



The Allure of the Archive: Performance and Censorship

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The Allure of the Archive

Performance and Censorship

by Helen Freshwater

The archive has become an increasingly attractive place to pursue research work in cultural studies. The rise of theories that foreground historical contextualisation, such as New Historicism and Cultural Materialism, has no doubt contributed to this academic fascination with the repositories of the past, giving the ancient manuscript and original artefact a new allure. The problem with this is certainly not the original theories. Both New Historicism and Cultural Materialism represent respectably rigorous and complex conceptual approaches to the use of historical material in the study of literature and the role of contextualisation in analysis. The problem here lies in the similarity that work inspired by these theories may have to research underpinned by unreconstructed forms of positivistic authentication and pseudo-scientific legitimisation—a similarity that I argue is a result of the nature of the archive as it is commonly conceived in humanistic studies.

Archival research has provided the foundation for research in the humanities since the innovations of the French sociologist August Comte and German historian Leopold von Ranke in the 1830s. Comte's prescriptions for a positivist methodology centred upon the painstaking accumulation of documentary evidence, followed by patient study and detailed comparative analysis. This slow process of collection, examination, and interrogation was inspired by the rigorous observation of phenomena privileged by the natural sciences. Scientific truth about the past came to be associated with a similar

set of practices in the newly professionalised discipline of history. These were summed up by Ranke's three principles of historical investigation, which emphasised the objectivity of the historian, close analysis of archival material, and the importance of '*Wie es eigentlich gewesen*' ('showing what actually happened/how it essentially was').¹ This model prevailed in historical research in the social sciences until the 1950s: long enough for the archive to become firmly established as a symbol of truth, plausibility, and authenticity.²

However, the latter half of the twentieth century has seen a sustained theoretical offensive against the empiricist approaches that have upheld the archive's symbolic status.³ In response to this development, some historians have settled for acknowledgement of the force of these critiques, whilst maintaining their commitment to archival research as a method of investigation.⁴ Nonetheless, it is still possible to find historians who reject what they perceive as the misleading distortions of 'theory' in favour of the recalcitrant, but dependable, 'thing': archival evidence.⁵ It seems that the temptation of making a claim to the academic authority conferred by undertaking 'proper research' may prove irresistible for the researcher utilising archived material. Without a continual awareness of the long association of archival research with a history of positivism, and a thorough understanding of our own investment in this form of research work, we may find ourselves reproducing discredited methodology.

The allure of the archive is perhaps most compelling when the researcher is confronted with the particularity of a unique archival collection. The tensions attendant upon archival study are particularly acute in the case of the Lord Chamberlain's correspondence files, which are the topic of this essay. These files, which are currently housed at the British Library, preserve the textual detritus produced by the quotidian activity of the British theatrical censorship system. Following the Stage Licensing Act of 1737, every public theatre production, from local pantomimes to grandiose performances in the West End, required a licence from the Lord Chamberlain. Each play had a report written on it by an examiner who wrote a synopsis of the script, outlining any offensive scenes or dubious language. There is a file for almost every play submitted for licensing during the twentieth century, and, consequently, the number

of files runs into the thousands. These files contain memoranda, letters, and reports covering each play submitted to the office between 1900 and the abolition of the censorship in 1968, and represent a unique record of the censor's changing rationale.⁶

However, any interpretation of this archive necessitates a complex negotiation of the space between thing and theory. The contents of this archive may provide a uniquely tangible record of a period of British theatre history, but we must bear in mind that these documents were preserved as part of a process of systematic censorship. The archive may include voices of dissent, yet these are framed and fragmented by the commentary—and the cataloguing—of the authorities that silenced them. It is important to remember that the documentation of this struggle is the result of a series of decisions taken by these authorities: to adopt pre-performance licensing of scripts as the vetting system; to demand alteration of a play, or indeed to refuse it a license altogether; to place particular documents in the archive, under a particular cataloguing procedure. This archive was originally designed as a tool and was utilised to silence and suppress, as well as to provide a record of official approval. Before exploring this collection, we must begin by questioning our past—and present—commitment to the archive as a research resource, in order to assess its future utility.

