

# *The Deleted Archive: Revisiting Alice Munro, Amnon Shamosh, Annie Ernaux and Yehoshua Kenaz*

---

Michal Ben-Naftali

Tel Aviv University

**ABSTRACT:** The essay develops the notion of “the deleted archive” on the basis of Derrida’s *Archive Fever* (1995) and through looking at several literary works: a short story by Alice Munro, a memoir by Amnon Shamosh, a diary by Annie Ernaux, and a novel by Yehoshua Kenaz. These works, which observe from different subject positions elderly people in an acute condition of illness, mostly Alzheimer’s disease, variously challenge the concept of the archive or the patriarchive. Oblivion, degree zero of symbolicity, deleted poetics, and the nursing home as a heterotopy are several ideas the essay tackles in order to analyze the literal-literary engagement with archive fever.

## 1

“**B**UT MADAME,” the nurse addresses Poupette, Simone de Beauvoir’s sister, as she sobs over their mother’s tortured fading from cancer despite the doctors’ promise, “I assure you it was a very easy death.”<sup>1</sup> But what is an “easy death,” de Beauvoir wonders. Does it refer to a death that takes you while still surrounded by close, dear relatives? For “what agony it must be to feel oneself a defenseless thing, utterly at the mercy of indifferent doctors and overworked nurses.”<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *A Very Easy Death*, trans. Patrick O’Brian (New York: Warner Paperback Library, 1973), 102.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 108–9.

In Annie Ernaux's *I Remain in Darkness* there is no easy death, not in the sense considered by de Beauvoir.<sup>3</sup> Even though one can say that every illness, in its critical phases, becomes a family illness, or the illness of close relatives, the taboo imposed by Alzheimer's disease is unlike the one imposed by "the illness." The foreign workers who accompany the helpless sick in metropolises across the world embody the foreignness of the illness that causes family members initially to deny it altogether, then gradually to share it with complete strangers, sometimes putting in their hands the heavy burden of the uncanny, a burden that is described in Ernaux's book through the image of the inhuman "mask" worn by the mother, the black shadow that came across her face, the animality that now characterized her behavior. "For a split-second, my mother appeared to me wearing the pelt of a wild beast."<sup>4</sup>

Nothing prepares us for the old person's infantilization, which rather than a childlike vital charm is a graceless regression that slowly corrodes the volume of experience, destroys the brain, and drags the sick person's speech and body language down to the elementary—a regression that is, in dementia's nature, un-minding, a loss of grip on the symbolic archive. Here lies the cunning of the illness that evades the sick people's conscious mind and joins their life impulse. "Today all the women are crazy," writes Ernaux, recognizing that the sick can continue to be miserable and forgetful, bitter and forgetful, angry and forgetful, numb and forgetful. However, Ernaux notices that in her mother's fluctuating attention, where she appears to be completely absorbed, there are shining moments of hair-raising lucidity: "despite her misshapen features, because of her voice, her mannerisms and her laugh, she remained my mother, more than ever."<sup>5</sup>

## 2

Derrida's starting point in his *Archive Fever*, written as a lecture to be given at the Freud Archives in London, is the inevitability of the archive.<sup>6</sup> It is impossible to speak of memory in general, argues Derrida, of what is called living or spontaneous memory, without assuming a certain archiving that takes place in different ways within the psychic mechanism, beginning with impressions in one's consciousness or preconsciousness through to the unconscious repression of impressions. Symptoms are thus also archives, since the symptom archives, through somatic or behavioral embodiment, psychic information that cannot otherwise make its way to the speaking subject's consciousness. In Derrida's view the archive is a type of necessary prosthesis, an apparently external material substrate that dwells in the psyche, a "technique" or "technology" that stores our impressions in different areas of the psyche, more or less accessible. This storage conditions memory. Without the archive there is no memory, and therefore, without the archive there is no perception. Derrida then describes the dynamics of the psychic archive, the relation between unconscious memory and repression, denial, foreclosure, censorship, and dream—experiences that consciousness buries, tries to remove from memory, seemingly eradicating the archive only to endure the spectral return of memory through, for example, the compulsion to repeat. One can thus acknowledge the transposition of memory from one zone in the psyche

<sup>3</sup> Annie Ernaux, *I Remain in Darkness*, trans. Tanya Leslie (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1999). Quotations in the original French will be given in parentheses in the notes. Annie Ernaux, *Je ne suis pas sortie de ma nuit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 75 ("Fugitivement, ma mère m'a paru couverte d'un pelage de bête"; 92).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 ("sous sa figure inhumaine, par sa voix, ses gestes, son rire, c'était ma mère, plus que jamais"; 13).

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

to another, the relation between what is archived in a crypt and what is given to the subject as accessible information through which one can think oneself, take responsibility for the archive one carries, decode it, narrate it—since otherwise the archive might paralyze or halt one’s movement and one’s capacity to transcend.

What happens then to one’s identity when the archive gradually diminishes? If we follow Derrida’s suggestion, it is no longer possible to use such words as “subjectivity” or “experience.” Indeed, since the archive constitutes identity, the very subjective continuity of the experiencing I, Amnon Shamosh describes his wife’s loss of memory as a “catastrophe” in *Good Morning Alz Heimer*.<sup>7</sup> The vanishing archive impoverishes her, slowly reducing her libido. She is no longer capable of the sorrow and pleasure that are the assets of archive bearers. Her archive is totally eradicated, nonexistent, as it were. There is no psychic movement other than annihilation.

However, if we take a close look at the portrait Shamosh draws, as well as other literary portraits of figures who suffer a fatal loss of memory, we realize that psychic movement does occur in unexpected epiphanies, which requires us to expand our notion of the “archive” and sheds a different light on the process of its extinction.

