagements with the archival turn, it is not clear that they have mattered to us or prompted us to join in the conversation. As Auden says to Clio, 'You had nothing to say and did not, one could see, / Observe where you were'. Before it is all over, it might be a project to make historians speak about what it is they do.

A FRAGMENT OF FOUCAULT

In *Les Mots et les choses* (1966), in the middle of a discussion of archivization, naming, counting and registration as regimes of modern power, Foucault briefly flashes up – a moment of danger? – the magical quality of archives. What is that magic? It is the way in which archives show us 'naïvement, et dans l'ombre, ce que tout le monde regarde au premier plan' ('quite simply, and in shadow, what all those in the foreground are looking at').⁴⁷ There is some understanding to be done here, of history (*history-writing*) as a form of magical realism, with the historian's contribution to the genre not the mountains that move, the

girls that fly, the rivers that run backwards, but their everyday and prosaic acts of making the dead walk and talk—but always, *after* the archive.

NOTES

- 1 For the inauguration of national archives in relation to the development of European nation states, see Jacques Le Goff, *Histoire et mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), pp. 159–161; translated by Steven Rendall and Elizabeth Claman as *History and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 87–89.
- 2 See Antoinette Burton, ‘Thinking Beyond the Boundaries: Empire, Feminism and the Domains of History’, *Social History* 26:1 (2001), 60–71.
- 3 Michel Foucault, ‘Des espaces autres’, in *Dits et écrits 1954–1988*, edited by Daniel Defert and François Ewald, 4 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), vol. 4, pp. 752–762, this quotation p. 759; translated by Robert Hurley as ‘Different Spaces’, in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984*, vol. 2, edited by James D. Faubion (London: Allen Lane, 1998), pp. 175–185, this quotation p. 182.
- 4 See Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 18.
- 5 See James Vernon, ‘Who’s Afraid of the “Linguistic Turn”? The Politics of Social History and Its Discontents’, *Social History* 19 (1994), 81–97; Geoff Eley, ‘Is All the World a Text?’, in *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences*, edited by Terrence McDonald (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp. 193–243; Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); and S. R. Boettcher, ‘The Linguistic Turn’, in *Writing Early Modern History*, edited by Garthine Walker (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), pp. 71–94.
- 6 See Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1997); Patrick Joyce, ‘The Return of History: Postmodernism and the Politics of Academic History in Great Britain’, *Past and Present* 158 (1998), 207–235; Keith Jenkins, *Refiguring History: New Thoughts on an Old Discipline* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 59–70; Kevin Passmore, ‘Poststructuralism and History’, in *Writing History: Theory and Practice*, edited by Stefan Berger, Heiko Feldner and Kevin Passmore (London: Hodder Arnold, 2003), pp. 118–140; and John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*, 5th edition (London: Longman, 2010), pp. 1–28.
- 7 See Arlette Farge, *Le Goût de l’archive* (Paris: Seuil, 1997); Bonnie Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women and Historical Practice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); and Tom Osborne, ‘The Ordinarity of the Archive’, *History of the Human Sciences* 12:2 (1999), 51–64.
- 8 See Kasper Risbjerg Eskildsen, ‘Leopold Ranke’s Archival Turn: Location and Evidence in Modern Historiography’, *Modern Intellectual History* 5 (2008), 425–453.
- 9 See Steedman, *Dust*, pp. 66–68.