One way to explain our fascination with the contents of the archive is to examine the value conferred on the unique document by what Walter Benjamin, in his seminal essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction',⁷ refers to as the 'aura' of the object. Academia thrives on the lure of new material and undiscovered textual territory. One way to ensure that research achieves the required level of originality is through analysis of previously unexamined material. The unique 'aura' of the archival document is thus bestowed upon its analysis by virtue of the perceived originality of the analyst's object of study. This preoccupation with the original document is reflected in our day-to-day exchanges. In an age of simulacra, which is rapidly completing its transfer of the production and dissemination of information on to the computer screen, we still privilege the paper document of authentication. We may rely entirely on the Internet for our consumer goods, depend upon email as a form of communication,

and entrust our labour to information technology, but every time we are called upon to prove our nationality, existence, or credentials, we revert to the passport, the driving licence, and the birth certificate. The archive performs a similar authenticating function in the academic realm.

Moreover, the academic fascination with the seemingly recoverable past contained within the archive may be symptomatic of a more recent societal obsession. Not only does the current popular interest in the importance of realising one's 'identity' lead us to scour our family inheritance for connections to ethnic groups or historical communities, but it also encourages us to read the development of the subject through reference to past occurrence to trace particularities of character to past events.⁸ In what follows I draw on psychoanalysis and archaeological theory in so far as they can offer critical models in which the present uses of history are considered to be as important as an accurate reflection of the past.

In many ways, the archive is an ideal site for research, as it is traditionally associated with text and writing. Reference to the archive evokes images of a forgotten realm of long-neglected textual territory: mountainous piles of paper bundled together; corridors of catalogued files; dusty, disintegrating letters; musty records; obscure lists. One thing unites this conceptualisation in the common cultural imagination: above all else, the archive exists in and through text as the written record of another time. This inherent textuality makes it very attractive to the academic researcher.

Consideration of the archive's wider functions may also help to explain why its contents are of such interest to the academic community. Jacques Derrida's recent *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* and Michel Foucault's now standard *Archaeology of Knowledge* are only the best known of the critical studies of the archive to have commented on the substantive role the archive plays in the construction and realisation of the state.⁹ This interaction of the state, writing, and the archive not only demonstrates the importance of textual traces for the construction of identity and collective national memory, but also indicates the state's methods of maintaining control of its subjects.¹⁰

More recent publications build upon this theoretical material. For example, Richard Harvey-Brown and Beth Davis-Brown draw

attention to the role the archive plays in the formation of a national self-consciousness, as they claim that ‘a national archive is the storing and ordering place of the collective memory of that nation or people(s)’.¹¹ They highlight the importance of the archive in the modern world and claim that the information preserved in archives, libraries, and museums represents contemporary society’s only constant, enabling a sense of ‘moral solidarity’. Whether or not we agree with their assessment of the archive’s potential to provide a ‘conscience collective’, there can be no doubt that archival institutions maintain fixed points of reference to a shared past, thus helping to cement social stability and solidarity, illuminating—or creating—collective national memories and, consequently, a sense of national identity.¹²

Harvey-Brown and Davis-Brown also observe that early collective memory resided in oral recitation; performances in which the voice of the individual was always associated with the reiteration of historical narrative. They note that the advent of writing uncoupled this intimate relationship, which enabled the realisation of ‘the textual embodiment of a shared memory exterior to particular minds and performances’.¹³ The collection and storage of text in an archive means that curators of facts and information now authorise and oversee what was once a performance of individual recitation. It might be expected that there is a high price to pay for this guardianship.¹⁴

The price, I would argue, is the very promise of the archive itself: the myth of the fixed historical record. Once removed from the world of recitation or enunciation, the voices of the past preserved in the archive will be mediated by the decisions of a series of archivists, experts, and academics. These ‘curators’ control the decision of which voices are given the opportunity to speak again to a wider audience. As these archival researchers frequently serve as conduits between the past and the contemporary public, their attitude towards the material they study should be a central concern for archive theory.