### 3

Grant, in Alice Munro’s story “The Bear Came Over the Mountain,” who brings his wife Fiona to an institute at her own request (when the story starts she is conscious of her decay), tries to overcome his anxiety. The story narrates their life together from his point of view. Until a certain moment he is, as it were, under a compulsion to re-mediate her fading memory: books she has loved, particular words she used to pronounce, words that now become pertinent for him, the only archivist left in their childless family. Without Grant’s memory, without Fiona introjected in his memory, it is as though their life never really existed. “Fiona had a word for those sort of swooping curtains. . . . He could not think what that word was”;<sup>8</sup> “Fiona had told him that they [the flowers he sees driving home from Marian and Aubrey’s house] generated a heat of their own as well. Rummaging around in one of her concealed pockets of information, she said that you were supposed to be able to put your hand inside the curled petal and feel the heat.”<sup>9</sup>

The institute where Fiona is hospitalized is divided between the first floor, where people “had apparently lost only some of it,”<sup>10</sup> and the second floor, which is populated by people who are living in total dementia. Kristy the nurse tells him about unexpected moments of recovery. After a period when they no longer recognize anything, “[a]ll of a sudden they’re absolutely back to normal again. . . . You think, wow, back to normal. And then they’re gone again.”<sup>11</sup> “Some glaze remained,” Munro describes the hospitalized, “a haunted rigidity—as if people were content to become memories of themselves, final photographs.”<sup>12</sup> But what does it mean “to become memories of themselves”? No longer are they the bearers of memories, they are no longer experiencing and remembering subjects, but like photographs, they now are traces of who they were.

<sup>7</sup> Amnon Shamosh, *Good Morning Alz Heimer* (Tel Aviv: Massada, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Alice Munro, “The Bear Came Over the Mountain,” in *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 311.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

Grant's immediate reaction is the apparently common reaction of any family when one of its members loses his or her memory: "Do you remember?" they ask time and again, trying to get a conversation going, sitting together in front of the computer, the domestic archivist whose memory guards everything flashing up photos from different periods of life. The computer, the album, the letters are the embodiment of familial togetherness, a common property from which the sick person grows gradually more distant. Of course, family members never remember the same things: the archive is spectral, transcending the material trace, neither present nor absent—those who remember are actively involved. But this return to the material archive as an apparently nonconflictual given is linked to the family's anxiety about the sick person's growing apathy and gradual loss of object relations. Anxiety is the lot not only of the sick one whose world stops being familiar but also of the healthy others facing someone who no longer accumulates his or her own being as well as theirs. The first response would therefore be to restore the person to him- or herself, bring back his or her memory, the world of names, of concepts, that entity which is being cruelly deleted until it seems that the sick person remains paradoxically with nothing but the origin. The destroyed archive leaves, interestingly, an oedipal substrate manifesting the sick person's anxious search for father and mother; all those who surround her or him, close and distant alike, remain outside this compulsive search.

Alzheimer's produces a variation on what Derrida called "an archive fever," referring to the nostalgic longing to return to the moment of archaic impression—namely, to the metaphysical desire to reconstruct the primitive region of absolute beginning, without residue, where the archive's traces fade. Derrida speaks of "archive fever," for example, regarding the archeological ambitions of psychoanalysis to reach the *arkhê*, the primitive origin that supposedly forms the basis of experience and explicates individual, as well as collective, pathologies. At this originary moment, in fact, the desire for archive is simultaneously forgetfulness: the impulse to keep meets the death impulse. "Archive fever," or the evil implicated in the archive, is thus linked to the tension between *arkhê* and "archive." The archive rubs against radical evil because its owners try to touch—and by implication to desecrate—the untouchable, the *arkhê*, to manipulate the elusive origin in order to make it the law and to authorize the archive. The archivist's paradoxical motive is to delete the archive in order to return to origin, to the original net impression, where origin should speak for itself, as if without archive, in the living present of the moment of impression, a moment of truth or revelation.

Alzheimer's is the satanic transformation of "archive fever." Its uncanny effect is connected with regression to the origin, literally. For the sick person there is nothing left but an origin that coincides with absolute forgetfulness. As the delusional origin recedes into an ever greater primitiveness, an origin that paradoxically keeps the sick one alive, its capacity of resistance toward the sick person's environment grows stronger.

#### 4

The deletion of the archive has a common syntax for people coming from different backgrounds. Experiencing extreme desocialization, they tend to say similar things, behave alike. People who have carried different archives express, once the archive is deleted, a similar text. In other words, the archive is idiomatic and singularizes, while illness levels and universalizes.

The difference in the literary gestures discussed here arises therefore from the different perspectives of the narrators engaged with the impossible challenge of approaching the human area

of becoming-infant or becoming-animal. All the stories about the deleted archive that I'll present are narrated from the viewpoint of those who observe the sick, the archivists who are helplessly facing the massive effacement but who nevertheless react differently, solve differently, existentially and poetically, the dramatic tension between the symbolic and the real toward which the sick return. In Shamosh's and Munro's stories the partners are the ones who accompany the sick; in Ernaux's, it is a daughter; in Yehoshua Kenaz's novel, there is an external narrator.<sup>13</sup> Shamosh writes a memoir in which he preserves his role of archivist throughout, insisting on the principle of reality on behalf of his wife lest she becomes lost. At no moment does he renounce memory's privileged status; Grant, the main character in Munro's story, gradually gives up the archive of his wife's life as well as that of their life together; Ernaux strives to write what comes closest to a demented poetics that erases as far as possible the gaps between the knowing daughter and the oblivious mother; Kenaz uses the heterotopy of the nursing home in order to examine how the deleted archive affects Mrs. Moscovitz's conscious life. In their different ways, even in Shamosh's memoir, all these narratives problematize the very idea of the archive to the point that it sometimes seems that the archive expresses neither truth nor the essence of being human.

