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Something She Called a Fever: Michelet, Derrida, and Dust

CAROLYN STEEDMAN

I breathed in their dust.

Jules Michelet, *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. 4.

IN THE SUMMER OF 1994, Jacques Derrida presented a paper to a conference in London, delivering the English-language version of what was to become *Mal d'archive: Une impression freudienne* in the North London Freud House, in Maresfield Gardens.¹ In the opening passages of "Archive Fever," Derrida presented his audience with the image of the *arkhe*, as a place where things begin, where power originates, its workings inextricably bound up with the authority of beginnings. In the brief account of the operation of the Greek city-state that he gave on that occasion (and in the various printed versions that followed), he pointed to its official documents, stored in the *arkheion*, the superior magistrate's residence. There, the *archon* himself, the magistrate, exercised the power of procedure and precedent, in his right to interpret them for the operation of a system of law.

In Derrida's description, the *arkhe*—the archive—appears to represent the *now* of whatever kind of power is being exercised, anywhere, in any place or time. It represents a principle that, in Derrida's words, is "in the order of commencement as well as in the order of commandment." The *mal* (the fever, the sickness) of the archive is to do with its very establishment, which is the establishment of state power and authority.² And then there is the feverish desire—a kind of sickness unto death—that Derrida indicated *for* the archive: the fever not so much to enter it and use it as to *have* it.

For those historians who heard or read "Archive Fever," it raised the puzzling question of what on earth an archive was doing there in the first place, at the beginning of a long description of another text (someone else's text, not Derrida's), which dealt, as he himself would go on to do at length, with Sigmund Freud and the topic of psychoanalysis.³ For the main part, "Archive Fever" is a sustained

¹ References in the text are to the English-language version of *Mal d'archive*, first published as Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression," *Diacritics* 25 (Summer 1995): 9–63. For the publication history of "Archive Fever," see note 7 below.

² Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Eric Prenowitz, trans. (Chicago, 1996), 9. That the inauguration of national archives is intimately bound up with the development of European nation-states has long been recognized. See Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory*, Steven Rendell and Elizabeth Claman, trans. (French edn., 1977; English, New York, 1992), 87–89; Carolyn Steedman, "The Space of Memory: In an Archive," *History of the Human Sciences* 11, no. 4 (1998): 67.

³ Derrida's remarks about archives are the prolegomenon to a major return to the topic of

contemplation of Yosef Yerushalmi's *Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (1991). A historian of Sephardic Jewry with an interest in the question of memory, Yerushalmi came, by way of his membership in a psychoanalytic study group on anti-Semitism, to a reading of Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*. There, he encountered Freud as a historian, or at least (in Freud's own formulation) someone who had produced a "historical novel," or a kind of historical story, in order to understand the period of baroque anti-Semitism through which he was living.

Derrida had long seen in Freudian psychoanalysis the desire to recover moments of inception, beginnings and origins, which—in a deluded way—we think might be the moment of truth. For Derrida, Freud's work is particularly marked by the foundationalism, or fever for origins, that he has spent nearly half a century writing against. In "Archive Fever," desire for the archive is presented as part of the desire to find, or locate, or to possess that moment, as a way of possessing the beginning of things. Yerushalmi's book, concerned as it is with Freud and the traces and marks of Judaism on psychoanalysis and, indeed, with Judaism as its origin, or progenitor, is a vehicle for further examination of this theme.

Yerushalmi's book is a speculative account of the composition of *Moses and Monotheism*, though not half as speculative as the text itself, which is famously based on no historical evidence whatsoever. Yerushalmi, on the other hand, had a fairly complete account of the process of its composition, from correspondence about it, from a hitherto unnoted draft (obtained with astonishing ease from the Freud Archive at the Library of Congress), and from the context within which Freud wrote (retrieved from newspaper files and a more general socio-political history of the rise of Nazism in central Europe). Yerushalmi's overall purpose in the book is to get Freud to admit that psychoanalysis is a Jewish science: the final chapter is in the form of a monologue, addressed directly to the dead author.⁴ The "impression" of Derrida's subtitle is the imprint of Judaism and "the Jewish science" on Yerushalmi, and indeed on Derrida himself. But the signs and traces that Freud dealt in, and the particular mark that is circumcision, constitute the kind of archive that Derrida seemed to believe most historians would not be interested in.

The *archon* and his *arkheion* allowed Derrida some commonplace speculation about the future of the archive, as the register, ledger, and letter are replaced by e-mail and the computer file. They also prompted some pertinent discussion of the politics of various kinds of archives. (Anyone who had read Yerushalmi's book might have been reminded of the furor of the 1980s over notorious restrictions of access to the Freud Archive.)⁵ Many kinds of repositories were strapped together

psychoanalysis and the questions he raised about it in 1967 in his essay "Freud and the Scene of Writing," in *Writing and Difference*, Alan Bass, trans. (French edn., 1967; English, London, 1978), 196–231.

⁴ Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (New Haven, Conn., 1991). For the draft of *Moses and Monotheism*, see Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 3, 16–17, and 101–03. For surprise at ease of access to this archive, see Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, *The Assault on Truth: Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory* (1984; rpt. edn., Harmondsworth, 1985); and Janet Malcolm, *In the Freud Archives* (1983; rpt. edn., London, 1997), esp. 19–21, 27–35.

⁵ Janet Malcolm gives a summary account of this affair in *In the Freud Archives*, and in the postscript, which she wrote for the 1997 edition.

here, in the portmanteau term “the archive,” as Derrida considered their limits and limitations, their denials and secrets. These aspects of the argument, where the *arkhe* appeared to lose much of its connection to the idea of a place where official documents are stored for administrative reference and became a metaphor capacious enough to encompass the whole of modern information technology, its storage, retrieval, and communication, are the ones that have been most taken up and commented on, in the English-speaking world, since 1994.⁶

The setting in which Derrida delivered the very first “Archive Fever” explains to some extent what an archive was doing there, as a prolegomenon to a discussion of psychoanalysis and a return to the questions he first raised about it in the late 1960s. In a substantial family house in Maresfield Gardens, the Freuds’ home in exile, Derrida looks up from the word-processed text from which he reads (he makes much in “Archive Fever” of the “little portable Macintosh on which I have begun to write”) and says: “It is thus, in this *domiciliation*, in this house arrest that archives take place. The dwelling, this place where they dwell permanently, marks this institutional passage from the private to the public . . . It is what is happening, right here, when a house, the Freuds’ last house, becomes a museum: the passage from one institution to another.”⁷ The immediacy of that archive—an archive in process, taking place at that moment—forced a beginning to a conference presentation and a book, at the same time as it reiterated arguments that Derrida had been making for thirty years, about the Western obsession with finding beginnings, starting places, and origins.⁸ “Archive Fever” thus explores the relationship between memory and writing (in its widest meaning, of recording and making marks) and Freud’s own attempts to find adequate metaphors for representing memory. Derrida sees in Freud’s writing the very desire that is Archive Fever: the desire to recover moments of inception, to find and possess all sorts of beginnings.

The etymology of these opening passages is given to us with the accompanying and paradoxical assertion that a word (“archive,” “arkhe,” “arkheion,” “archon”) cannot be a beginning. Indeed, “Archive Fever” opens with the clearest of statements that words are never a beginning, never an origin: “Let us not begin at the beginning,” Derrida said, “nor even at the archive. But rather at the word ‘archive.’” What “archive” is doing there at all, then, is the work of meditating on starting places, the search for which, because it is impossible, Derrida names as a sickness, a movement toward death. Moreover, he reiterated here, to want to make an archive in the first place is to want to *repeat*, and one of Freud’s clearest lessons was that the compulsion to repeat is the drive toward death.⁹ And the puzzling

⁶ See “Special Issue: The Archive,” *History of the Human Sciences* 11, no. 4 (1998), and “Special Issue: The Archive Part 2,” *History of the Human Sciences* 12, no. 2 (1999).

⁷ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 22, 10. Written (word-processed) in French in May 1994 (every version mentioned below is most precise about the dates of composition) for the conference “Memory: The Question of Archives,” which was held under the auspices of the Société Internationale d’Histoire de la Psychiatrie et de la Psychoanalyse, and the Freud Museum, it was then called “The Concept of the Archive: A Freudian Impression.” The English-language version appeared in the summer of 1995 as noted in n. 1 above. This appeared in book form a year later: Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Prenowitz, trans. (Chicago, 1996). The French edition appeared in 1995: Derrida, *Mal d’archive: Une impression freudienne* (Paris, 1995).