The attitude of the archival researcher towards the archive, and the labour undertaken within it, has always been ambivalent. The work of the archival researcher is reported as being demanding and exhausting, yet also compelling and pleasurable. Indeed, this attraction has been described in terms of sexual desire or addiction since Ranke’s

first assertion of his three principles of historical research in the early nineteenth century.¹⁵ It seems that the archive can be a dangerously seductive place. Instead of becoming lost in its dusty, forbidding, textual corridors, it is all too easy to become enchanted.

Before we fall under the archive's spell, it would be prudent to examine the nature of its appeal. We might consider the pleasures proffered by this archival allure to be innocent enough, but the archaeological theorist Michael Shanks suggests that we should treat the subtle arousal experienced upon immersion in the archive with some suspicion. He outlines his perception of the difference between the attitude of the archaeologist and the antiquarian and registers his unease about the latter's fascination with the archive:

Here is a passion a little too intimate with the past, a fetishism. Fetishism: here is a desire to hold, look, touch; captivation by the consecrated object. [...] The wholeness of the past is lost in the melancholic holding of the [object].¹⁶

According to Shanks, the archival fragment operates as a literal substitute for the lost object, the unrecoverable past.¹⁷ However, he surmises that this ultimately unsatisfying intimacy is an uninvited familiarity, an intrusion on the part of the antiquarian. For him, this relation to the past is a voyeuristic violation, a pornography.¹⁸

Shanks's anxiety would surely only be heightened by consideration of the terms used by Frank G. Burke in his introduction to *Research and the Manuscript Tradition*. Burke unselfconsciously celebrates the compelling quality of the archive, as he declares that he wishes to 'convey the joy of working with these materials [...] the excitement of the chase for facts, the vicarious participation in the lives of the great, near great, and no-account, and the recognition that history is a seamless encounter of human beings acting very humanly as they go about expressing and living their hopes, joys, fears, frustrations and sorrows'.¹⁹ As we can see from this quote, Burke casually acknowledges that this gratification is 'vicarious'. He recalls the pleasure of working in the archive and contemplates his captivation by the essential innocence of most texts preserved in the archive. What is appealing to Burke is the text's unselfconsciousness and ignorance of its future position as source of investigation.

One might well conclude that these qualities—and the allure they possess—are an intrinsic part of the character of every archive. The reader in the archive will always be in the position of the uninvited reader, the intruder into another's private communications: notes, marginalia, private letters. Literary critics such as Terry Eagleton have commented on the allure of the private letter for the reader, mixing metaphors of rape and readership:

Nothing could be at once more intimate and more alienable [...] The letter is part of the body which is detachable: torn from the very depths of the subject, it can equally be torn from her physical possession. [...] The letter comes to signify nothing quite so much as sexuality itself, that folded secret place which is always open to violent intrusion [...] There is always within the letter's decorously covered body that crevice or fissured place where the stirrings of desire can be felt.²⁰

Though Eagleton is referring in this passage to the function of the letter in eighteenth-century epistolary fiction, there is no reason to believe that the reader in the archive does not also feel this gratification. Surely the reader of the unedited, nonfictional, original manuscript must feel a much greater thrill in invading the private realm of the writer.

Certainly, a close reading of Ranke's letters—such as that carried out by Bonnie Smith—reveals that he imagined the archives he consulted to be women, requiring rescue or deflowering. He alludes to them as beautiful women, either princesses 'all under a curse and needing to be saved', or, if they were obscure, as virgins. Remarking upon one little-known collection, he noted, 'I long for the moment I have access to her'.²¹

This quality of unselfconsciousness or innocence certainly plays a substantial role in enhancing the textual charms of the Lord Chamberlain's correspondence files. The value of this bureaucratic detritus is largely due to the fact that it was produced and compiled by men who had no apprehension of its future use. They were not aware that their notes, memos, and reports would one day come under public scrutiny, and no doubt they would have been very surprised to learn that they would be of academic interest.