## 5

Shamosh's sense of obligation to fulfill the task of the archivist is perhaps linked to the fact that memory and memories have been distinctly the province of his wife, Hannah Sokel, a refugee who escaped from Vienna to England at the age of fifteen: "Nine suitcases full of all their things and memories were supposed to be sent after them. In vain. The visual memory of the suitcases lining the walls of the empty room, holding her whole world, accompanies her until this very day";<sup>14</sup> "Our home is full of dictionaries, from the German-Austrian to dictionaries of slang in different languages, and Hannah would throw herself at those shelves with a passion and immense knowledge."<sup>15</sup> At the beginning of her illness Hannah retains her long-term memory but short-term information is immediately deleted, and this is soon followed by the loss of her ability to understand: "Without hesitation she quotes from classical English poetry she learnt by heart at boarding school in England and in the great city of New York... while she forgets, in those very same days, which side of the bed is hers."<sup>16</sup> Gradually she loses the capacity to read: "She read aloud to me, it took a great effort. Only the headlines on the front page. When she finished she sighed: 'It's Greek to me. I did not understand a word.'"<sup>17</sup>

Shamosh describes the cognitive and the affective aspects of the deleted archive. His wife experiences enduring anxiety because no one can explain anything to her: explanations are annihilated immediately, as she is unable to register them in her memory. Everything is spoken or done apparently for the first time. Without accumulation there is no possession and no sense of self. But the great difficulty he confronts concerns her emotional suffering in the brief moment when she is still conscious of her situation as one who is excluded from the collective archive, becoming increasingly remote from that consolidating and unifying material. Hannah is unable to share memories: "During the conversation which included all the people she was closest to

<sup>13</sup> Yehoshua Kenaz, *The Way to the Cats* (South Royalton, VT: Steerforth Press, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> Shamosh, *Good Morning Alz Heimer*, 25.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

and loved best, I noticed she was sad. I went to her. I took her hand and she said: I'm alone";<sup>18</sup> "She is simply devoid of memories. . . . I am so full of memories and I live them day and night. How is it to live without memories?";<sup>19</sup> "I tried to cull some of her childhood memories. Everything is erased. She doesn't remember anything. And immediately she asks me to tell her my own childhood memories which give her much pleasure. I am happy I once wrote down some of her childhood memories which now I am able to tell her time and again."<sup>20</sup> In a conversation that concludes the book he articulates his task of tying the unraveling threads for her: "Remember we are married? [And she answers,] Are you sure? Are you my husband? . . . [A]fter I've been out for an hour I have to tell her again. . . . so that it enters her blood flow."<sup>21</sup>

Hannah Sokel is alone because she is no longer a subject with memories. The experience of loneliness intensifies at night, hours of even more radical disconnection from her surroundings. In his early writings Levinas described insomnia as a primitive encounter, even more than Sartre's nausea, with the real, the *il y a*, without symbolic mediation and filtration. In his words, "Thus dawns the idea of an existing that occurs without us, without a subject. . . . The fact of existing imposes itself when there is no longer anything. And it is anonymous: there is neither anyone nor anything that takes this existing upon itself."<sup>22</sup> If normal life is a process of becoming a subject that takes responsibility for existence and for the other, the process of dementia regresses to the obscurity of the Levinasian *il y a*. Shamosh writes: "Asleep I suddenly hear a frightened call or a gurgling followed by an unbroken moan of pain"; "I awaken her as from a nightmare and she doesn't know what is happening."<sup>23</sup> Night thus becomes a pit of massive eradication. It is no accident that Ernaux mentions it in the title of her book: "I remain in darkness" are the last words her mother wrote to a friend before she fell into a night from which she would not wake up.

Shamosh is convinced of the necessity of reminding Hannah of herself, preventing her from disconnecting with reality lest she become apathetic. On the basis of their common archive, time and again he makes a Sisyphean effort to transmit from the full to the empty, to create, even if momentarily, a common language, although it will be lost almost immediately in the erosion of more extreme disconnection: "Even such a festive, powerful, rare and enjoyable event does not stay in her memory for more than ten minutes. I asked myself if there was any point in making this draining effort . . . if it's all deleted and forgotten. And immediately I answered myself: It must be done, it's important, whenever possible. Touching life and choosing reality is important even if it's forgotten immediately."<sup>24</sup>

She is no longer the mother of an offspring with a future. She is now a descendant of her parents only. The return to origin is the hallucination of those afflicted by Alzheimer's disease. If in normal life the origin becomes more and more distant, the demented person abides with the origin in the living present. What has distanced itself from her forever becomes an actual reality she seemingly holds and then releases. The delusion undermines distinctions between night and day, dream and wakefulness. The evacuated mind fills up with "distorted, bizarre, weird, delusive,

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>22</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1995), 44, 47.

<sup>23</sup> Shamosh, *Good Morning Alz Heimer*, 35.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 44.

irrational thoughts and fears.”<sup>25</sup> This is not nostalgia but a more crude return with no consciousness involved. The sick one is exposed to delusions and she holds on to them with great belief. Her former lucid reaction of sadness to her state of loneliness is now transformed into anxiety and hallucinations. In Kleinian terms, Alzheimer’s is a regression from the depressive achievement of language and individuation to the schizoid-paranoid position, which forms the basis of the sick person’s feeling of persecution and her dichotomous perception of reality.

In order to maintain his often very strenuous position as an archivist, Shamosh personifies the illness, transforming it into a third party in relation to him and his wife. “Alz Heimer” enables him to displace his anger and keep his relationship with Hannah innocent of negativity: “Our love is great and full and wonderful even though at this stage the brain is empty. Neither short term memory nor long term memory, and what we did a minute ago never even happened.”<sup>26</sup> Besides and beyond his doomed struggle for her memory, Shamosh is ready to fall in love with the woman she has become, to engage in a semiotic relation with a desubjectified woman detached from the biographical and literary archive that supported their former intimacy.

## 6

Grant’s position in Munro’s story keeps changing. At the beginning, as we saw, he too is an archivist: he collects Fiona’s memories for her and brings her a book about her native Iceland. Moreover, the erasure of her memory leads to the flooding of his own. In his attempt to hold what she releases and his insistence on continuity, secrets kept hidden throughout the years of their marriage are now revealed. Paradoxically, this surfacing of secrets accompanies a process in which, for Fiona, the very distinction between closure and disclosure is effaced. However, this ostensibly conventional narrative includes an unexpected twist. As the story proceeds, Grant becomes gradually willing to accept the fact of this radical interruption. After trying in vain to reconstruct Fiona’s traces for both his and her sake, he lets go, realizing it is a lost battle. He stops insisting and agrees to release the burden of the past in order to let his wife turn over a new leaf and accommodate her life to her actual state of mind, making way for a relationship that can occur only between demented people. He thus collaborates with her oblivion. “He didn’t see much point in mentioning their marriage, now.”<sup>27</sup> If insistence presupposes temporal continuity, renouncement unravels it. Grant chooses to let Fiona have what is apparently impossible—life without archive. Munro hints at this solution from the beginning of her story. We learn that Fiona’s life was already marked by a deletion that preceded the deletion caused by illness. Fiona, sick, thus coheres with her past character. Unlike Shamosh’s wife, she tore herself away from Iceland and did not bear children, as if always already exempting herself from genealogical imperatives. Grant, in his turn, renounces the foreign woman she has become and puts her in the arms of her new choice without struggling for her heart. The egocentric position withdraws in the face of Alzheimer’s disease, making way for a different existence that involves letting go of logocentrism, or of what Derrida calls the “patriarchive.” But this position is not tantamount to a renouncement of the human. Grant renounces defining the human via the archive. It seems that Munro strives, through Fiona’s character and her new connections, to describe the world of the deleted archive as a human world that exists in the full sense of the word, though under an altogether different paradigm.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>27</sup> Munro, “The Bear Came Over the Mountain,” 308.