⁸ For origins fever, see Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, trans. (French edn., 1967; English, Baltimore, 1976).

⁹ Expressed at many points during Freud’s writing career, the clearest statement of the argument is

etymological prolegomenon may be seen as one more example of the textual techniques exercised in Derrida's philosophy. The binary oppositions that underpin Western metaphysics can be made to shift, by inflating a concept so that it joins up with its supposed opposite, thereby demonstrating that—there is no opposition at all. "Archive" is thus inflated to mean—if not quite the Everything—then at least all the ways and means of state power: Power itself, perhaps, rather than those quietly folded and filed documents that provide the mere and incomplete records of some of its inaugural moments.

By far the most common reaction to "Archive Fever" among its English-speaking readers has been the assumption that it has something to do with archives (rather than with psychoanalysis, or deconstruction, or Sigmund Freud; or with political and social misuses of power). Derrida has been addressed through his idea of the *arkeion*, yet commentators have found remarkably little to say about record offices, libraries, and repositories, and have for the main part been brought face to face with the *ordinariness*, the unremarkable nature of archives and the everyday disappointments that historians know they will always encounter there. (Although few have been as honest about what they have found—or not found—as Tom Osborne is in "The Ordinariness of the Archive."¹⁰) There is a kind of surprise in such reactions, at encountering something far less portentous, difficult, and meaningful than Derrida's use of the concept of "archive" would seem to promise.

In the French book-version of "Archive Fever," there is a loose-leaf notice three pages long, headed "Prière d'insérer" (Please Insert). (In my library copy, it is placed behind the title page and before an explanatory note about the Freud Museum conference.) This notice makes much clearer than can be done in English the social questions it seems Derrida intended to treat in the body of the text. Here (for the French *mal* does not mince its meaning), there are both archives *and* the political disasters of the late twentieth century named as archives of evil:

Les désastres qui marquent cette fin de millénaire, ce sont aussi des *archives du mal*: dissimulées ou détruites, interdites, détournées, "refoulées." Leur traitement est à la fois massif et raffiné au cours de guerres civiles ou internationales, de manipulations privées ou secrètes.¹¹

Derrida broods on revisionist histories that have been written out of these archives of evil (a shadow of a suggestion here, then, that it is not archives he has in his sights so much as what gets written out of archives: formal, academic history); but he broods as well on never giving up on the hope of getting proof of the past, even though documentary evidence may be locked away and suppressed. He emphasizes again the institution of the archives as the expression of state power. And he appears to urge a distinction between actual archives (official places for the reception of records, with systems of storage, organization, cataloging) and what

to be found in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920), *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, James Strachey, gen. ed., vol. 18 (London, 1950), 3–64.

¹⁰ Thomas Osborne, "The Ordinariness of the Archive," *History of the Human Sciences* 12, no. 2 (1999): 51–64.

¹¹ "The disasters that mark the end of the millennium are also *archives of evil*: hidden or destroyed, forbidden, misappropriated, 'repressed.' Their usage is at once clumsy and refined, during civil or international wars, during private or secret intrigues."

they are all too often reduced to in common understanding: memory, the desire for origins, “la recherche du temps perdu.”¹² “Prière d’insérer” also makes plainer the relationship between psychoanalysis and archival practice that is explored in the main text: psychoanalysis ought to revolutionize archival questions, dealing as it does with the repression *and* reading of records, and because of the importance it places on all forms of inscription. Above all, this brief insertion makes it clear that, in *Mal d’archive*, Derrida will deal not only with a feverish—sick—search for origins, not only with archives of evil but with “le mal radical,” with evil itself. The two intertwined threads of argument to follow in the main body of the text, about psychoanalysis and Yerushalmi’s questioning of Freud’s Jewishness, underpin a history of the twentieth century that is, indeed, a history of horror. To say the very least, if you read in English, without the insert and with the restricted, monovalent, archaic—and, because archaic, faintly comic—“fever” of the English translation, rather than with “mal” (trouble, misfortune, pain, hurt, sickness, wrong, sin, badness, evil), you will read rather differently than a reader of the French version.¹³

But as English-language readers, we are forced to have the fever, and, if we are historians, forced to exasperated expostulation that archives are nothing like this at all. As might be expected of an experience that is an important professional rite of passage, no one historian’s archive is ever like another’s; each account of his or her experience within them will always produce counterexamples, of different kinds of discomfort. The English translation of *Mal d’archive* makes Archive Fever a variant of origins fever; the fever about to be described here is one that might actually be contracted in the dust of an archive. And this actual fever (Archive Fever Proper) will turn out to be just one more item in the litany of complaints that historians have drawn up, in their deeply uncomfortable quest for original sources that Bonnie G. Smith has shown being recorded by scholars ever since the practice of “scientific” history was inaugurated, in the middle years of the nineteenth century.¹⁴ She has described these moans and groans: the “indignities” endured by Eugène Burnouf, for example, when he was searching out English manuscripts in the 1830s; the “sleepless nights . . . hard beds, ‘sad collections of meat and vegetables cooked in water,’” horrible food, people wearing horrible clothes, desperate social encounters with fellow historians who live in the provincial towns where records are kept, their sad and dispirited wives. (As the gender of history and historical practice has changed, and women have set out on their own campaigns to release “those many princesses, possibly beautiful,” which are the languishing records awaiting their rescuer, we must add to this list of social terrors involved in archive work the sad and dispirited husbands of provincial historians.)¹⁵ Anyone else’s archive can always

¹² How hard *not* to do this, at the end of the long efforts of Pierre Nora and his colleagues to establish that French archives themselves are *lieux de mémoire*. See Bertrand Taithe, “Monuments aux morts? Reading Nora’s *Realms of Memory* and Samuel’s *Theatres of Memory*,” *History of the Human Sciences* 12, no. 2 (1999): 123–39.

¹³ And with yet more difference if you are a British speaker of English. You only have a fever in the UK after medical pronouncement, probably after being hospitalized. “Running a temperature” is what is used to mean the everyday American “fever.”

¹⁴ Bonnie G. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), 120–21.

¹⁵ Bonnie G. Smith, “Gender and the Practices of Scientific History: The Seminar and Archival

make the historian expostulate: "Archive Fever, indeed! *I can tell you all about the archive . . .*"

In a parody (but not quite a parody) of empirical doggedness, we might cling to the coattails of one figure of Derrida's, one image, *one literal meaning* of "fever" (which wasn't even a word that was there to start with), and find not only a different kind of sickness but also the magistrate who is actually present in his text, though wrongly named. There is always a pleasure as a reader in finding something that the writer did not know (or purports not to know) was there (and in this particular case, in willfully asserting of a deconstructionist text that there *is* something there, after all); indeed, the practice of history in its modern mode is, in one view, just one long exercise of the deep satisfaction of *finding things*.¹⁶ But a more serious purpose here is to understand why historians and deconstructionists must continue to talk right past each other, to suggest why this mutual incomprehension may be no bad thing—or at least—nothing to worry about, and along the way to know a little more about what it is that historians do in archives, and in writing about what they have found there.

Archive Fever, indeed? *I can tell you all about archive fever.*

ACTUALLY, ARCHIVE FEVER comes on at night, long after the archive has shut for the day. Typically, the fever—more accurately, the precursor fever, the feverlet—starts in the early hours of the morning, in the bed of a cheap hotel, where the historian cannot get to sleep. You cannot get to sleep because you lie so narrowly, in an attempt to avoid contact with anything that isn't shielded by sheets and pillowcase. The first sign, then, is an excessive attention to the bed, an irresistible anxiety about the hundreds who have slept there before you, leaving their dust and debris in the fibers of the blankets, greasing the surface of the heavy, slippery coverlet. The dust of others, and of other times, fills the room, settles on the carpet, marks out the sticky passage from bed to bathroom.

This symptom—worrying about the bed—is a screen anxiety. What keeps you awake, the sizing and starch in the thin sheets dissolving as you turn again and again within their confines, is actually the archive, and the myriads of its dead, who all day long have pressed their concerns upon you. You think: these people have left me the lot: each washboard and doormat purchased; saucepans, soup tureens, mirrors, newspapers, ounces of cinnamon, and dozens of lemons; each ha'penny handed to a poor child, the minute agreement concerning how long a servant must work to get to keep the greatcoat you provide him with at the hiring; clothes pegs, fat hog meat, the exact expenditure on spirits in a year; the price of papering a room, as you turn, in the spring of 1802, from tenant farmer with limewashed walls into gentleman with gentleman's residence. Everything. Not a purchase made, not a thing acquired that is not noted and recorded. You think: I could get to hate these people; and, I can

Research in the Nineteenth Century," *AHR* 100 (October 1995): 1166, now in Smith, *Gender of History*, 118.