Nonetheless, this archive does not simply lay the secrets of the censorship bare. It holds many dry, formal letters, which indicate that their writers were well aware of their possible participation in the public sphere. It also contains correspondence that bears the exclusive

stamp ‘confidential’. The censorship office was particularly concerned to maintain the illusion of its autonomy, and in consequence, letters to and from other branches of government—including the Home Office, the Foreign Office, and the War Office—parade their insignia upon the head of the letter but command silence. However, informal notes and memoranda circulated among the staff of the censorship office do reveal private obsessions and prejudices. Unguarded and intimate, they expose their writers’ predispositions and personal feelings, as they record the details of their authors’ everyday lives.

Immersion in this material brings familiarity with the characters and personalities of each examiner, as they can be identified through their individual, and often distinctive, handwriting. Never staffed by more than a handful of men, the office employed them for many years at a stretch. Through an examination of the archive’s contents, one perceives the ebb and flow of daily life in the office: working relationships develop and shift, and the balance of power changes over time. Readers moved from apprenticeship, through positions of influence and seniority, to eventual antiquation and obsolescence. Concern over each other’s opinions reveals the strict hierarchy in operation, as some judgements are held up as precedential reference points, while others are casually dismissed. This archive is indeed constructed around what Burke describes as ‘human beings acting very humanly’.

My acquaintance with the day-to-day work of these men through my research over many years produced an unexpected side effect. I began to feel as if I knew them, as I felt sympathy for their troubles, involvement in their lives, and respect for their diligence and sense of duty. Such a sense of familiarity with the voices of the past must surely compromise the objectivity of my research. However, this empathy for the guardians and creators of the archive is surely one of the more innocuous charms of the archive. The illusory pleasure of recovered memory appears to be much more insidious. In the archive, the dream of the historian seems close to realisation: it seems possible to make the past live and suppressed voices speak. This desire is the subject of Derrida’s *Archive Fever*. Noting Freud’s fascination with archaeological digs, he observes that Freud wishes ‘to let the stones talk’, to allow the contents of the archive express themselves without mediation. This would be

a moment and not a process, [...which] does not belong to the laborious deciphering of the archive. It is the nearly ecstatic instant Freud dreams of, when the very success of the dig must sign the effacement of the archivist: *the origin then speaks by itself*. The *arkhe* appears in the nude, without archive.²²

We are surely all vulnerable to this beguiling fantasy of self-effacement, which seems to promise the recovery of lost time, the possibility of being reunited with the lost past, and the fulfilment of our deepest desires for wholeness and completion. This, then, is the attraction of the archival object. It becomes a substitute for a lost object: a temporary satiation of the quest for full identity and narcissistic unity.

Here the archive's inherently textual nature must interrupt our blissful encounter with its contents. During our investigation, we cannot avoid experiencing the familiar problem of all literary analysis: the indeterminacy of interpretation that haunts every text. This difficulty seems particularly acute in the case of the Lord Chamberlain's correspondence files. After Barthes and Foucault, all authors may be dead, but those who contributed to the archive are more dead than most; any control they may have wished to exercise over their statements was relinquished the moment their missives arrived at the Lord Chamberlain's office. The playwrights, producers, and examiners who contributed to the contents of the Lord Chamberlain's correspondence files could not have anticipated the public exposure of their words or their future analysis. Only a handful of the playwrights who negotiated with the Lord Chamberlain's office could have expected the treatment of their work to be of wider interest. Most would have been accustomed to obscurity. Moreover, the construction of the archive scatters and fragments the contribution of each individual, as the archive is catalogued by play title.

Of course, these problems are present, to some degree, in all archival research. When digging up the details of the past that are hidden in the archive, we must remember that we are dealing with the dead. As Derrida notes, 'the structure of the archive is *spectral*. It is spectral *a priori*: neither present nor absent "in the flesh", neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met'.²³ Any figures we encounter in the archive are ghosts, mere shadows of the past. Their actions are complete, and their original significance will remain undetermined, open to interpretation.