## 7

But Grant/Munro's existential decision is contained in a linear, coherent story without recourse to poetic embodiment. Observing the experience of Alzheimer's, Munro undermines the patriarchal presuppositions without unsettling her text. The one who takes this direction is Annie Ernaux in her radically fragmented writing.

I opened my discussion with de Beauvoir's first-person memoir on her mother's illness and death, since it constitutes a landmark for French women's writing about this fundamental plot, the mother-daughter relationship, at the tragic time of illness. In an inevitable reversal of roles the daughter becomes her mother's mother and, at least in de Beauvoir's case, for the first time experiences a variation on the maternity from which she abstained throughout her life. "An agonizing reversal of roles between mother and child," Ernaux writes.<sup>28</sup> "I must raise my head slightly. I am ten years old, I look up at her, she's my mother. It's the same gap, the same ritual."<sup>29</sup> "The situation is reversed, now she is my little girl. I CANNOT be her mother."<sup>30</sup> "I tell her the first thing that comes into my head, like one does with children."<sup>31</sup>

But this reversal of roles does not take place on the level of the plot alone. In Ernaux's text it entails poetic decisions reflected in a transformation in the writer's very use of language. In de Beauvoir we notice a rhetorical passage from the symbolic order of the Law of the Father—characterizing the discourse of the existentialist thinker in those parts that acutely describe her mother's condition in the patriarchal society that has condemned her to passivity—to the imaginary order of the mother tongue, in which the conflict between mother and daughter makes space for a mimetic incorporation that reveals, to de Beauvoir's own astonishment, a newly surfaced, primitive link. What is initially present in the text as an emotional barrier between herself and her mother collapses progressively and receives its imaginary and real implementation in the zone of the mouth: "I talked to Sartre about my mother's mouth as I had seen it that morning and about everything I had interpreted in it—greediness refused, an almost servile humility, hope, distress, loneliness—the loneliness of her death and of her life—that did not want to admit its existence. And he told me that my own mouth was not obeying me any more: I had put Maman's mouth on my own face and in spite of myself, I copied its movements. Her whole person, her whole being, was concentrated there, and compassion wrung my heart."<sup>32</sup> The illness peels away the layers of distance, and the daughter becomes like her mother in an involuntary melancholic mimetic gesture where her mouth testifies without testifying.

Everything happens in the zone of the mouth. Both de Beauvoir's and Ernaux's books—although I could have included Duras and Collette and Sarraute and Kristeva—present us with a linguistic drama. In order to understand the choice or, rather, the compulsion Ernaux feels to write what could be called a "demented poetics," devoid of archive, I would like to open another horizon for discussion on the basis of Kristeva's analysis of individuation and separation from the mother in two of her early texts, *Powers of Horror* (1982) and *Black Sun* (1989). Through a close reading of Freud, Melanie Klein, and André Green, Kristeva examines both the child's initiation to language and the pathologies implicated when normal development fails and leads

<sup>28</sup> Ernaux, *I Remain in Darkness*, 70 ("L'horreur de ce renversement mère/enfant"; 87).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 77–78 ("Je dois lever un peu la tête. J'ai dix ans, je la regarde, c'est ma mère. Toujours la même écart d'âge, la même cérémonie"; 96).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 ("Tout est renversé, maintenant, elle est ma petite fille. Je ne PEUX pas être sa mère"; 29).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 83 ("Je lui dis n'importe quoi comme on le fait aux enfants"; 102).

<sup>32</sup> De Beauvoir, *A Very Easy Death*, 37–38.

the speaking subject to what Kristeva calls a melancholy or depressed language. Kristeva distinguishes between the boy's and the girl's acquired autonomy in terms of their different entrance to the paternal symbolic order through "matricide," the murder of the object that dominates the satisfaction of desire. Coming into language requires the renouncing of symbiosis with the mother, accepting the loss of somatic unity through abjection—namely, a spiral process of separation that involves attraction-rejection and the mother's rediscovery by naming her. Beginning with this early experience of object negation, language will always be the negation of a certain object and its spiritualization, its transformation into a general meaningful sign. From this viewpoint, melancholy or depressed pathologies are caused by the child's incapacity to accept the loss of the object, to negate the object, to play with negation, to apparently disguise it and respond thereby to its symbolic substitutes. For such a boy or a girl, signifiers are denied the conventional role of transmitting meaning and are experienced as empty. Melancholy persons, writes Kristeva, "are foreigners in their maternal tongue. They have lost the meaning—the value—of their mother tongue for want of losing the mother."<sup>33</sup>

However, books such as *I Remain in Darkness* and *A Very Easy Death*—as well as Barthes's *Mourning Diary* and Derrida's *Circumfession* (to hint, following Kristeva, at another fundamental plot, that between mother and son)—present us with another question, which, to my knowledge, has not yet attracted distinct theoretical elaboration. Naturally, these books do not relate to infantile initiation to speech facing the disappearance—often temporary—of the mother and the invention of a type of play followed by a word that extracts the abandoned child from his or her helplessness in order to master reality. These books ask in different ways what happens to the daughter's (or the son's) language in the face of the mother's fatal disappearance at the end of her life. What happens to language when the mother disappears—not in order to return, but forever? What happens to language with the death of the archaic object? Since we are dealing with mature authors, the question would be, what transformation is caused in their poetics by the disappearance of the archaic object? More specifically, what happens to the daughter's language when she is already a sophisticated, speaking subject and finds herself cast once more, as if for the first time, to the zero degree of symbolicity and loses, if only for a while, her capacity to play?