- 10 See Michel Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), pp. 103–174; translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith as *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Tavistock, 1972), pp. 77–131; Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, pp. 289–290, 309–310; Burton, 'Thinking Beyond the Boundaries'; and Chloe Taylor, *The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault: The Genealogy of the 'Confessing Animal'* (London: Routledge, 2008).
- 11 See Carolyn Steedman, 'Michelet, Derrida and Dust', *American Historical Review* 106:4 (2001), 1159–1180.
- 12 See Carolyn Steedman, 'The Space of Memory: In an Archive', *History of the Human Sciences* 11:4 (1998), 65–83. County (and many metropolitan) record offices are funded out of a local authority's leisure services budget. See Institute of Historical Research, 'National and Local Repositories', <http://www.history.ac.uk/msarchives/national.html>.
- 13 See Alberto Manguel, *The Library at Night* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008).
- 14 See Steedman, *Dust*, pp. 26–29, 38–40, 150–152.
- 15 Michelet quoted in Edmund Wilson, *To the Finland Station: A Study in the Writing and Acting of History* (London: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1940), p. 4; cf. Arthur Mitzman, *Michelet, Historian: Rebirth and Romanticism in Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 24–25; and Arthur McCalla, 'Romantic Vicos: Vico and Providence in Michelet and Ballanche', *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 19 (1993), 389–408.
- 16 Jules Michelet, 'Préface de l'*Histoire de France* (1869)', in *Œuvres complètes*, edited by Paul Viallaneix, 21 vols (Paris: Flammarion, 1971–1987), vol. IV, pp. 5–30, this quotation p. 14 (Michelet's emphasis; my translation); cf. Wilson, *Finland Station*, p. 5; McCalla, 'Romantic Vicos', pp. 401–402.
- 17 Giambattista Vico, *La Scienza nuova seconda*, edited by Fausto Nicolini (Bari: Laterza, 1953), p. 117; translated from the third edition (1744) by Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch as *The New Science of Giambattista Vico* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1948), p. 85.
- 18 Wilson, *Finland Station*, p. 8.
- 19 Michelet, 'Préface', p. 24.
- 20 Mitzman, *Michelet*, pp. 42–43.
- 21 Jules Michelet, 'Jusqu'au 18 Brumaire', in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. XXI, p. 268 (my translation); cf. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 198.
- 22 W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (Munich: Carl Hanser, 2001), p. 265; translated by Anthea Bell as *Austerlitz* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 261.
- 23 See Philippe Carrard, 'History as a Kind of Writing: On the Poetics of Historiography', *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 15:3 (1988), 443–453; and Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).
- 24 Gareth Stedman-Jones, 'From Historical Sociology to Theoretical History', *British Journal of Sociology* 27:3 (1976), 295–305, this quotation p. 296.
- 25 Sigmund Freud, 'Das Unheimliche', in *Der Moses des Michelangelo. Schriften über Kunst und Künstler* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2008), pp. 135–172, this quotation p. 161; translated as 'The Uncanny', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete*

- Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, edited by James Strachey and Anna Freud, vol. 17 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), pp. 217–256, this quotation p. 242.
- 26 For an exception, see the 21st International Congress of the Historical Sciences (Amsterdam, August 2010), panels on ‘Who Owns History?’ (especially Anton de Baets, ‘Posthumous Privacy’) and ‘The Rights of the Dead’. <http://www.ichs2010.org/home.asp>.
- 27 See E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963); William H. Sewell, Jr, ‘How Classes are Made: Critical Reflections on E. P. Thompson’s Theory of Working-Class Formation’, in *E. P. Thompson: Critical Perspectives*, edited by Harvey J. Kaye and Keith McClelland (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), pp. 50–77; and Joan Wallach Scott, ‘The Evidence of Experience’, *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991), 773–797, revised as ‘Experience’, in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, edited by Judith Butler and Joan Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 22–40.
- 28 See Carolyn Steedman, *Master and Servant: Love and Labour in the English Industrial Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 1–12, 29–46.
- 29 Carolyn Steedman, *The Magistrate, the Framework Knitter, and the Law: How to Frame Everyday Life in the English Eighteenth Century* (forthcoming).
- 30 For time as money in the archive, see Steedman, *Dust*, pp. 17–19.
- 31 Nottinghamshire Archives, M8050, Notebook of Sir Gervase Clifton JP (1772–1812), entry for 17 November 1806. Reproduced by kind permission of Nottinghamshire Archives. All reasonable efforts have been made to trace the heirs of Sir Gervase Clifton.
- 32 Nottinghamshire Archives, M8050, Notebook of Sir Gervase Clifton JP (1772–1812), undated entry, p. 193. Reproduced by kind permission of Nottinghamshire Archives.
- 33 See Jacques Rancière, *Les Noms de l’histoire. Essai de poétique du savoir* (Paris: Seuil, 1992); translated by Hassan Melehy as *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).
- 34 Marlene Manoff, ‘Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines’, *Libraries and the Academy* 4:1 (2004), 9–25, this quotation p. 22.
- 35 See Nicholas Dirks, ‘Colonial Histories and Native Informants: Biography of an Archive’, in *Colonialism and Culture*, edited by Nicholas Dirks (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992); Christopher Bayley, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Indrani Chatterjee, ‘Testing the Local Against the Colonial Archive’, *History Workshop* 44 (1997), 215–224; Ann L. Stoler, ‘Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance’, *Archival Science* 2:1–2 (2002), 87–109; Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris and Graeme Reid, *Refiguring the Archive* (Dordrecht and London: Kluwer Academic, 2002); Antoinette Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); and *Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*, edited by Antoinette Burton (Durham, SC: Duke University Press, 2006).
- 36 See Carolyn Steedman, ‘The Poetry of It (Writing History)’, in *How We Write: Scholarly Writing and the Power of Form*, edited by Angelika Bammer and Ruth-Ellen Joeres (forthcoming).