¹⁶ Christina Crosby, *The Ends of History: Victorians and "The Woman Question"* (New York, 1991), 69–109.

never do these people justice;¹⁷ and, finally: I shall never get it done. For the fever usually comes on at the end of the penultimate day in the record office. Either you must leave after tomorrow (train timetables, journeys planned) or the archive is about to shut for the weekend. And it's expensive being in the archive, as your credit card clocks up the price of the room, the restaurant meals. Leaving is the only way to stop spending. Your anxiety is that you will not finish, that there will be something left unread, unnoted, untranscribed. You are not anxious about the Great Unfinished, knowledge of which is the very condition of your being there in the first place, and of the grubby trade you set out in, years ago. You know perfectly well that despite the infinite heaps of *things* they recorded, the notes and traces that these people left behind, it is in fact, practically nothing at all.¹⁸ There is the great, brown, slow-moving strandless river of Everything, and then there is its tiny flotsam that has ended up in the record office you are working in.¹⁹ Your craft is to conjure a social system from a nutmeg grater, and your competence in that was established long ago. Your anxiety is more precise and more prosaic. It's about PT S2/1/1, which only arrived from the stacks that afternoon, which is enormous, and which you will never get through tomorrow.

And then, just as dawn comes, and the birds start to sing, you plunge like a stone into a narrow sleep, waking two or three hours later to find yourself wringing with sweat, the sheets soaked, any protection they afforded quite gone. The Fever—the precursor fever—has broken. But in severe cases, with Archive Fever Proper, all this is in retrospect the mere signal of the terrible headache that will wake you a couple of days later at two o'clock in the morning, at home, in your own bed, the pain pressing down like a cap that fits to your skull and the back of your eyes, the extreme sensitivity to light and distortion of sound, the limbs that can only be moved by extraordinary effort, and the high temperature. Real Archive Fever lasts between sixteen and twenty-four hours, sometimes longer (with an aftermath of weeks rather than days). You think, in the delirium: it was their dust that I breathed in.

THE FIELD OF OCCUPATIONAL (OR INDUSTRIAL) DISEASE emerged in its modern mode in Britain during the early part of the nineteenth century. The physicians and apothecaries attached to the textile-district infirmaries were of professional necessity interested in the diseases arising from relatively new industrial processes and the factory system. Nevertheless, in acknowledging their seventeenth and eighteenth-century

¹⁷ This care and attention to the long-dead subjects of the historian's research has been labeled as a kind of maternalism, exercised through the pursuit of detail. See Victoria Rosner, "Have You Seen This Child? Carolyn K. Steedman and the Writing of Fantasy Motherhood," *Feminist Studies* 26, no. 1 (2000): 7–32. But it is a care quite ordinarily exercised by male historians, and indeed established by them as a professional practice in the mid-nineteenth century. If the gender of history is male, then mothering is an attribute of the sex. Smith, *Gender of History*, 70–156, and *passim*.

¹⁸ For more on the question of how little there is in archives, see Steedman, "Space of Memory," 65–83.

¹⁹ See Maurice Mandelbaum, *Philosophy, History, and the Sciences: Selected Critical Essays* (Baltimore, 1984), 97–111, not for his criticism of deconstructive readings of history (which will be discussed below) but for page 101 and page 103 and the compelling image of the stream or river in describing what it is historians work on.

teenth-century predecessors, they continued to work within a framework that had long been established, of dangerous and malignant trades, especially hide, skin, and leather processing and the papermaking industries.²⁰

The newer medical investigations of the early nineteenth century drew very marked attention to dust and its effect on hand workers as well as factory workers. The largest section of C. Turner Thackrah's investigation of the early 1830s, into "the agents which produce disease and shorten the duration of life" across the trades and professions, was devoted to workers "whose employments produce a dust or vapour decidedly injurious."²¹ He concentrated in particular on papermakers, who were "unable to bear the dust which arises from cutting the rags," and dressers of certain types of colored decorative leather, who needed to pare or grind the finished skins.²² In the *Cyclopaedia of Practical Medicine* of 1833, John Forbes defined a new category of industrial disease: "The Diseases of Artisans." Among the many debilities suffered by hand workers, there were those produced by "the mechanical irritation of molecularae, or fine powders," either in a reaction on the skin of the worker (the fellmongerer's and tanner's carbuncle was an example of ancient provenance) or in some form of pulmonary or respiratory ailment.²³ The maladies attendant on the skin-processing and allied trades were much discussed. After woolen manufacturing, leather working was the most important eighteenth-century industry, both in terms of the number of workers employed and its output.²⁴ In Great Britain, the category of trades considered dangerous from the dusts they produced was widened during the course of the nineteenth century. By its end, bronzing in the printing process, flax and linen milling, cotton and clothing

²⁰ Jacqueline Karnell Corn, *Response to Occupational Health Hazards: A Historical Perspective* (New York, 1992); Donald Hunter, *The Diseases of Occupations* (London, 1955); A. Meiklejohn, *The Life, Work, and Times of Charles Turner Thackrah, Surgeon and Apothecary of Leeds (1795–1833)* (Edinburgh, 1957). The seventeenth-century authority on occupational disease most frequently referred to in the nineteenth century was Bernardini Ramazzini. His *De morbis artificum* (1703) was first written in English in 1705 and published as *A Treatise of the Diseases of Tradesmen*. See also Wilmer C. Wright, *De morbis artificum Bernardini Ramazzini diatriba: The Latin Text of 1713, Revised* (Chicago, 1940). For eighteenth-century "environmentalist" medicine and its connection to later miasmatic and contagion theories, see James C. Riley, *The Eighteenth-Century Campaign to Avoid Disease* (New York, 1987), 13–19, and *passim*.

²¹ Charles Turner Thackrah, *The Effects of Arts, Trades, and Professions, and of Civic States and Habits of Living, on Health and Longevity: With Suggestions for the Removal of Many of the Agents Which Produce Disease, and Shorten the Duration of Life*, 2d edn. (London, 1832), 63–119.

²² Thackrah, *Effects*, 66, 70.

²³ John Forbes, Alexander Tweedie, and John Conolly, *The Cyclopaedia of Practical Medicine*, 3 vols. (London, 1833), 1: 149–60, 156. The particular hazards of cotton dust, in the processing of fiber for spinning and weaving, and in the rag trades in general (in papermaking, until wood pulp largely replaced rags, in the flock and shoddy used in upholstery and bedding) continued to be investigated until well into the twentieth century. Byssinosis was not recognized in the United States as an occupational disease of cotton workers until the 1960s. Leonard A. Parry, *The Risks and Dangers of Various Occupations and Their Prevention* (London, 1900), 4–5; George M. Kober and William C. Hanson, *Diseases of Occupation and Vocational Hygiene* (1916; rpt. edn., London, 1918); Great Britain, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, Coventry, Records of the Trades Union Congress, MSS 292/144.3/3; 144.312; D107, "Dust—Rag Flock, 1937–1947." See also Christopher C. Sellers, *Hazards of the Job: From Industrial Disease to Environmental Health Science* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1997); and Barbara Harrison, *Not Only the "Dangerous Trades": Women's Work and Health in Britain, 1880–1914* (London, 1996), 58–59. For the truly modern hazards of work, see Catherine Casey, *Work, Self and Society: After Industrialism* (London, 1995). For byssinosis in the United States, see Corn, *Response to Occupational Health Hazards*, 147–76.