"Invariably, she mistakes my study for her bedroom. She opens the study door just a crack, realizes it's the wrong room and gently closes the door; I see the latch spring up, as if there were no one on the other side. Mounting panic."<sup>34</sup> Ernaux's study, haunted by her mother, is paralyzed, anticipating the beginning of a process in which Ernaux experiences a sort of double renunciation, of both abjection and language, a renunciation that sometimes results in fusion-to-the-point-of-erasure between mother and daughter. "Suddenly, I felt I was the one who was being exposed in public";<sup>35</sup> "And because the body which I see is also mine...";<sup>36</sup> "There was no true distance between the two of us. Rather, a sense of identification";<sup>37</sup> "She is me in old age."<sup>38</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 53.

<sup>34</sup> Ernaux, *I Remain in Darkness*, 13 ("Toujours, elle confond sa chambre et mon bureau. Elle ouvre la porte de celui-ci, s'aperçoit de son erreur, referme doucement, je vois la clenche remonter, comme s'il n'y avait personne derrière la porte. Une sorte d'angoisse"; 18–19).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 ("D'un seul coup, ce fut comme si c'était moi, exhibée ainsi"; 20).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* ("Et c'est aussi mon corps que je vois"; 20).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 ("Il n'y avait pas de réelle distance entre nous. De l'identification"; 37).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* ("Elle est ma vieillesse"; 37).

The daughter, who prefers her mother demented rather than dead, is held captive by her mother, letting her lead the book's language of writing, beginning with the title. The whole book, one could say, is written in "mother tongue." It is not the product of Ernaux's "eloquent" language, a language that her mother believes—erroneously—has gained her a reputation and prizes. It is written in the mother's diminishing language, a language emptied of amplification and density, keeping some few idioms that have served her as armor and now cover up for the lack of words and the terrible pit that has opened wide within her. These expressions, which reflect both her personality and her sociogenerational sensibility, still serve her when everything else seems to have been taken from her. "It always takes me by surprise when I hear her use the same expressions as before, in her present state";<sup>39</sup> "she is so different from what she used to be and yet she's definitely 'herself';"<sup>40</sup> "Gathering all her favorite sayings when she can barely speak."<sup>41</sup> The familiar phrases, a mixture of intuitions, banal conversations, and clichés, maintaining the appearance of business as usual, are juxtaposed here to the mother's infantile tongue, on the one hand, and to linguistic inventions, on the other, that occasionally hold a lucid truth of a purity that her everyday speech had never previously attained: "Je suis seule de fille";<sup>42</sup> "I'm sure I'd be happier with you rather than outside you."<sup>43</sup>

Ernaux's mother tongue is not as dense as that of Duras or as material and sensual as the language of the books Collette dedicated to her mother, Sido.<sup>44</sup> If there is creativity in this language, it is the creativity of Alzheimer's disease, of a demented insanity that gnaws at language, diminishes it, and removes both the mother's and the daughter's text from the symbolic order in order to locate it in darkness, in a disconnected, asocial space from which no daylight is seen.

This demented poetics, this loss of grip on knowledge by choice, driving the text crazy by extricating oneself from the trap of knowing too much, can also be witnessed in Ernaux's use of the genre of the diary. What sets apart this diary, which, but for the introduction added in 1996, extends over the years 1983–86, is that it doesn't document daily life. It is a diary of "darkness," mainly describing the writer's visits to the nursing home, taking the writer out of her routine (teaching, writing); sometimes, also, the diary records memories of her mother summoned by chance through dreams, books, or clothes, a mother who becomes an exclusive site of reality, of nostalgia, and of phantasm. Between one episode and another, described with fragmentary precision, with short, quick, and impulsive sentences, a void is inscribed. The "heartbreaking" quality of certain moments in this book does not result from pathos or emotionally dense writing but rather from restraint and strictness, which are also exercised in those paragraphs that demand the daughter's approach to the abject, where even the imaginary register is not available.

In fact, we rarely hear about what happens outside. Dramatic events like her divorce or important characters like her lover enter the text through the acute senses of her mother, who doesn't know anything but apparently knows everything. The essence of the text is the present of illness, its phases and symptoms, revealed through present interactions combined with

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 61 ("Je suis toujours surprise de l'entendre prononcer les phrases qu'elle disait avant, dans l'état ou elle se trouve maintenant"; 74).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. ("si différente de ce qu'elle a été et pourtant 'elle'; 76).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 65 ("Recenser toutes ses phrases alors qu'elle ne parle presque plus"; 80).

<sup>42</sup> Ernaux, *Je ne suis pas sortie de ma nuit*, 83. The English translation "I am an only child" (*I Remain in Darkness*, 68) does not register the originality of this phrase.

<sup>43</sup> Ernaux, *I Remain in Darkness*, 70 ("Je serais sûrement mieux avec toi que hors de toi"; 87).

<sup>44</sup> Colette, *La naissance du jour* (Paris: Flammarion, 1993).

flashbacks from the distant past. Days, weeks, months, and years interweave in the continuity of the illness and are devoured in the non-time of dementia that fixates the mother in an ongoing chaotic present, in which, each time anew, between her daughter's visits, she faces the closing doors of the elevator. The fact of our expulsion from chronological routine, despite the mostly meticulous dating of the book, prevails on the levels of both signifier and signified. On the level of the signified, Ernaux describes the time evaporating in the nursing home, where the same temperature is maintained throughout the year and wall clocks are never adjusted. What is left is to pass the time measured only by the sick person's decline and its implications. "It's almost one year since she lost her glasses."<sup>45</sup> On the level of the signifier, we notice the exit from time in a gesture perhaps inadvertent, or at least one that Ernaux does not choose to explain, not even in her introduction, written a decade after the completion of her diary. Ernaux emphasizes words denoting time throughout the text by adding "unnecessary" commas: "Now," "Today," "This evening," "In the night," etc. This detail consolidates the absolute interruption between the present reality in the nursing home and what happens outside.

