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The Archon(s) of Wildfell Hall: Memory and the Frame Narrative
in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

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ABSTRACT

The Archon(s) of Wildfell Hall: Memory and the Frame Narrative in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

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In the first chapter of Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Gilbert Markham invites his reader to join him as he attempts to recall the past. Because Gilbert uses the journal of another to supplement his own memories, the novel's frame narrative structure becomes saturated with complex memory-based issues and problems. Thus, the complicated frame narrative provides fertile ground for exploring the novel through memory. In studying the frame narrative, scholars have typically devoted their criticism to Gilbert and how he shapes the frame. Few scholars afford the other primary narrator of the novel, Helen, any power in shaping that frame. However, both Gilbert's and Helen's narratives exist separately yet function codependently. Using recent studies in memory as well as Derridean and Foucaultian archive theory as a lens, I will explore how *Tenant* presents an anarchic narrative structure that simultaneously gives its own semblance of power and order without assigning complete narrative power to one person or to one gender.

Keywords and terms: Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, memory, archive, frame narrative, gender politics, Derrida, Foucault, archon, systems of enunciability, discourse

Introduction

At its simplest, Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is a journal within a story within a letter; as each layer of the frame unfolds, readers move through fluctuating narratives and narrative modes. The unusual structure and the layering of narratives within the novel separate readers from the story's point of origin, and each layer of discourse becomes progressively more dependent on the difficult task of recalling the past. As the primary narrator, Gilbert Markham begins chapter one of his letter by inviting his reader—his brother-in-law Halford—to accompany him as he attempts to recall the past: “You must go back with me to the autumn of 1827” (42). While Gilbert's invitation establishes a timeline for his story, it also highlights the role memory plays in the transmission of the narrative. Thus, a study of *Tenant's* framed structure also becomes a study of memory and how the narrators from the novel mediate their memories through their narratives.

Many of Brontë's contemporaries recognized the inherent complications within *Tenant's* framed narrative, expressing frustration with its highly improbable epistolary structure. A reviewer from *The Spectator* notes that “the arrangements of the incidents and persons” are “extreme and wild,” hinting at his own distaste for *Tenant's* frame narrative (“Acton Bell's *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*” 662–63).¹ Another reviewer from *The Examiner* asserts, “Just at the time when we begin to feel some interest about [Gilbert] Markham and the lady [Helen Graham], we are thrown back upon her previous history, which occupies a full half of the three volumes before us. This is a fatal error” (“Unsigned Review”). The reviewer suggests that being “thrown back” on Helen's “previous history” is a literary weakness. Both of these examples from 1848

¹ While the reviewer applies this description to the Brontës' novels in general, his particular focus on *Tenant* in subsequent paragraphs functions as evidence that he had this novel in mind.

(the same year that *Tenant* was published) demonstrate that the frame narrative has been at the heart of criticism surrounding the novel. Critics have consistently grappled with the complexities and improbabilities of the frame narrative, without arriving at any kind of consensus. And though scholars have analyzed the frame narrative almost ad nauseam, they have yet to unpack the narrative in relation to memory. Yet, by inviting his reader to venture into the past, Gilbert establishes memory as the primary narrative mode.

Tenant's structure, in which readers are “thrown back” and forth through converging memories and characters’ histories, allows readers to view the novel as a narrative experiment in the representations of memory. Since Aristotle, those who study memory have seen it as a fluid and unreliable medium for conveying experience, and the frame narrative within *Tenant* provides a tangible representation of the fallibility of memory and the problematic attempt to archive it in a record like Gilbert’s. If, as Jacques Derrida and Paul Ricoeur suggest, archival work is a complicated process of working backwards to record the past while simultaneously trying to recover memory, the archiving process becomes increasingly suspect when the past is filtered through layers of narration and layers of archiving, as it is in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

The question, then, is how are we to understand the complicated frame narrative and the implications related to memory and archiving? I posit that the novel’s structure and reliance on memory result in an anarchic narrative style, or a narrativization in which no single narration takes complete governance. This is made evident first in the way Gilbert uses Helen’s journal to supplement his own memory, and second in the way that Helen retains some authority over the narrative. I seek to examine the gendered power struggles within the layered structure via the very mode that Gilbert foregrounds at the beginning of his narrative: memory.