- 37 Anjali Arondekar, *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Durham, SC: Duke University Press, 2009), p. ix.
- 38 Rancière, *Les Noms de l'histoire*, p. 129; p. 63 (Rancière's emphasis).
- 39 See Suzanne Keen, *Romances of the Archives in Contemporary British Fiction* (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 2001). The 'archival sublime' is a concept of the economic historian Emma Rothschild; see 'The Archives of Universal History', *Journal of World History* 19:3 (2008), 375–401. It has to do with the sublime moment (the moment of supreme satisfaction) of *finding* something from the past; however, the implication of the current argument is that the sublime moment occurs when the historian knows that it (whatever it is) cannot be found, for it was never there in the first place; cf. Carolyn Steedman, 'Archival Methods', in *Research Methods for English Studies*, edited by Gabriele Griffin (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), pp. 17–29.
- 40 Martha Cooley, *The Archivist* (London: Abacus, 1998), pp. 5–6. Also see Ismail Kadare, *Nepunesi i pallatit te endrrave* (1981), a novel written in Albanian and translated from the French of Joseph Vironi by Barbara Bray as *The Palace of Dreams* (London: Harvill, 1990); Travis Holland, *The Archivist's Story* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004); and Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), for fictional discussions of archives and archivization outside a romance framework.
- 41 Régine Robert, *La Mémoire saturée* (Paris: Stock, 2003), especially pp. 102–104 for 'l'archiviste dans le roman' (the archivist in the novel), in the section 'Le Sédiment de l'archive'.
- 42 José Saramago, *Todos os nomes* (Lisbon: Editorial Caminho, 1997); translated by Margaret Jull Costa as *All the Names* (London: Harvill, 1999), p. 9.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 113.
- 44 *Ibid.*, pp. 181–182.
- 45 Beverley Southgate's recent *History Meets Fiction* (London: Longman, 2009) holds out some hope of literary familiars, but only if historians are prepared to read the novels of Penelope Lively, Lively's archival searchers providing the majority of Southgate's case studies.
- 46 W. H. Auden, 'Homage to Clio', in *Homage to Clio* (London: Faber & Faber, 1960), pp. 15–17. For the Ischian poems, written between 1948 and 1957, see Edward Callen, *Auden: A Carnival of Intellect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 218–237.
- 47 Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris: Gallimard 'Tel', 1990), p. 30; translated as *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock, 1970), p. 15. The 'moment of danger' ('Augenblick einer Gefahr') is from Walter Benjamin's reflections on the practice and meaning of history in 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte', in *Illuminationen. Ausgewählte Schriften I*, edited by Siegfried Unseld (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), pp. 251–261, this quotation p. 253; translated by Harry Zohn as 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt (London: Fontana, 1992), pp. 245–255, this quotation p. 247. Here, articulating the past historically does not mean recognizing it the way 'it really was'; it means seizing hold of a memory (whose memory?) as it flashes up at a moment of danger.