²⁴ Maxine Berg, *The Age of Manufactures, 1700–1820* (London, 1985), 26, 28, 38–39.

manufacture, brass finishing, and ivory and pearl button making were among the dusty occupations subject to regulation.²⁵

Early twentieth-century medical attention to industrial disease continued to be framed and categorized by the dust question.²⁶ Discussing occupations “from the legislative, social, and medical points of view” in 1916, Thomas Oliver urged his readers to remember “that the greatest enemy of a worker in any trade is dust,” and that “dust is something more than merely particles of an organic or inorganic nature. Usually the particles which rise with the air are surrounded by a watery envelope and clinging to this moist covering there may be micro-organisms.”²⁷ As the defensive action of trade unions moved from questions of working hours and physically injurious labor to incorporate working conditions and health hazards, the question of dust and its inhalation remained a focus, well into the twentieth century.²⁸

“The Diseases of Literary Men” sat uneasily under Forbes’s 1833 heading “Diseases of Artisans,” but nevertheless that is where he placed them. Very briefly, for perhaps thirty years or so, between about 1820 and 1850, a range of occupational hazards was understood to be attendant on the activity of scholarship. These originated, said Forbes, “from want of exercise, very frequently from breathing the same atmosphere too long, from the curved position of the body, and from too ardent exercise of the brain.”²⁹ “Brain fever” might be the result of this mental activity, and it was no mere figure of speech. It described the two forms of meningitis that had been pathologized by the 1830s: inflammation of the membranes of the brain (meningitis proper) and of the substance of the brain (cerebritis).³⁰ Thackrah also concentrated on the “professional men” who live and work “in a bad atmosphere, maintain one position for most of the day, take little exercise and are frequently under the excitement of ambition.”³¹ “Brain fever,” or some form of meningeal disturbance, was a hazard of this way of working:

The brain becomes disturbed. Congestion first occurs and to this succeeds an increased or irregular action of the arteries. A highly excitable state of the nervous system is not infrequently produced. Chronic inflammation of the membranes of the brain, ramollissement of its substance, or other organic change becomes established; and the man dies,

²⁵ Harrison, *Not Only the “Dangerous Trades,”* 58–59, 76; Sir Thomas Oliver, *Diseases of Occupation from the Legislative, Social, and Medical Points of View*, 3d edn. (London, 1916), 71–84.

²⁶ Parry, *Risks and Dangers*, 1–42.

²⁷ Oliver, *Diseases of Occupation*, 59, 71–72.

²⁸ Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, Records of the TUC, MSS 292/144.3/3; 144.312; D107, “Dust—Rag Flock, 1937–1947”; and MSS 292/144/211/6, “Anthrax, 1924–1947.”

²⁹ Forbes, *Cyclopaedia*, 159. These works of the 1820s and 1830s nowhere mention Samuel Tissot’s *De la santé des gens de lettres* (1766), even though his work was translated into English and his perceptions seem omnipresent in the 1820s and 1830s. Samuel Auguste Tissot, *De la santé des gens de lettres* (1766; rpt. edn., Lausanne, 1768); Tissot, *An Essay on Diseases Incidental to Literary and Sedentary Persons: With Proper Rules for Preventing Their Fatal Consequences, and Instructions for Their Care* (London, 1768); Tissot, *A Treatise on the Diseases Incident to Literary and Sedentary Persons: Transcribed from the Last French Edition; With Notes, by a Physician* (Edinburgh, 1771). Tissot did not mention scholarship as an occupation that ran the hazard of dust, or miasma; he made no reference to the headache. He attributed most of the scholar’s ills to sitting down and not taking exercise.

³⁰ Forbes, *Cyclopaedia*, 281–312, “Brain, Inflammation of.”

³¹ Thackrah, *Effects*, 173–92.

becomes epileptic or insane, or falls into that imbecility of mind, which renders him an object of pity to the world, and of deep affliction to his connections.³²

Medical men like Forbes and Thackrah were able to adduce physiological and psychological causes for the fevers of scholarship (lack of exercise, bad air, and the “passions” induced by excitement and ambition). By the time a bacteriological explanation was available, “the literary man” as a victim of occupational disease had disappeared as a category, and these early commentators did not consider the book, the very stuff of the scholar’s life, as a potential cause of his fever. And yet the book and its components (leather binding, various glues and adhesives, paper and its edging, and, decreasingly, parchments and vellums of various types) in fact concentrated in one object many of the industrial hazards and diseases that were mapped out in the course of the century.

The hazards of leather working had been known and recorded in the ancient world. Right through the process, from fellmongering (the initial removal of flesh, fat, and hair from the animal skins) to the paring and finishing of the cured and tanned skins, workers were known to be liable to anthrax. In medical dictionaries and treatises of the eighteenth century, “anthrax” meant “anthracia,” “anthracosis” or “carbunculus,” and described what came in the late nineteenth century to be defined as the external or cutaneous form of anthrax. Leather workers and medical commentators also knew that the processes of fellmongering, washing, limerubbing, scraping, further washing, chemical curing, stretching, drying, and dressing all gave rise to dust, which was inhaled. Descriptions of leather working in the bookbinding trades also show that the amount of hand-paring, shaving, and scraping involved in the process (and productive of dust) remained remarkably consistent across two centuries.³³ Parchment making (parchment is essentially untanned leather) possibly gave rise to even more dust, as it involved the splitting of sheepskins. (The vellum process used calfskin, which was not usually split.) The many hazards of the paper trades have already been indicated. The nineteenth century saw the proliferation of a vast literature on its airborne hazards, which declined toward the end of the century when woodpulp replaced rags as the main component.³⁴

In mentioning “the putrid serum of sheep’s blood,” which bookbinders and pocketbook makers used as “a cement,” Thackrah produced the most striking and

³² Thackrah, *Effects*, 184–85. For the ill-health of historians, see Smith, *Gender of History*, 120–21.

³³ David Macbride, *Some Account of a New Method of Tanning* (Dublin, 1769); The Dublin Society, *The Art of Tanning and Currying Leather: With an Account of All the Different Processes Made Use of in Europe and Asia for Dying Leather Red and Yellow . . .* (London, 1774); James Revell, *A Complete Guide to the Ornamental Leather Work* (London, 1853); Alexander Watt, *The Art of Leather Manufacturing, Being a Practical Handbook* (London, 1885); H. C. Standage, *The Leather Worker’s Manual, Being a Compendium of Practical Recipes and Working Formulae for Curriers, Bootmakers, Leather Dressers . . .* (London, 1900); Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, *Report of the Committee on Leather for Bookbinding: With Four Appendices* (London, 1911); Constant Ponder, *A Report to the Worshipful Company of Leathersellers on the Incidence of Anthrax amongst Those Engaged in Hide, Skin and Leather Industries* (London, 1911). For the treatment of skins in parchment making, and the consistency of the process over time, see Ronald Reed, *Ancient Skins, Parchments and Leathers* (London, 1972), 46–85; Reed, *The Nature and Making of Parchment* (Leeds, 1975); and Dard Hunter, *Papermaking: The History and Technique of an Ancient Craft* (London, 1978).

³⁴ Donald Hunter, *Diseases of Occupations*, 546, suggests that the change took place in the 1890s; but see Carolyn Steedman, “What a Rag Rug Means,” *Journal of Material Culture* 3 (November 1998): 259–81, esp. 273–74 and references.

potent image of the book as a locus of a whole range of industrial diseases.³⁵ That stinking glue was probably also one among several of the actual transmitters of the Archive Fever that is discussed here. The bacillus of anthrax was the first specific microorganism discovered, when in 1850 Pierre Rayner and Casimir Davaine observed the *petits batonnets* in the blood of sheep who had died from the disease. When Louis Pasteur published his work on lactic acid fermentation, Davaine recognized that the little infusoria were not blood crystals but living organisms.³⁶ Robert Koch cultivated the bacillus, infected sheep from his cultivation, and described its life cycle in 1876.³⁷ Considerable investigative energy of the 1880s went into showing that the disease in animals and human beings was identical, that the bacillus anthracis was responsible for the disease in all hosts, that the skins, hairs, and wool of the animal dying of what was still, in the 1870s, sometimes called “cattle plague” or “splenetic fever” retained the infecting organism, which found access to the body of the worker in various ways.³⁸ Internal and external anthrax were clearly demarcated, provided with disease classifications, and with miserable prognoses: “the worker may be perfectly well when he goes to business; he may in a short time become giddy, restless and exhausted; he feels very ill, goes home, becomes feverish . . . [I]n bad cases, in from twenty four hours to four days the patient dies unconscious.”³⁹ As a delegate of the National Society of Woolcombers pointed out to the British Trades Union Congress in 1929, “It is a disease that does not hang on very long. You get it one day and you may be dead the next.”⁴⁰

In Britain, anthrax was first scheduled as a notifiable disease in 1892.⁴¹ The number of cases rose in the following decades despite regulation, with workers, trade unionists, and medical commentators all ascribing the increase to the upsurge in imports of foreign hides and wools.⁴² The disease remained a profound danger to workers in the woolen and allied trades, and in all forms of leather and skin working, until after World War II.⁴³ By the 1920s, it was common knowledge among workers in wool, hides, and hair that it was the anthrax spore that constituted the greatest danger. If an animal dies of anthrax and is immediately destroyed without opening the carcass or removing the skin, there is probably no risk. However, once

³⁵ Thackrah, *Effects*, 45.

