

The Archive: Literary Perspectives on the Intersections between History and Fiction

Introduction

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IN *ARCHIVE FEVER*, one of the most well-known lectures on archives, Jacques Derrida argues that “even in their guardianship or their hermeneutic tradition, the archives could do neither without substance nor without residence.”¹ By looking at the relationships between art and archives, the articles in this issue of *Dibur* discuss the role that literature and cinema play today in being a residency for archives and in providing a space for selecting and reflecting on the archive’s substance. The articles explore how art interacts with archives, the nature of the relationship between archive, memory, and oblivion, and how literary works and films can themselves become a kind of archive and, by so doing, serve as a space for reflecting on the archive as a concept. We ask how literature and film question the historical and fictional aspects of the archive, its hermeneutic, its preservation versus its construction of narratives. We look at the intersection between art and archive as a productive space for playing with the dynamics between voicing and silencing, past and becoming, singular and collective, oblivion and focalization, and much more. This issue raises questions such as the extent to which the act of archiving serves as a way to slow down oblivion or even to censor. And are there forbidden archives and hidden archives that can appear only through works of fiction?

Thinking of archives through art allows us to rethink the nature and genre of the archive, which may be especially useful at a time when the residency of archives is shifting away from physical dwellings to digitized spaces. It might help with new attempts to understand the

¹ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

substance, curation, institutionalization, and preservation of archives at a time when we are experiencing an explosion in saved and shared texts, images, and clips. Our digital culture seems to be more concerned with deciding what should not be preserved rather than what should be preserved and with how to retrieve material instead of how to collect it. Finally, how do these developments change the way we perceive and read the archives?

At the core of the many philosophical and intellectual discussions of archives are French thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, and Paul Ricoeur. In our attempt at *Dibur* to create conversations between “major” and “minor” literatures, we brought together French and Hebrew/Israeli scholars. At the end of the issue is an exclusive interview with Julia Kristeva. Keren Mock opened the dialogue with Kristeva with a question about archives. The interview quickly developed into Kristeva’s conversation with Jewish and Hebrew cultures and her reflections on ethnicity and religion in Europe today. The interview took place just as Kristeva was working on the publication of her memoir (*Je me voyage*) and engaged in collecting and constructing stories from her own personal archives.

Three of the essays in this volume start their investigation by exploring Jacques Derrida’s work. In “The Deleted Archive: Revisiting Alice Munro, Amnon Shamosh, Annie Ernaux, and Yehoshua Kenaz,” Michal Ben-Naftali (who has also translated *Archive Fever*, among many other books by Derrida, into Hebrew) develops the notion of “the deleted archive” through a discussion of literary works in Hebrew, English, and French. These texts, “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.” In Ben-Naftali’s essay, “Alzheimer’s is the satanic transformation of ‘archive fever,’” and demented poetics problematize the very idea of the concept of archive as the essence of being human.

In his article “‘The Need to Be Recorded’: Gabriel Preil’s Archival Prosthesis in the American Diaspora,” Yotam Popliker explores the poetics of the archive and the structural divide between the person who re-members and the content being collected in this process of archival re-membling, following Derrida’s argument that “*there is no archive . . . without a certain exteriority.*”² Re-membling indicates that the poetics of the archive embraces a “process of recording,” consigning recurrent memories to a mnemotechnical tool: the recording device. Popliker examines the recording process in the poetry of the New York-based Yiddish and Hebrew poet Gabriel Preil. Preil collects and gathers a poetic archive in order to argue that the process of recording can serve as a way to reconcile and accept the Diasporic condition and the lack of a direct connection to origins and roots.

In “Lost in Fire, Lost in Letters: Archives of the Algerian War,” Marie-Pierre Ulloa uses *Archive Fever* as a starting point for a discussion of the silencing of the archives of the Sartrian philosopher Francis Jeanson, a leader of a network of French nationals who actively supported the Front de libération nationale (FLN) during the Algerian War (1954–62). However, Jeanson produced an epistolary novel, *Lettre aux femmes* (Letter to women, 1965), which draws heavily on his own experience during the war, and as Ulloa argues, this novel can be understood as another space for both constructing memory and forgetting memory and constitutes an archive in its own right.