As the archive cannot offer direct access to the past, any reading of its contents will necessarily be a reinterpretation. It is for this reason that the archival researcher must foreground his or her own role in the process of the production of the past; responsibility to the dead requires a recognition that the reanimation of ghostly traces—in the process of writing the history of the dead—is a potentially violent act. In order to guard against such violations, the researcher should foreground the agency of the interpreter and acknowledge that this is a recontextualisation of the past rather than a reconstruction. Michael Shanks outlines just such an approach in his recent interdisciplinary collaboration with Mike Pearson, *Theatre/Archaeology*. Here he articulates the basic tenets of ‘interpretative archaeology’: ‘Gone is the notion of a singular material record bequeathed to us from the past and from which meaning can be “read off”. Instead archaeology is to regard itself as a practice of cultural production’.²⁴

This self-consciousness complicates our perception of the archive’s traditional relationship to the disciplines it often serves to legitimate. The problems presented by the use of the archive may be generated by the character of these disciplines. Indeed, critics such as Thomas Osborne have indicated that the academic subjects that are associated with archival research exhibit a fundamental incompatibility with the scientific rationalism emulated by its first practitioners, Compté and Ranke. He observes that these ‘conjectural sciences’ legitimise themselves through evidential detail that demands expert interpretation. Their conclusions, Osborne states, are ‘produced only through the labours of an aesthetic of perception; a fine, discriminating gaze that is able to isolate, on the basis of experience and example, items of significance out of a mass of detail’.²⁵ It is certainly true that, when faced with a huge body of textual material, much research work is informed by an instinctive response as the researcher follows traces and searches for clues.

However, it would appear that this departure from the tenets of scientific rationalism is in no way a conscious move on the part of the humanities researcher. Indeed, the way in which aesthetic discrimination is presented as objective enquiry is a function of the continual, if unconscious, refusal to remember that the archive does not contain the complete record of the past that it promises. Such a refusal

persists despite our awareness that, during its construction, the archive will have been formed by many instances of radical contingency. Every archive has undergone a process of selection, during which recorded information may have been excluded and discarded as well as preserved. Carolyn Steedman comments on the haphazard nature of the record and the way this reflects on the institutions that bring the archive into being:

The Archive is made from the selected and consciously chosen documentation from the past and from the mad fragmentations that no-one intended to preserve and that just ended up there. [...] In the Archive, you cannot be shocked at its exclusions, its emptinesses, at what is not catalogued [...] Its condition of being deflects outrage: in its quiet folders and bundles is the neatest demonstration of how state power has operated, through ledgers and lists and indictments, and through what is missing from them.²⁶

This duality of random inclusion and considered exclusion marks the construction of every archive; Steedman's description need not be limited to the functioning of state power. The original decisions as to which materials are to be preserved and which to be discarded, prior to public access, are often unavailable to the researcher. But the archive's very existence indicates an *a priori* value judgement concerning the worth of the documents or artefacts it contains.

These judgements continue after the initial establishment of the archive. Once preserved, the material is subject to systems, schemas, and structures of ordering and classification. Even cataloguing, which is designed to enable access, inevitably serves to foreground and highlight the existence of some of the archive's contents, resulting in the effective marginalisation or exclusion of the remaining contents. These decisions are often presented as simply a matter of pragmatic financial considerations, imposed by pressures of space or time. However, these rationalisations may mask other agendas. While we may be accustomed to dealing with the vagaries of subjective textual interpretation, we do not often choose to dwell on the existence of similar forces that affect the availability of text in the first place. As Harvey-Brown and Davis-Brown aver, 'It is not that archivists do not tell the whole truth about reality. It is that they *cannot* tell it'.²⁷

Where do we go from here? We have replaced the archive's traditional legitimacy with a site of conflicted signification. But this need not lead towards the fatalistic conception that there are no facts, only interpretations. Derrida notes that the contemporary awareness of historical indeterminacy is at the heart of our desire to return to the archive as a source of knowledge: 'We are *en mal d'archive*: in need of archives'.²⁸ Despite our reservations concerning the reliability of the archive and its liability to mislead and manipulate, we have to return to the past, or what remains of it, in order to attempt a cautious, conditional reconstruction.