³⁶ Jean Théorides, “Un grand médecin et biologiste: Casimir-Joseph Davaine (1812–1882),” *Analecta medico-historica* 4 (1968): 72–123, 124–25.

³⁷ W. F. Bynum and Roy Porter, *Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine*, 2 vols. (London, 1993), 1: 113–14; Kenneth F. Kiple, *The Cambridge World History of Human Disease* (Cambridge, 1993), 582–84.

³⁸ Parry, *Risks and Dangers*, 147–54.

³⁹ Parry, *Risks and Dangers*, 149; also see Donald Hunter, *Diseases of Occupations*, 627–39.

⁴⁰ Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, Records of the TUC, M292/144/211/6, “Anthrax, 1924–1947.” This is a note from the Trades Union Congress, *Report*, 1929, pp. 116–18.

⁴¹ That is, a contagious disease that must by law be reported to public health officials, and in some cases to the police. Harrison, *Not Only the “Dangerous Trades,”* 76.

⁴² Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, Records of the TUC, MSS 292/144/211/6, “Anthrax, 1924–1947.”

⁴³ The Factory Department of the Home Office issued an illustrated “Precautionary Card for Workers” in 1930, telling them what symptoms of anthrax to look out for: “Take this card with you and show it to the Doctor.” Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, Records of the TUC, MSS 292/144/211/6, “Anthrax, 1924–1947.” Ministry of Labour, *Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Anthrax* (London, 1959).

the bacillus comes into contact with air, it forms resistant spores.⁴⁴ Any wool, fleece, or skin touched by infected blood will contain these spores; fleeces and hides when dried are the source of dust, which, containing the spores, may come into contact with skin abrasions or may be inhaled.⁴⁵ It was also common knowledge that the spores were "very difficult to kill."⁴⁶ Leather working provided the optimum conditions for the development of spores, for none of the leather "cures" available to preserve hides destroyed "the Anthrax Infection," while the temperature that might eliminate the spores was utterly destructive of the hides.⁴⁷ The anthrax spore could come through the whole leather-making process unscathed, although "the question as to whether finished leather can retain and convey the infection" had to remain unsettled, for "whilst cases have occurred in men who have only handled leather, and it has been proved that the spore can pass uninjured through all the chemical solutions used in tanning, the possibility of the leather itself having become contaminated by contact with other goods can hardly ever be excluded."⁴⁸

In the same period as the indestructibility and fatality of the anthrax spore was established, archivists and book restorers started to define a type of leather deterioration, particularly in "modern" leathers, those of the post-1880 era, which is when the bookbinding and finishing trades began to use imported, vegetable-cured leather in great quantities.⁴⁹ "Powdering," "red decay," and "red rot," which are as well known among historians as they are among archivists, continue to be described in the literature of book conservation.⁵⁰ A crumbling of leather into an orangey-red powder, it is said to be found particularly in East Indian leather, prepared with tannin of bark, wood, or fruits, which became increasingly common at the end of the nineteenth century. A second type of red decay known to conservationists, a hardening and embrittling (rather than powdering) of bindings, occurs most often in leathers prepared before about 1830. This also gives rise to dust in handling.⁵¹ It seems, then, from the considerable literature on this topic, that the causes of both kinds of leather rot must be found in the type of tanning agent or agents used (and these have been numerous), making the finished skin more or less vulnerable to atmospheric conditions.⁵²

So when the young Jules Michelet spent his very first days in the archives, in those "catacombs of manuscripts" that made up the Archives Nationales in Paris in the 1820s, and later wrote of restoring its "papers and parchments" to the light of day

⁴⁴ Donald Hunter, *Diseases of Occupations*, 627–39.

⁴⁵ See Philip Brachman, "Inhalation Anthrax," *Annals of the New York Academy of Science* 353 (1980): 83–93, for a history of attention to internal anthrax, by this date "primarily only of historical interest."

⁴⁶ Kober and Hanson, *Diseases*, 159.

⁴⁷ Ponder, *Report to the Worshipful Company*, 17, 44, 65.

⁴⁸ Ponder, *Report to the Worshipful Company*, 65–66.

⁴⁹ Society for the Encouragement of Arts, *Report of the Committee*, 1911, 12; H. J. Plenderleith, *The Preservation of Leather Bookbindings* (1946; rpt. edn., London, 1967).

⁵⁰ K. J. Adcock, *Leather: From the Raw Material to the Finished Product* (London, 1924), 107; Matt Roberts and Don Etherington, *Bookbinding and the Conservation of Books* (Washington, D.C., 1982), 214; European Commission, Environment Leather Project, *Deterioration of Vegetable Tanned Leather, Protection and Conservation of the European Cultural Heritage*, Research Report No. 6 (Copenhagen, 1997); Bernard C. Middleton, *The Restoration of Leather Bindings*, 3d edn. (London, 1998), 36.

⁵¹ Roberts and Etherington, *Bookbinding*, 214.

⁵² Roberts and Etherington, *Bookbinding*, 214.

by breathing in their dust,⁵³ this was not the figure of speech that he intended but, rather, a literal description of a physiological process. In a quite extraordinary (and much scrutinized) passage, it is the historian's act of inhalation that gives life: "these papers and parchments, so long deserted, desired no better than to be restored to the light of day . . . [A]s I breathed in their dust, I saw them rise up."⁵⁴ It remains completely uncertain—it *must* remain uncertain, that is its point—who or what rises up in this moment. It cannot be determined whether it is the manuscripts or the dead or both who come to life, and take shape and form. But we can be clearer than Michelet could be about exactly what it was that he breathed in: the dust of the workers who made the papers and parchments, the dust of the animals who provided the skins for their leather bindings, the by-product of all the filthy trades that have, by circuitous routes, deposited their end-products in the archives. And we are forced to consider whether it was not life that he breathed into "the souls who had suffered so long ago and who were smothered now in the past," but death that he took into himself with each lungful of the past.

Roland Barthes believed that a different process of incorporation was at work, that Michelet actually *ate* history, and that it was eating it that made him ill. The first section of *Michelet par lui-même* (1953) was called "Michelet Mangeur d'Histoire." Barthes described Michelet's terrible headaches ("la maladie de Michelet, c'est la migraine"), the way in which everything gave him migraine, how his body became his own creation, a kind of steady-state system, a symbiosis between the historian and History, which was ingested in the manner of the Host. This ingested History was also Death: "Michelet took in History as nourishment, but, in return, he abandoned his life to it: not only his work and his health but even his death."⁵⁵ It is the suggestion here that this process did actually take place, not just by analogy with "le thème christologique"—indeed, Christian theme—that Barthes pursues here (he made much as well, of Michelet's frequent reference to drinking the black blood of the dead) but also in the biological realm, as physiological process.

We must seriously consider, as Jules Michelet was not able to, the archive as a harbinger of the anthrax infection. We must take note of the significant number of cases of anthrax meningitis reported between 1920 and 1950, when it became clear for the first time that the bacillus anthracis could cause, or result in, meningitis (though, indeed, the incidence of the meningeal variant was infrequent).⁵⁶ In its

⁵³ "Et à mesure que je soufflais sur leur poussière, je les voyais se soulever." Jules Michelet, "Preface de l'Histoire de France" [1869], and "Examen en des Remainments du texte de 1833 par Robert Casanova," *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 4 (Paris, 1974), 613–14, 727.

⁵⁴ Among the commentators: Edmund Wilson, *To the Finland Station: A Study in the Writing and Acting of History* (1940; rpt. edn., Garden City, N.Y., 1953), 8; Roland Barthes, *Michelet par lui-même* (1954; rpt. edn., Paris, 1968), 89–92; Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, 1973), 149–62; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. edn. (New York, 1991); Steedman, "Space of Memory."

⁵⁵ Barthes, *Michelet par lui-même*, 19. See Andy Stafford, "Barthes and Michelet: Biography and History," *Nottingham French Studies* 36, no. 1 (1997): 14–23. As Stafford urges, see Chantal Thomas on Michelet par lui-même as "quelque chose comme le cœur secret de son [Barthes's] oeuvre." Chantal Thomas, "Barthes et Michelet: Homologie de travail, parallèle d'affection," *La règle du jeu* 15 (January 1995): 73–84.

⁵⁶ Donald Hunter, *Diseases of Occupations*, 638; Robert H. Shanahan, Joseph R. Griffin, and Alfred

modern classification, meningitis bears strict comparison with the brain fever described nearly two centuries ago, as attendant on the sedentary, airless, and fevered scholarly life, spent in close proximity to leather-bound books and documents.