From the very start, Ernaux distinguishes between this diary and her other writing (which usually wanders in the regions of autobiography and autofiction). In the introduction she says of her mode of writing: "I would write hastily, in the turmoil of my emotions, without thinking or trying to marshal my thoughts." And in the diary itself: "When I write down all these things, I scribble away as fast as I can (as if I felt guilty), without choosing my words";<sup>46</sup> "I could never write those words [Mummy is dead] in a fictional work";<sup>47</sup> "This is not literature what I am writing. I can see the difference with my other books," she adds, and at the same time hesitates, "or rather, no I can't."<sup>48</sup> Not only does this hesitation show us things from a different angle in a way that renders the diary nonanomalous in Ernaux's writing, but, on the contrary, the diary seems to reveal something fundamental and essential about her poetics. "Writing a book about one's mother inevitably raises the issue of writing," she affirms.<sup>49</sup> For it may well be that this very plot that undermines the sense of reality—an insane plot that resists any coherence or order and transcends the ready-made norm and conformist discourse—is what after all defines literature for her: "an attempt to salvage part of our lives, to understand, but first to salvage," she writes.<sup>50</sup> Not necessarily to understand but to try and preserve, perhaps defend herself against the finality of death while recognizing that "the maternal instinct is tantamount to a death wish."<sup>51</sup> Writing without potency, without knowledge, amid the eradication of knowledge that is gradually being denuded from the symbolic order; writing that is not intended to transmit a message, an idea, or to communicate; writing in which the writer—naked, wild, and dispossessed—inscribes those words with the same pious discipline with which she performs other bodily activities: washing, brushing, feeding. The common dispossession renders both mother and daughter close in a

<sup>45</sup> Ernaux, *I Remain in Darkness*, 55 ("il y aura bientôt un an qu'elle a perdu ses lunettes"; 68).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 ("J'écrivais très vite, dans la violence des sensations, sans réfléchir ni chercher d'ordre"; 92), 74–75 ("Quand j'écris toutes ces choses, j'écris le plus vite possible [comme si c'était mal], et sans penser aux mots que j'emploie"; 92).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 93 ("Je ne pourrai jamais écrire ces mots [maman est morte] dans une fiction"; 115).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 88 ("Ce n'est pas de la littérature ce que j'écris. Je vois la différence avec les livres que j'ai fait, ou plutôt non"; 108).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 38 ("Écrire sur sa mère pose forcément le problème de l'écriture"; 49).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 88 ("ce désir de sauver, de comprendre, mais sauver d'abord"; 108).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 43 ("Le besoin d'enfant est besoin de morbidité"; 55).

poetics of correspondences that is based not on the word but on its absence. “‘You know what I mean,’ she would say when she was trying to find the right turn of phrase”;<sup>52</sup> “I have also noticed that she often thinks she is me”;<sup>53</sup> “My mother—her energy, her constant anxiety too. I feel the same tenseness, only in my writing.”<sup>54</sup> A writing that despite the temptation, as the mother dwindles, does not let the volume of memory raise and erase her oblivion.

Yet loneliness cannot be redeemed. Not really. Demented pain remains impenetrable. Each to herself, to himself. Almost no one in the nursing home is mentioned by name. From a demented perspective, there are no proper names. Characters who pass along the corridors or come inside the mother’s room are a man, a woman, an old man, an old woman, anonymous people who wander and struggle in vain, without passion, engulfed in amorphous anxiety. “A community of dolphins.”<sup>55</sup> The medical team appear as functionaries or are described in terms of their gestures and appearance. Nothing is inscribed in those sick people who have been uprooted from the family of men and keep an appearance of normalcy, with TV on throughout the day and put into fancy dress during festivals. The diary, in its very writing, incorporates the mother as well as ejecting her. In its winding way, it constitutes a sort of a late abjection. There is no one but myself and my mother. The elevator doors close behind Ernaux. “She or me.” “I glance at myself in the mirror once again, just to make sure.”<sup>56</sup> She descends to the car, prepared for “tons of guilt feelings”: “I failed to give her the support she needed, she remained ‘in darkness’ alone.”<sup>57</sup>

## 8

Kenaz’s novel apparently unfolds outside the sequence I’ve been dealing with so far. Not only is it a novel, but the heroine of *The Way to the Cats*, Mrs. Yolanda Moscovitz, a retired professor of French, does not have Alzheimer’s. However, as we’ll see, Kenaz succeeds in his way to problematize her archive and thereby the very idea of the archive.

One enters Yolanda’s story, and Kenaz’s novel—and the nursing home—by way of a nightmare, fragments of memory that the heroine, deluded, sees as reality: “she knew that it had really happened to her, it wasn’t a dream or a fantasy.”<sup>58</sup> Even if Yolanda is able to distinguish between real and false memories, she discovers inside herself borrowed memories that are not her own, memories that, as the novel continues, will become her memories of the future, so to speak: “The more she looked at the garden and examined its details, the more certain she was that she had never been there in her life and that the terrible incident she had related to her friends had not happened to her, but to somebody else, whose memory had been absorbed into hers.”<sup>59</sup> This self-conscious inner split at the beginning of the novel amplifies her self-estrangement. “Why was all this happening to her? Was it happening to her, or to the strange woman who had taken possession of her and her memories and was trying to drag her down the slippery slope to her perdition?”<sup>60</sup> But slowly Kenaz comes to describe those moments when other memories over-

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 57 (“‘On se comprend.’ Disait-elle autrefois, quand elle cherchait une tournure”; 71).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 34 (“Je remarque aussi qu’elle se prend souvent pour moi”; 44).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 61 (“Ma mère, sa force, son angoisse perpétuelle aussi. J’ai la même tension, mais dans l’écriture”; 75).

<sup>55</sup> The expression is taken from Julia Kristeva’s “Stabat Mater,” in *Histoires d’amour* (Paris: Denoël, 1981), 321.

<sup>56</sup> Ernaux, *I Remain in Darkness*, 31 (“Je me regarde encore dans la glace pour me rassurer”; 38).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 62 (“Je ne l’ai pas assez secourue, elle a traversé ‘sa nuit’ seul”; 77).