However, a revalorisation of the archive may well involve its redefinition. This redefinition must account for its essential doubleness, as physical collection or space and as a concept or idea. This doubleness accounts in turn for the archive's continual oscillation between the poles of thing and theory. Derrida, for example, foregrounds the need for place in the operation of the archive:

Even in their guardianship or their hermeneutic tradition, the archives could do neither without substrate nor without residence. It is thus, in this *domiciliation*, in this house arrest, that archives take place.²⁹

A case in point is the formation of the archive containing the textual records of the Lord Chamberlain's censorship office. Their 'domiciliation' was of prime importance. The association with the crown and the royal prerogative, signalled in the address of St James's Palace, placed the Lord Chamberlain above the law. Playwrights who were denied the right to present their work upon the public stage had no opportunity to appeal against his decisions.

At the same time, though, the archive can be conceived not as an empirical or material concept at all. Foucault's well-known description does just this:

[The archive is not] the sum of all the texts that a culture has kept upon its person as documents attesting to its own past, or as evidence of a continuing identity; nor [is it] the institutions, which, in a given society, make it possible to record and preserve those discourses that one wishes to remember and keep in circulation. [It is rather] *the general system of the formation and the transformation of statements*.³⁰

Negotiating the two poles that the archive variously occupies in the process of historical reconstruction is the challenge for any attempt at a redefinition of the archive. Such negotiation ought to prove extremely

useful in its application to the history of theatrical censorship. According to the Foucauldian definition of the archive, an archival assessment of the censorious control of the theatre cannot simply be delineated by the textual contents of the Lord Chamberlain's records. Moreover, it is quite clear that theatrical censorship did not simply disappear in Britain following the removal of this responsibility from the Lord Chamberlain in 1968.

Legal constraints on theatrical performance remain today, even if they are no longer specific to the theatre. Individual plays no longer need a licence, but theatres are licensed under the Health and Safety Regulations Act, and producers are liable under the Obscene Publications Act, 1959. The theatre has also been subject to private prosecution, as well as the impact of the infamous 'Section 28' of the British Local Government Act, 1988, which prohibited Local Authorities from 'promoting' homosexuality. Ironically, without the protection of the Lord Chamberlain's licence, the dependence of playwrights and theatre companies upon a plethora of other institutions has become more apparent. The following have all taken on the role of censor: corporate sponsors, public pressure groups, administrators of charitable foundations, functionaries of local government, members of theatre boards, and those who distribute public subsidy.

Of course, this wide dispersal of censorious intervention poses problems for the archival researcher interested in the development of the theatre in Britain, post-1968. The faceless guardians of public propriety listed above do not record their decisions in a centralised database. However, although it is clear that the material archive may no longer exist, the discursive archive, the historical *a priori*, the system which enables the '*formation and the transformation of statements*', remains.

The continuing presence of the censorious impulse indicates the importance of a redefinition of the archive. Indeed, any researcher interested in censorious influences upon British theatre will have to work on a new definition of the archive that responds to the particularity of theatre as a medium. This definition should attend to the shortcomings of the Lord Chamberlain's archive—both as a repository of theatre history and as a method of censorship.