We may thus begin to provide the etiology of Archive Fever Proper, and, on a parochial and personal note, suggest that in England, at least, the Public Record Office is by far the most likely site for contraction of it. Many PRO classmarks consist of dust and dirt and decaying matter put into bundles in the 1780s and then into boxes 150 years later. In the County Record Offices, where, although the stacks may be hundreds of yards long, there are in fact far fewer records stored, documents have nearly always been dusted and cleaned at some time since their acquisition. But that is not strictly the point, for the red rot comes off on your hands from the spine of the ledger; the dust still rises as you open the bundle. Moreover, atmospheric conditions in the Public Record Office, being at the optimum for the preservation of paper and parchment, are rather cold for human beings. You sit all day long, reading in the particular manner of historians, to save time and money, and in the sure knowledge that out of the thousand lines of handwriting you decipher, you will perhaps use one or two. You scarcely move, partly to conserve body heat but mainly because *you want to finish* and not to have to come back, because the PRO is so far away, so difficult to get to. That is the immediate ambition that excites you: to leave, although there exist of course the wider passions, of *finding it* (whatever it is you are searching for), and writing the article or book, writing history. All of this must be taken into account, as productive of Archive Fever. But so must the thousands of historians be considered, who, like Michelet, have breathed in lungfuls of dust and woken that night or the next with the unmistakable headache, “the heavy and often stupefying pain.”⁵⁷ We should certainly remember that in 1947 (the last time the topic was seriously considered in the medical literature) the incidence of meningeal involvement in anthrax infection was considered to be only 5 percent.⁵⁸ But taking all of this into account, that’s what my money is on; we’re talking epidemiology here, not metaphor: meningitis due to or as a complication of anthrax; Real Archive Fever, or Archive Fever Proper, a new entry for the medical dictionaries.

P. von Anersburg, “Anthrax Meningitis: Report of a Case of Internal Anthrax with Recovery,” *American Journal of Chemical Pathology* 17 (1947): 719–22; H. Gross and H. Plate, “Milzbrandbacillen-Meningitis” [Meningitis due to anthrax bacilli], *Klinische Wochenschrift* 19 (October 5, 1940): 1036–37; Michel Deniker, Jean Patel, and Bernard Jamain, “Meningite au Cours du Charbon” [Meningitis as a complication of anthrax], *La presse médicale* 46 (April 13, 1938): 575–76; R. Bruynoghe and M. Ronse, “Une infection méningée par un bacilli anthracite” [Meningeal infection due to anthracoid bacillus], *Comptes rendus des séances de la Société de Biologie* 125 (1937): 395–97; Hamant, Drouet, P. Chalnot, and J. Simonin, “Hyperacute Meningitis in Anthrax,” *Bulletins et mémoires de la Société Médicale des Hopitaux de Paris* 49 (January 23, 1933): 14–15; G. R. McCowen and H. B. Parker, “Anthrax Meningitis,” *Journal of the Royal Navy Medical Service* 18 (October 1932): 278–80; W. K. Dunscombe, “Meningitis Due to B. anthracis,” *British Medical Journal* (January 30, 1932): 190; A. Aguiar, “Meningitis Caused by Anthrax in Boy of 11,” *Bulletin de la Société de Pédiatrie de Paris* 26 (May 1928): 285–91.

⁵⁷ Forbes, *Cyclopaedia*, 1: 282–83.

⁵⁸ Shanahan, Griffin, and von Anersburg, “Anthrax Meningitis,” 721.

ACCORDING TO BENEDICT ANDERSON, Michelet went into the archive in order to enact a particular kind of national imagining. The dead and forgotten people he exhumed “were by no means a random assemblage of forgotten, anonymous dead. They were those whose sacrifices, throughout History, made possible the rupture of 1789 and the self-conscious appearance of the French nation.”⁵⁹ Anderson is brilliant—and brilliantly funny—on the way in which, after Michelet, “the silence of the dead was no obstacle to the exhumation of their deepest desires,” and the way in which historians found themselves able to speak on behalf of the dead and to interpret the words and the acts they themselves had not understood—“qu’ils n’ont pas compris.”⁶⁰ It was not exactly Michelet the historian, nor indeed the Historian, who performed this act of interpretation (although it was indeed, precisely, on a particular day, a date, a lived time, that the young lycéen entered the portals of the Archives Nationales and breathed in the dust of the dead). It was in fact a magistrate, also called History, who did the work of resurrection:

Yes, everyone who dies leaves behind a little something, his memory, and demands that we care for it. For those who have no friends, the magistrate must provide that care. For the law, or justice, is more certain than all our tender forgetfulness, our tears so swiftly dried. This magistracy is History. And the dead are, to use the language of Roman law, those *miserabiles personae* with whom the magistrate must preoccupy himself. Never in my career have I lost sight of that duty of the historian.⁶¹

Is this a reason for the *archon* and the *arkhe* being there in Derrida’s text? Not with a reference to the legal system of the Greek city-state at all but somehow, by some means, to Michelet’s awesome yet touching image of 1872–1874, of History (or the Historian, or both) charged with the care and protection of the forgotten poor and the forgotten dead? A biography of Derrida, his educational history, an account of the fate of Michelet’s writing—and history writing in general—under the Vichy regime’s educational “reforms,” all might give us a sighting of his reading of Michelet, and a possible answer to the question of how Michelet’s Magistrate got into “Archive Fever.” But we would then have to dismiss this search, our own tiny, pathetic example of the Western nostalgia—fever—for origins, points of beginning, foundations.⁶²

⁵⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 198.

⁶⁰ Anderson’s source for his formulation is Barthes, *Michelet par lui-même*, 92.

⁶¹ Jules Michelet, “Jusqu’au 18 Brumaire” [1872–74], *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 21 (Paris, 1982), 268. This passage is quoted in full in Barthes, *Michelet par lui-même*, 1954, under the title “Magistrature de l’histoire.”

⁶² But the attempt to find the *archon*’s origins would be fun. Working material for it may be found in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Paris, 1991), 299–302; Y. C. Aouate, “Les mesures d’exclusion antijuives dans l’enseignement public en Algérie, 1940–1943,” *Pardès* 8 (1988): 109–28. For the uses of history under Vichy, see Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940–1944* (New York, 1972), 150–68; Jean-Michel Barreau, “Vichy, idéologue de l’école,” *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 38 (1991): 590–616; and Barreau, “Abel Bonnard, Ministre de l’éducation nationale sous Vichy, ou l’éducation impossible,” *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 43, no. 3 (1996): 464–78. See also Jean-Michel Guiraud, *La vie intellectuelle et artistique à Marseille à l’époque de Vichy et sous l’occupation, 1940–1944* (Marseille, 1987), 144–55; and W. D. Halls, *The Youth of Vichy France* (Oxford, 1981), 8, 19, 40, 216–19, for the uses of history to depose the centrality of the 1789 Revolution and Republicanism in French political culture. See Nadia Margolis, “The ‘Joan Phenomenon’ and the French Right,” in Bonnie Wheeler and Charles T. Wood, *Fresh Verdicts on Joan of Arc* (New York, 1996), 265–87, for Michelet’s work on Joan of Arc (originally published in 1841, as part of his unfinished history of the French people), and its use by the French

Whether we can explain the presence of the Magistrate in Derrida's text or not, we can assuredly see that he is there. Indeed, we should find this particular magistrate's presence unsurprising: we have learned from Derrida himself that texts contain what apparently isn't there at all; that they pull against their overt meaning, in the unregarded details, in chains of metaphors, in the footnotes; on all the wilder shores of meaning that are signaled by punctuation marks, for example; by absences, spaces, lacunae, all working against their overt propositions.

Reading "Archive Fever" in this way would be fine, if our reading were to produce a magistrate who apparently wasn't there. But the *archon* is there: his house, his justice room, his law books open "Archive Fever"; and the problem is not that he's there but that he is the wrong magistrate. The *archon* operated a system of law in a slave society, and had a quite different function from the kind of magistrate that Michelet figured. The *archon* dealt with slaves, the majority of local populations, only as aspects of their owners' property and personality.⁶³ But the Magistrate whom Michelet figures as History was, in different ways, in England and France of the modern period, specifically charged with the care and management of the poor, and with the mediation of social and class relations. Michelet invoked Roman law in describing the duties and activities of a magistracy, and thus might be thought to make the post-Napoleonic French justice system the groundwork of his allegory. But the same broad assumptions of the magistrate's task guided theory and practice under England's system of common law. Statute law ("law positive," in eighteenth-century language) gave the care and protection of the majority of the populace to the justices of the peace, under the Poor Law. (This is to leave quite out of the reckoning the question of how nasty, demeaning, and actually unjust that treatment may have been, in any particular case.) English legal theory of the eighteenth century was quite strongly "Roman" in implication and interpretation, and the most striking legal commentator of them all, William Blackstone, understood the relationship between master and servant, between subordinates and those who ruled over them, to be the first of the "great relations" of private life that the law was interested in, and that on which all other forms of personal relationship subject to law (the married relation, and between parent and child) were based.⁶⁴ The local justice of the peace was formally obliged to mediate these relationships, within the social and familial hierarchies of civil society. Operating a legal system with chattel-slavery law, the *archon* did not—could not—do anything like this.