<sup>58</sup> Kenaz, *The Way to the Cats*, 3.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 58–59.

whelm her own as epiphanies, in which Yolanda, a woman who usually thinks only about herself and her own needs, lends her archive, as it were, to the experience of someone else who elicits in her a potential archive transcending biographical memory in the strict sense of the word. “One of the new memories, of things that had never actually happened to her, came into her mind. It wasn’t a dream. She was awake. . . . She even tried to dredge up as many accurate details as possible from the memory she had never remembered before, the memory that was not hers but that came from the experience of someone else, and for some unknown reason had been deposited with her for safekeeping.”<sup>61</sup> “Lately, when I look in the mirror,” she tells Kagan concerning the portrait he painted of her, “I see that woman with those hairs that are falling on each other, and that face, with the wrinkles. Like you made her in that picture. You know her. Not me. And she isn’t me. She’s not normal. And little by little she’s sending her thoughts into my head, what she remembers that once happened to her. And it’s nothing to do from my life.”<sup>62</sup> The encounter between her painted face and the other figure that invades her—“That is how I see you,” he tells her. “This is not a photographic picture, this is a drawing. So my subjective eye sees your face”<sup>63</sup>—produces a palimpsest that brings her closer to her other face: “In the mirror she saw the strange woman who had begun to invade her thoughts and memories, on her face a close network of fine deep wrinkles, spun out like innumerable spider’s webs.”<sup>64</sup>

Kagan’s painting in a sense anticipates the role played by Kenaz’s writing itself—Kagan makes a phenomenological gesture by painting an abstract portrait. “[A]ccording to the picture he drew I knew how he saw me. Like a witch, like a madwoman he saw me.”<sup>65</sup> The phenomenological gesture of Kenaz’s writing is even more extreme when it describes the nursing home as a heterotopy innocent of archive—a kind of bracketing in which the sick look for peace of mind whether they like it or not. This heterotopy has a dangerous attraction. Some of the hospitalized people come to die there; others will wish to leave.

Heterotopy, according to Foucault, is a counterlocation that neutralizes, contradicts, or turns around the totality of relations that pertain in other spaces. Foucault speaks specifically about heterotopias of deviation, that is, places populated by individuals whose behavior deviates from the norm, such as sanatoriums and psychiatric clinics. Nursing homes straddle the border between heterotopias of crisis and heterotopias of deviation: as Foucault puts it, in our society where leisure is the law, laziness is a kind of deviation. Thus, Kenaz can deal with old age without past, with hardly any memories, by planting his heroine, like Ernaux’s mother, in the nursing home: not in a hegemonic space, which forms and carries a common memory, but in a space that seeks to rid itself from memory, a space where politics is apparently powerless—“apparently” because although discipline and agenda mostly involve nothing but hygiene, it becomes clear that even neutralized people can harm one another. The sociopolitical archive invades the nursing home through the harassed Arab male nurse, as we’ll see, and the sick women who talk in their language and exclude those who do not understand them.<sup>66</sup> Kenaz therefore makes two gestures

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 79. Some of the linguistic expressions in these passages are intentionally ungrammatical and nonidiomatic.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>66</sup> Kenaz uses the expression “They spoke in their tongue” many times. This is indeed the title of Na’ama Tzal’s remarkable book on Kenaz that has just been published: *They Spoke in Their Tongue: The Poetics of Yehoshua*

at the same time: on the one hand, the deleted archive constitutes the condition that enables the stay in the nursing home—no one takes into account who and what you have been in the past; on the other hand, in such a situation, too, power relations are produced, nourished by concrete or imaginary privileges that involve the outside world.

As already noted, Kenaz's novel is unlike the other texts I am discussing because of the writer's subject position. The narrator is neither a companion nor a relative of Mrs. Moscowitz. He is a narrator-witness who describes a lonely and isolated character who continues her fifty years of solitude in the nursing home. During her whole stay no one comes to visit her, not even friends or neighbors. No one ever phones her. People around her are always involved in some business or contractual relation, whether cynical or not. Those who do show up at her door once she finally returns home are the mad neighbor's husband or other neighbors, policemen, a maid, workers.

But it may be exactly because of his unique subject position that Kenaz leads us, in the context of the works discussed, to the most radical examination of the archive and its deletion. First and foremost, he almost totally eradicates any remains of the outside world and enters a heterotopic logic. The plot does not take place in a family home as in Shamosh's memoir; it does not take place in the interval between the world of the asylum and home as in Munro's and Ernaux's works, where the invisible though bitter conflict eventually liberates the family members to their own lives. Although Kenaz's poetics is not demented, the narrator does not stray outside the nursing home—a place that demands absolute forgetfulness in order to adjust to its rules. He describes almost exclusively the reality of bodily pains, sighs, complaints, and the experience that identity-erasing suffering creates in the nursing home. In the living present of the nursing home the archive does not define the humanity of those it shelters. We know very little about the past of the sick ("Fichman was doctor for children in Tel Aviv," says Kagan. "Who didn't know Dr. Fichman in Tel Aviv? How much money, friends, honor? Now also dead.")<sup>67</sup> Mrs. Moscowitz brings along her wardrobe, but when she puts on her pretty dress, the hiatus between the worlds grows only more prominent, since the too-hot dress does not fit in any sense: it makes her sweat and putting her hospital gown back on seems the best solution. One can say that dementia constructs the heterotopy of the nursing home. Furthermore, the exclusion of chronological sequence and the suspension of time that eliminates the external world are reproduced by the hospitalized people themselves, who when they enter, willingly or not, this space disconnect and let the institution take over their past. The fleeting presence of visiting families, which remind the hospitalized of who they are, makes no difference. The nursing home thus becomes a regressive presymbolic place where one engages daily with the abject through private purifying rituals like those Adela performs when she anoints Allegra's untouchable forbidden flesh with baby oil. Mrs. Moscowitz's activity comes down to a tiring walk along the corridor, finding chairs to sit on, trying to get up, and more of the same. Bodily helplessness infantilizes the sick, making them dependent. Senile and sick, people are carried to their beds like babies. The renunciation of the past is represented by the motif of hair. The glory of Yolanda's past is marked at the beginning by the haircut, the single thread that ties the present to bygone days, a thread that has maintained her self-identity after she seemed to have renounced everything else, finished teaching, and buried herself at home. Nevertheless, at some point she stops coloring it. "You've got such beautiful hair, why do

---

*Kenaz* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2016).