Fortunately, these shortcomings are easily discernible. The Lord Chamberlain's censorship was certainly ineffective as a method of censorship. The archive reveals that the examiners struggled to reconcile their dependence upon the system of pre-licensed scripts with theatre's ephemerality, as it bears witness to performance's evasion of the authority of the text. Upon occasion, the Lord Chamberlain's attempts to tie performance to a licensed script were decisively defeated by impromptu improvisation, innuendo, and the infinite expansion of stage business. Clearly, the Lord Chamberlain could not hope to capture the corporeal art of theatre through textual regulation once and for all. All theatrical productions include a mutable relationship between the author's script and the resulting performance, just as all theatre explores the gap between the text and the spoken word or physical gesture. This rupture is inherent in all theatrical performance. The main limitation of the Lord Chamberlain's censorship as a method of control was that it failed to address theatre *as performance*. This, of course, is the same deficiency that its archive presents as a record of theatrical history. Indeed, all archiving of live performance is problematised by its subject's time-based nature. No amount of video, documentary recording, or personal testimony can capture the ephemerality of performance. Something will always be lost in translation.

Any redefinition of the archive must attend to the singularity of performance as a medium. Such a redefinition would need to address theatre's realisation as a corporeal art, its development through processes of devising and improvisation, and modern performance's increasing disassociation from textuality. This redefinition is plainly beyond the scope of this article. Furthermore, academic analysis of censored or suppressed performance has its own set of problems. Much censored material is simply not available for assessment: the desired object of the researcher's gaze is irremediably lost to history, aborted before it reached the stage. In other instances, the work's progress, development, and dissemination have been distorted by its entanglement with the censor's critical power. However, if we wish to encounter these lost performances, we must enter the archive, for it is the only place where their traces remain.

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Endnotes

1. Quoted in Keith Jenkins, *Why History? Ethics and Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 106. Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (London: Norton, 1994) and Bonnie Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women and Historical Practice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998) include accounts of these developments. Smith notes that 'history' lacked a common methodology before the 1830s. She describes the diverse forms of its presentation (including epic poetry, historical plays, novels, and journalism) and its various practitioners: 'As the nineteenth century opened, archival research was by no means the universally accepted road to historical truth [...]. Between 1750 and 1830, male historians were most likely to have been trained as jurists and theologians; or they were bankers or bureaucrats who wrote merely as an avocation' (Smith, p. 19).
2. Georg G. Iggers and James M. Powell, *Leopold von Ranke and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990); Smith, pp. 116–20; and Appleby, pp. 73–76.

3. Keith Jenkins provides a useful outline of these critiques in *Why History? Ethics and Postmodernity*.
4. See Martha Howell and Walter Prevens, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods* (London: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 148–49.
5. See Mary Lindemann, ‘Confessions of an Archive Junkie’, in *Theory, Method and Practice in Social and Cultural History*, ed. by P. Karsten and J. Modell (New York: New York University Press, 1992), pp. 152–80; and Richard Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta, 1997). Lindemann notes: ‘theory for historians [...] has more often proved an untrustworthy guide than a reliable pilot. Immersion in the archival evidence seems to me an obvious corrective to theoretical flights of fancy’ (p. 154). In the face of such retrenchment, critics have launched a renewed attack upon the conceptual blindspots of this ‘revised Rankeanism’ (Jenkins, p. 93).
6. The fact that these files are available for study is a matter of some fortuity. Following the removal of the Lord Chamberlain’s theatre licensing function in 1968 and the closure of the censorship office in St James’s Palace, the accumulated scripts and files were stored for many years in a coal cellar and nearly did not reach the light at all. When they were finally transferred to the British Library in 1991, many of the files were suffering the effects of dampness and required preservation treatment. Coal dust still clings to many of the files today, which make their consultation dirty work.
7. Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), pp. 217–51.
8. See Pierre Nora on the remarkable growth of this phenomenon. ‘Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire’, *Representations* 26 (1989) 7–25 (p. 15).
9. *History of the Human Sciences* published two special issues on the archive, which contain many discussions of this conjunction (11.4 [1998] and 12.2 [1999]). In particular, see Richard Harvey-Brown and Beth Davis-Brown, ‘The Making of Memory: The Politics of Archives, Libraries and Museums in the Construction of the National Consciousness’, (11 [1998], 17–32); Sandra Kemp, ‘The Archive on which the Sun Never Sets: Rudyard Kipling’ (11 [1998] 33–48); and Michael Lynch, ‘Archives in Formation: Privileged Spaces, Popular Archives and Paper Trails’