Could not do anything like the justice of the peace Philip Ward of Stoke Doyle in Northamptonshire, who sometime in April 1751 heard a complaint from a Mr. Sambrook, watchmaker of Oundle, whose apprentice had assaulted him. A servant or apprentice who did such a thing was liable to one year's imprisonment and additional corporal punishment, but the legislation specified that two justices must

Right (but not, it seems, during Vichy). See also Robert Gildea, *The Past in French History* (New Haven, Conn., 1994), 154–65.

⁶³ Victor Ehrenberg, *The Greek State*, 2d edn. (London, 1969), 66–74, 77–80; Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), 4–5, 29, 87.

⁶⁴ Sir William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England: In Four Books* (1765; rpt. edn., Dublin, 1775), 1: 422–32; S. F. C. Milsom, "The Nature of Blackstone's Achievement," *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 1 (1981): 1–12; John W. Cairns, "Blackstone, an English Institutional: Legal Literature and the Rise of the Nation State," *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 4 (1984): 318–60.

sit together to pass sentence in this way.⁶⁵ Doyle had already issued a warrant (he could do that on his sole authority), when it occurred to him “upon second thoughts that I as a single justice can neither punish him upon s.21 of 5 Eliz. c.4 nor upon s.4 of 20 Geo.2 c.19.” He recorded in his notebook his solution to the limits the law placed on his actions. Calling the arrested apprentice into the justice room at Stoke Doyle House and “concealing my want of power I said the words of the Statute read over to him and he immediately desir’d he might be admitted [*sic*] to ask his Masters pardon upon promising never to offend more and so was forgiven.”⁶⁶ The magistrate who is really in Derrida’s text, Michelet’s Magistrate, exercises a power that he does not always actually have, that has already always been inaugurated somewhere else; he files away not only official documents (although the warrant in this particular case from 1751, the hundreds of recognizances, depositions, and examinations that passed under the hand of justices of the peace, and must have passed through Ward’s justice room are actually lost) but also makes entries in a personal notebook that he, like many country magistrates, kept to remind himself of what he had done, as well as to remind himself of what the law said he could not do. And, although the nameless apprentice watchmaker of Oundle is not the best example I could produce, the stories of the poor, the *miserabiles personae*, end up in the archive, too. The archive that isn’t there in “Archive Fever” is not and never has been the repository of official documents alone. And nothing is there from the beginning. Archives hold no origins, and origins are not what historians search for in them. Rather, they hold everything *in medias res*, the account caught halfway through, most of it missing, with no end ever in sight. Nothing starts in the Archive, nothing, ever at all, although things certainly end up there.

Including, of course, dust. Even though Michelet was unaware of its precise components, he breathed it in, restored the dead to the light of day, and gave them justice by bringing them before the tribunal of History. This History was what Michelet himself wrote, out of the notes and the handfuls of dust he carried away from the Archive. As a form of writing, it was also an idea, of the total justice of a narrative that incorporated the past and the “when it shall have been,” that is, when the dead have spoken and (the specificity of Michelet’s central interest as a historian) France has been made.

Yet it is not his history of the French nation for which Michelet is remembered, at the beginning of the twenty-first century. What promotes the bright, interested question “Was he *mad*?” when you tell people that you are reading him are all the volumes that do not seem to be works of history, to the modern, professional historical eye: work on the sea, on birds, on women, on mountains, insects, love. These were the texts, an admixture of physiology and lyricism, that entertained Barthes in the early 1950s. They will probably continue to be marked as odd,

⁶⁵ Blackstone, *Commentaries*, 1: 427–28. Justices of the peace were more likely to learn their law not even from one of the many editions of Richard Burn’s *Justice of the Peace and Parish Officer* published after 1756 but from volumes of tear-out blank warrants, and summonses, like Burn’s own *Blank Precedents Relating to the Office of Justices of the Peace* (London, 1787). But in 1751, Ward probably referred to Michael Dalton, *The Country Justice: Containing the Practice, Duty and Power of the Justices of the Peace, as Well in as out of Their Sessions* (London, 1742), 139.

⁶⁶ Lincoln’s Inn Library, London, Misc. Manuscript 592, Manuscript Diary of Philip Ward of Stoke Doyle, Northamptonshire, 1748–1751.

although in the nineteenth-century development of the modern practice of history, they were not *very* strange.

As History, as a way of thinking and a modern academic discipline, came to be formulated, it bore much resemblance to the life sciences, where the task was also to think about the past—think pastness—about the imperishability of matter, through all the stages of growth and decay, to the point of recognition that “within the system of nature existing as it is, we cannot admit that an atom of any kind can ever be destroyed.”⁶⁷ Nothing goes away. Physiology, in serious and popular ways, was conceived as a form of history, a connection exemplified by the chemist and physiologist John William Draper, who followed his *Human Physiology* of 1856 with a *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe* in 1863. Here, he sought to provide evidence of a concluding premise of his earlier work, that “the history of men and of nations is only a chapter of physiology.”⁶⁸ Draper’s panegyrics to the ever-moving, ever-changing sea and sky in this second work, his descriptions of the constant yielding of mountains to frost and rain, the passing of all things from form to form, suggest that Michelet’s volumes on similar topics should not be read solely under the interpretive banner of Romantic lyricism but as a form of history. They also make it very plain why Michelet *knew* that the unconsidered dead were to be found in the Archives Nationales, and that the material presence of their dust, the atomistic remains of the toils and tribulations and of the growth and decay of the animal body, was literally what might carry them, through his inhalation and his writing of History, into a new life. He knew that they were “not capable of loss of existence.”⁶⁹

The historian’s massive authority as a writer derives from two factors: the ways archives are, and the conventional rhetoric of history writing, which always asserts (through the footnotes, through the casual reference to PT S2/1/1) that you *know* because you have been there. The fiction is that the authority comes from the documents themselves, as well as the historian’s obeisance to the limits they impose on any account that employs them. But really it comes from having been there (the train to the distant city, the call number, the bundle opened, the dust), so that then, and only then, you can present yourself as moved and dictated to by those sources, telling a story the way it has to be told.

There is not a way in which History (the work of historians, history writing) could operate differently. There is everything, or Everything, the great undifferentiated past, all of it, which is not history, but just stuff.⁷⁰ The smallest fragment of its representation (nearly always in some kind of written language) ends up in various kinds of archives and record offices (and also in the vastly expanded data banks that Derrida refers to in “Archive Fever”). From that, you make history, which is never what *was* there, once upon a time. (There was only stuff, fragments, dust.) “There is history,” writes Jacques Rancière, after his long contemplation of Michelet,

⁶⁷ John William Draper, *Human Physiology, Statistical and Dynamical; or, The Conditions and the Course of the Life of Man* (1856; rpt. edn., New York, 1868), 548.

⁶⁸ John William Draper, *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe*, 2 vols. (London, 1864), 1: 604. On the relationship of history to physiology, see Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780–1930* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), 43–95.

⁶⁹ Draper, *Human Physiology*, 1: 549.

⁷⁰ See P. A. Roth, “Narrative Explanation: The Case of History,” *History and Theory* 27 (1988): 1–13.

“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*.”⁷¹ Contemplating Everything, the historian must start somewhere, but starting is a different thing from originating, or even from beginning. And while there is closure in historical writing, and historians do bring their arguments and books to a conclusion, there is no End—cannot be an End, for we are still in it, the great, slow-moving Everything. An End is quite different from an Ending, and endings are what history deals in, just as its mode of beginning always suggests a wayward arbitrariness: “Once upon a time” is the rhetorical mode, the unspoken starting point of the written history. The grammatical tense of the archive is not, then, the future perfect, not the conventional past historic of English-speaking historians, nor even the *présent historique* of the French, but the syntax of the fairy tale: “Once, there was,” “in the spring of 1751” (“in the summer of 1994,” indeed), “once *upon* a time . . .”