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur’s *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2000) is revisited in “Trace, Archive, Imaginary” by Jean-Michel Frodon. Ricoeur investigates the dialectics between

² Ibid., 11 (italics in original).

facts, memories, and transmission, both collectively and individually; Frodon argues that “the images under consideration in *Memory, History, Forgetting* are only mental or literary constructs; Ricoeur focuses exclusively on words as mnemonic tools to describe, remember, and forget.” Ricoeur, according to Frodon, does not address the field or the impact of visual images and neglects the important contributions of cinematic art. This absence is salient when it comes to the study of the Shoah’s representation in art.

In “On the Heightened Intuitability of History in Walter Benjamin’s *Arcades Project*,” Eli Friedlander examines how the notions of collection and archives are featured in an attempt to describe Benjamin’s unfinished *Arcades Project*, composed of thirty-six convolutes. One of them, convolute H, is entitled “The Collector,” and the essay “Eduard Fuchs, Historian and Collector” is instrumental in grasping the method of the *Arcades Project* and the intimate relation between the collecting process and Benjamin’s own conception of history. Friedlander argues that “‘Collection’ and ‘archive’ indeed introduce contingency and concrete materiality in all its details that resist easy assimilation into various premature conceptual unities. And yet it might be as problematic, in attempting to characterize Benjamin’s historical materialism, to give up on the dimension of overall unity that is the task of the project, in favor of the dispersal and concreteness of the collection and the archive.”

Finally, Dina Stein’s “Archival Recollections: Rabbinic Figures as Folk Heroes” focuses on the two hundred tales dedicated to rabbinic figures of late antiquity out of the twenty-four thousand tales filed in the Israel Folktale Archives named after Dov Noy (IFA). The article focuses on the tales that characterize the rabbis as tricksters and in which Rabbi Akiva is the major narrative figure. Stein shows how the IFA as a national archive is “a conflicted arena of competing discourses, mixing categories in a similar manner to the trickster-hero of its rabbinic tales.” Furthermore, by presenting the complex interplay of hegemony and marginality as staged and performed by the tales and their tellers, the article contributes to a more general issue: the understanding of the semiotics of archival recollection as hermeneutic tool.

In the artistic contribution part of the issue we are including a chapter from *We Were the Future* by Yael Neeman, in the translation of Sondra Silverston. Neeman’s award-winning book (Hebrew, 2011; English, 2016) presents readers with a unique voice that challenges any traditional divisions between “I” and “we” in storytelling. Neeman juxtaposes stories that are based on her own memory with information and documents that were collected from her kibbutz archives. In an interview we conducted with Neeman for this introduction, she said, “I wanted to tell a story that is not only mine, because the kibbutz is like that—your own private memory is always duplicated, always shared, and you can always check it.” The archival material allowed Neeman to write the personal/collective story of a community that didn’t leave much room for individuality and privacy, where the story of the “I” was extremely similar to the stories of the other individuals, who shared with him/her almost every experience. Archives played two additional roles in the novel. The archival material made it possible for Neeman to include marginal voices and figures in the history of her place and, as she argues, to include the past as both “dead” and “alive.” Neeman explains that for her “the archive in its entirety is in the present tense. Everybody is alive in the archive”; literature through narration turns the “living evidence” into the past and into something that, on the one hand, “gives voice to the documents and, on the other hand, turns them into an artifact, into something dead, something from the past.” The chapter we chose to

include here (chapter 8) reflects the complex relationship between memory, storytelling, and archives in this book.

It is now left for the readers of the issue to assess to what extent the French-Hebrew conversation helps us navigate the tensions between the archival and the nonarchival and, at the same time, how our understanding of French thinkers changes when their works are discussed in and reflected through Hebrew or Jewish contexts. A