<sup>67</sup> Kenaz, *The Way to the Cats*, 60–61. See also the conversation between Yolanda and Elegra about Kagan (160).

you make war on it? Why shouldn't it be like it used to be?" Allegra asks. "Nothing will be like it used to be," said Mrs. Moscowitz.<sup>68</sup>

The heterotopy of the nursing home and its unique socialization produce a schizoid-paranoid regression in Yolanda Moscowitz, as did Alzheimer's disease for Hannah Sokel. Yolanda struggles with evil, time and again, an evil residing in certain figures that surround her—first and foremost nurse Rosa. "A new memory came into her heart: something that had happened on the first day here in this hospital. That afternoon, at the command of the head nurse, the Russian nurse had dumped her into a lukewarm bath. . . . Now her memory told her that the water had been as cold as ice."<sup>69</sup> However, in the sick person's mind, memory is still the limit between humanity and nonhumanity. Thus, Paula, another resident of the nursing home, testifies, as she gradually decays toward dementia: "My memory fails me. I don't remember anything. I'm not a human being anymore."<sup>70</sup>

The inversion Kenaz makes by means of his exclusive focus on the nursing home produces a different perspective at a moment that seems to be an aggressive incursion of the sociopolitical topos into the heterotopy. This moment is described, not as an outbreak of the symbolic order in a place innocent of memory, but rather as the absorption of the symbolic by the real, as in Levinas's notion of the *Il y a*. In other words, in the spirit of Munro and Ernaux, the deleted archive in Kenaz receives privileged status. Thus, when the male nurse Raffy is hit by the son of a patient who passed away, in the silence that takes over the scene Kenaz seems to open another bracket within the phenomenological brackets: "[A] heavy sensuous light, saturated with the reddish haze of the end of a summer that refused to die, and covered the room in a half-transparent veil, obliterating details, wiping out facial features, freezing movements and silencing every whisper, until the place was no longer a hospital room but a temporary wayside station on an endless journey into the great night of oblivion."<sup>71</sup> Hate, depression, revenge, that might leave no self behind,<sup>72</sup> are produced in the folds of the archive.<sup>73</sup> The archive's death impulse, the negation of the archive, the destruction or erasure of traces might reveal itself in historic outbreaks of annihilation, which are not disconnected from regressive situations where apparently nothing is left but the origin itself, namely primitive feelings that exclude any symbolic mediation, situations captured by "the great night of oblivion." Derrida's "archive fever" acts within the archive. The movement between concealment and disclosure, between origin and trace, inside the archive makes the very notion of the archive contradictory and conflictual in a way that no artificial homogenization can dissimulate. The archive is neither unified nor homogeneous, and therefore, instead of being a condition for social solidarity, it might always already signify an opposite possibility of living together on the basis of separation. Against the background of the passivity and the almost absolute evacuation that engulfs the nursing home, the penetration of the "outside" through Kenaz's description testifies to "the great night of oblivion" inherent in the symbolic order. Perhaps this is why it is precisely at that moment in the story that Mrs. Moscowitz lights a "torch of memory" against forgetfulness, reconstructing, with her eyes closed, the contents of

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> "Every moment was robbing her of something that was hers, until there was nothing left, only the passionate hatred and the unquenchable thirst for revenge" (ibid., 128).

her apartment by making an imaginary tour, “trying to see whether she could still remember all the little details after such a long time.”<sup>74</sup> Fichman’s mad attack against Kagan and Clara’s son’s assault on the Arab male nurse are juxtaposed attacks in which archive and dementia join to release the death drive and lead toward total destruction. The threat of chaos results in resistance that is enacted through the memory of objects: “Her possessions inspired in her a feeling of security”;<sup>75</sup> “She could no longer endure the painful intimacy, the bitter community of fate which dispossessed her of herself. . . . Her solitary voice of old rose up from her depths, warning of danger, crying out for help.”<sup>76</sup> “‘At home I’ll forget everything.’ ‘Once you said that you’d never forget me as long as you live,’ said Allegra in astonishment. ‘I have to forget. Otherwise I won’t have any strength to go on living.’”<sup>77</sup>

Yolanda Moskowitz’s determined forgetting mechanism characterized her former life. In order to survive it seems she has to return to herself—that is, to perform another cut. But nevertheless she is proven wrong. “Her life in the hospital would not let her be. Like the advance guard of an invading army its messengers kept arriving to fill the void she had sought to maintain in her new life.” Life in the heterotopy enables her to create a new space of memory anticipated, as we saw, in the opening scene. She surrounds herself with photos of Allegra, a stranger whose life now shadows her own. However, already in the nursing home, a persistent memory from her distant past, like a silent soundtrack, overwhelms her. In the morbid and intimate atmosphere in which she and her roommates now live, “She closed her eyes. At once heaviness overcame her and she could no longer move. Gradually silence overtook her, and from the heart of the silence, softly at first and then louder and louder rose a high, piercing unmistakable sound, the crying of baby Rosalia, her sister Elvira’s daughter.”<sup>78</sup> Kenaz lets this baby cry out into the present of the nursing home on two more occasions. We learn that Yolanda’s sister, her sister’s daughter, and their mother shared one room with her after the war, arousing her hate and anger: “She cursed them without stopping, moving her lips in the heat of her hatred.”<sup>79</sup> The curse’s power of erasure comes back to her now and along with it the wish for forgiveness. In the melting pot of past memories and borrowed memories a possibility arises for a life of freedom.

## 9

Losing our grip on our archive constitutes perhaps the worst nightmare for the archivists we all are. However, this short literary voyage presents and examines encounters with the deleted archive that suggest a certain form of release. After all, deleted memory also brings release, beyond the material and psychic economy.

## 10

Maladies of the end, terminal, hopeless: to what extent should they form the prism for a comprehensive look back, a key for translating the past, a metaphor to process it? A

---

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.