- (12 [1999] 65–87). Frank G. Burke's *Research and the Manuscript Tradition* (London: Scarecrow Press, 1997) also contains an account of the construction and management of archives. For earlier work, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives' (*History and Theory*, 24 [1985], 247–72) and Roberto Gonzalez Echevarria, *Myth and Archive* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Currently, Derrida's *Archive Fever* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1995) is being applied in fields as diverse as medieval and performance studies, in publications such as Siân Echard's 'House Arrest: Modern Archives, Medieval Manuscripts' (*Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30 [2000], 185–210) and Sarah Gorman's 'Archive Fever: Memory as a Challenge to Finitude in the Work of Rose English and Insomniac Productions' (*Performance Research* 5 [2000], 90–99). The growing interest in the intersection of thing and theory is evidenced by this broad application of Derrida's work.
10. Foucault demonstrates that official archives play a vital part in the formation of the modern state, as a part of the legal apparatus of social regulation. His often-cited argument that the end of the seventeenth century witnessed a shift away from religious notions of confession, and the rise of another disciplinary mechanism, which was 'an administrative and no longer a religious arrangement: a mechanism of registration and no longer a pardon', hinges on the birth of the archive, as 'everything thus said is a registered in writing, accumulates and constitutes dossiers and archives'. Foucault quoted in *Michel Foucault: Power, Truth, Strategy*, ed. by Meaghan Morris and Paul Patton (Sydney: Feral Press, 1979).
 11. Harvey-Brown and Davis-Brown, p. 17.
 12. Harvey-Brown and Davis-Brown, p. 19.
 13. Harvey-Brown and Davis-Brown, p. 18.
 14. Pierre Nora observes that this 'materialisation of memory' constitutes a form of 'terrorism'. He observes that the information conserved in archives is 'no longer living memory's more or less intended remainder', but that it 'comes to us from the outside'. He concludes that it is merely a 'prosthesis-memory', secondary to 'true memory' (p. 13–14).
 15. Ranke refers to a morning's work in an Italian repository as an exhausting bout of sexual congress in a letter of 1827: 'Yesterday I had a sweet, magnificent fling with the object of my love, a beautiful Italian, and I hope that we produce a beautiful Roman-German prodigy. I rose at noon, completely exhausted' (cited in Smith, p. 119). More recently,

- Mary Lindeman describes her relationship with the archive as an addiction in her article 'Confessions of an Archive Junkie' (pp. 152–80).
16. Michael Shanks, *Experiencing the Past: On the Character of Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 99.
 17. Both Catherine Brown and Dominick LaCapra comment on this quality, albeit from radically different perspectives. For Brown's celebration, see 'In the Middle' (*Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 30 [2000], 547–74, p. 557), while LaCapra's sceptical critique can be found in *History and Criticism* (London: Cornell University Press, 1985, p. 92).
 18. While writing on 'The Erotics of the Museum', Shanks notes: 'The relation with the past based on the look of objects is an amorous one. It is a voyeuristic appreciation and a simultaneous violation of the body of the past. It is a pornography. Artefacts are [...] prostituted for possession and consumption'. Michael Shanks and Christopher Tilley, *Re-Constructing Archaeology: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 79.
 19. Burke, p. x.
 20. Terry Eagleton quoted in Carolyn Steedman, 'The Space of Memory: In an Archive', *History of the Human Sciences*, 11 (1998), 65–83 (p. 71).
 21. Ranke quoted in Smith, pp. 116, 119.
 22. Derrida, p. 93.
 23. Derrida, p. 84.
 24. Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 11.
 25. Thomas Osborne, 'The Ordinarity of the Archive', *History of the Human Sciences*, 12 (1999) 51–64 (p. 58).
 26. Steedman, p. 66.
 27. Harvey-Brown and Davis-Brown, p. 22.
 28. Derrida, p. 91.
 29. Derrida, p. 2.
 30. Foucault, p. 129–30. Emphasis original.