The archive gives rise to particular practices of reading. If you are an archival historian, you nearly always read something that was not intended for your eyes: you are the reader impossible-to-be-imagined by Philip Ward keeping his justice’s notebook as an *aide-mémoire* (quite different from the way that Henry Fielding, who had a good deal of horrifying fun with what went on in the justice room, *did* imagine you, a reader, with *Joseph Andrews* in your hands, reading the novel he wanted someone to read). The vestryman recording an allowance of 6 pence a week in bread to a poor woman, the merchant manufacturer’s wife listing the payments-in-kind to her serving maid (silk ribbons, a pair of stays, a hatbox!) in Howarth 1794, had nothing like you in mind at all.⁷² Productive and extraordinary as is Derrida’s concept of the *carte-postale* (the idea of the relationship between language and truth that his book *La carte postale* explores), of messages gone astray, not sent in the first place, or unread because you can’t see them for looking at them, as in Edgar Allan Poe’s “Purloined Letter,” none of it gives insight (indeed, it was not meant to) into the message that was never a message in the first place, never sent, and never sent to the historian: was just an entry in a ledger, a name on a list.⁷³ Moreover, historians read for what is not there: the silences and the absences of the documents always speak to us. They spoke, of course, to Michelet. (He was actually after the silence, the whisper, the unrecorded dead: what wasn’t there at all, in the Archives Nationales.) An absence speaks; the nameless watchmaker’s apprentice is important *because* he is nameless: we give his namelessness meaning, make it matter. Indeed, Rancière claims that it was Michelet who first formulated the proper subject of history: all the numberless unnoticed *miserabiles personae* who had lived and died, as mute in the grave as they had been in life. According to Rancière, Michelet’s modern reputation as a mere Romantic—indeed, sentiment-

⁷¹ Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge*, Hassan Melehy, trans. (1992; rpt. edn., Minneapolis, 1994), 63.

⁷² For the historian as a reader—always this kind of reader—of the unintended, purloined letter, see Carolyn Steedman, “A Woman Writing a Letter,” in Rebecca Earle, ed., *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600–1945* (Aldershot, 1999), 111–33.

⁷³ Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, Alan Bass, trans. (French edn., 1980; English, Chicago, 1987).

tal—rescuer of “the People” serves to repress both his startling originality as a historian and History’s proper topic.⁷⁴

ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS DURING THE 1980s and 1990s, it was very sensibly suggested by Christopher Norris that it was best for historians not to mess with deconstruction, that as a method of reading devised for the interrogation of philosophical texts, its power lies solely in the particular terrain of philosophy (and possibly that of literature).⁷⁵ One might with some profit treat a work of history *as* a literary text and make deconstructive approaches to it as a form of writing, but those approaches could do nothing to, or for, the reading matter found in the archives, out of which the historical work is (partly) constructed. Norris made his point for political purposes, when an extreme relativism wedded to a form of deconstruction allowed some historians to deny that certain past events had ever taken place. What is clearer ten years on is that it was not historians who needed warning off but rather a number of cultural critics and theorists who wanted to address the question of history, or historicity, or merely have something to say about its relationship to deconstructive practice. It was the problem of diachronicity (in the realm of synchronic analysis and thinking) that was being raised. Or the problem of pastness, *tout court*.⁷⁶ The urgency with which Norris needed to give his advice to historians perhaps prevented him from considering what happens when the traffic goes the other way, when deconstruction considers historians and tells them about the history they write. It has long been noted that alerting historians to the fact that they write in the tragic mode, or as ironists, that they emplot their stories in particular ways, and may produce meanings that work against their overt and stated arguments makes absolutely no difference at all to their dogged daily performance of positivism. The text usually figured in these observations is Hayden White’s *Metahistory*, a work now nearly thirty years old; and, with White’s work in view, it has been suggested that one of the reasons for this, for the way in which deconstructive readings slither around the written history, is that their analyses do not have reference in mind. For history writing, as Maurice Mandelbaum pointed out some time ago, does not refer to archives and record offices, nor to the documents they contain. Neither is the point of reference any preexisting account of those documents in works of history. Rather, what is referred to are anterior entities: past structures, processes, and happenings. In their writing, historians “refer to past occurrences whose existence is only known through inferences drawn from surviving documents; but it is not to those documents themselves, but to what they indicate concerning the past, that the historian’s statements actually refer.” In making this point, Mandelbaum appears to suggest that the historian’s statements

⁷⁴ Rancière, *Names of History*, 42–75. And see Hayden White’s comments on these points, in his introduction to this work, xiv–xviii.

⁷⁵ Christopher Norris, *Uncritical Theory: Postmodernism, Intellectuals and the Gulf War* (London, 1992); and his *Deconstruction and the Interests of Theory* (London, 1988), 16–17.

⁷⁶ See, for example, Derek Attridge, Geoff Bennington, and Robert Young, eds., *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History* (Cambridge, 1987).

are not inventive, nor creative, but that history writing makes reference to History—as something that has a prior, pre-textual existence.⁷⁷

We should probably go beyond this, by allowing that it is, in fact, the historian who makes the stuff of the past into a structure or event, a happening or a thing, through the activities of thought and writing: that they were never actually there, once, in the first place, or at least not in the same way that a nutmeg grater actually once was, and certainly not as the many ways in which they “have been told.” There is a double nothingness in the writing of history and in the analysis of it: it is about something that never did happen in the way it comes to be represented (the happening exists in the telling or the text), and it is made out of materials that are not there, in an archive or anywhere else. We should be entirely unsurprised that deconstruction made no difference to this kind of writing. The search for the historian’s nostalgia for origins and original referents cannot be performed, because there is actually *nothing there*: only absence, what once was: dust.

In 1779, Fanny Burney was taken ill when she was staying with her friend, Hester Thrale. (Her *then* friend. This friendship disintegrated some years later, when the widow of the brewing magnate married an Italian—and a mere music master to boot—and became Mrs. Piozzi. Many were lost at this time.) Burney was obviously a demanding invalid, or at least Mrs. Thrale found her so: “Fanny Burney has kept her Room here in my house seven Days with a Fever, or something she called a Fever,” wrote her exasperated hostess, in one of the six blank quarto volumes that her husband had given her in 1776:

I gave her every Medicine, and every Slop with my own hand; took away her dirty Cups, Spoons &c moved her Tables, in short was Doctor & Nurse & Maid—for I did not like the Servants should have additional Trouble lest they should hate her for’t and now—with the Gratitude of a Wit, She tells me that the *World thinks better of me* for my Civilities to her.

It does! does it?⁷⁸

The cleverness of this entry is utterly charming: there is the confident move of the pen from the penultimate line to the last, making meaning by a space left behind; there is that exclamation mark, and the bold use of an exclamation and a question mark within one sentence, the insistence that you hear a tone of voice in words that were not, in fact, spoken aloud at all. Now Hester Thrale was, in all manner of ways, a very difficult number indeed, and she is scarcely good evidence for my case of the historian as reader of the unintended letter. She did not write for us, but she certainly imagined something like us reading her private diary—especially her academic readers, for among all its other uses, *Thraliana* was used as a source for her own philological work. She often reflected on what posterity would make of her writing:

⁷⁷ Mandelbaum, *Philosophy, History, and the Sciences*, 109–10.

⁷⁸ Katharine C. Balderston, ed., *Thraliana: The Diary of Mrs. Hester Lynch Thrale (Later Mrs. Piozzi) 1776–1809*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1951), 1: 413, entry for December 1, 1779.

but say the Critics a Violin is not an Instrument for *Ladies* to manage, very likely!
 I remember when they said the same Thing of a Pen.
 I wonder if my Executors will burn the Thraliana!⁷⁹

And she so admired some of her *aperçus* and turns of phrase that she recycled them in her letters (like the Fanny Burney story). She wrote highly crafted, controlled, and managed accounts of herself, directed at future audiences. This is not the aspect of her voluminous writings that fixes attention. Rather, it is that question of someone else's supposed fever, a question asked in some place between speech and writing, that voiced skepticism, that irony, all of which provokes, in the hallucinatory aftermath of your own Archive Fever, the delicious idea of pursuing its origins—of finding out *where it came from*—through Derrida's text, indeed; so that you might end up exclaiming: "It does! does it?"—"Archive Fever, indeed? I can tell you *all about* Archive Fever!"

⁷⁹ Balderston, *Thraliana*, 2: 748.

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