Certainly, Gilbert asserts a certain level of narratorial control: his is the voice that begins and ends the novel. Perhaps it is for this reason that, since *Tenant's* critical revival in the 1980s and '90s, the scholarly conversation surrounding the complicated structure has also been wrapped up in a debate over Gilbert's narrative credibility.² More recently, critics have explored the frame narrative as a means of understanding Gilbert and of viewing Victorian ideals of masculinity.³ Almost without fail, scholars view the narrative and its structure in terms of Gilbert's masculine power; surprisingly few scholars have examined Helen's part in scaffolding the frame narrative, and even fewer afford her narratorial influence equal to that of Gilbert's. Many of the scholars who focus on Helen, as she relates to the novel's gender politics, examine her role as a fugitive mother rather than how she shapes the narrative frame.⁴ As a rare exception, Priti Joshi briefly discusses how Helen contributes to *Tenant's* narrative structure

² See, for example, Gordon "Gossip, Diary, Letter, Text: Anne Brontë's Narrative *Tenant* and the Problematic of the Gothic Sequel" and Jacobs "Gender and Layered Narrative in *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*."

³ Sarah Hallenbeck argues in favor of Gilbert's narrative credibility, explaining that he is "aware of the burden he carries as the narrator of Helen's tale" (para. 22), and this responsibility of caring for the journal ultimately helps him navigate changing conceptions of gentlemanliness. Hallenbeck argues that Gilbert's frame works together with Helen's journal to present a reevaluation of the marriage myth. Also giving Gilbert credit as narrator, Lorene M. Birden argues that the novel's framed structure is underpinned by instances of unconscious and frank humor, which explain and lend insight into Gilbert's attempts to maintain masculine ideals as well as his understandable deficiencies as a narrator. Maggie Berg, on the other hand, sees Gilbert's assimilation of Helen's diary as a violent act. She claims that "the assimilation of Helen's text exhibits a certain symbolic violence which is intimately related to, perhaps symptomatic of, the actual violence portrayed in the text, particularly towards women and animals" (21). Joshi's article also looks at narrative structures and gender roles, arguing that Brontë writes *Tenant* in an effort to pave a middle ground between competing Victorian views of femininity and masculinity by presenting a new masculinity that is formed by emulating a practice usually relegated to the feminine: gossip.

⁴ See Monika Hope Lee's article, "A Mother Outlaw Vindicated: Social Critique in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*." Also see Ian Ward's chapter on "Huntingdon v Huntingdon" (25–47).

(both in terms of the gossip in the outer frames and the journal in the middle), but she ultimately concludes that the journal is a “silent offering” to Gilbert, who eventually violates Helen’s trust when he shares the journal’s contents with Halford (913–14). Conversely, Elizabeth Signorotti’s 1995 article in *The Victorian Newsletter* does argue that Helen’s narrative finally dominates over Gilbert’s. Signorotti views Helen’s goal in controlling the narrative and hence controlling Gilbert as a byproduct of the abuse she experienced in her first marriage. Though Signorotti published the article over two decades ago, scholars have yet to fully engage with the idea that Helen acts as a narrative authority in her own right. And in the scholarship about the frame narrative, the conversations eventually make a decisive turn back to Gilbert and his pervasive narrative presence.

Many scholars view the narrative exchange in *Tenant* as a gendered competition, with Gilbert usually winning out in the end. In reality, *Tenant*’s framed narrative is far more complicated as the layered structure instead demonstrates a fluid model of narrative negotiation. On the one hand, *Tenant* unfolds from Helen, and all that we know about her life prior to becoming the tenant of Wildfell Hall stems from her attempts to archive her memories. On the other hand, Gilbert maintains a level of control over how Helen’s memories are transmitted. Helen’s journal and Gilbert’s frame thus function together as codependent archives. According to Derrida, archives are domiciled documents that provide a point of origin as well as a point of law or authority. Archons oversee these archives and ultimately decide what to reveal or withhold and what to preserve or erase from the archives (3). This Derridean conception of the archive and the archon provides a helpful lens through which we can understand the complicated narration within *Tenant* by lending a nuanced understanding of the structure’s various components: Helen’s journal as an archive with Gilbert as the primary archon. But Derrida’s

conception of the archive does not adequately account for all of the narrative variables within *Tenant* in that it presupposes a dominant (if not completely uncompromised) archontic authority. As noted above, however, in *Tenant* there are two narrators that contend for archival and archontic priority. While Gilbert asserts archontic priority by controlling the outer layer of the narrative, the novel's multi-layered structure checks his assertion by decentering archontic authority so that the narrative exchange becomes a negotiation between Helen's recounting of events and his own rather than a bid for total archival control.

Gilbert's and Helen's interaction with physical documents in a domiciled, physical space represents Derridean archiving and memory preservation at work. Derrida's conception of the archive provides a good starting point for understanding how memory influences the retrospective element of the narrative, but it does not account for coexisting and sometimes competing narratives that move beyond the physical space and into a discursive space. Instead, we can turn to Michel Foucault's systems of enunciability that examine the "system[s] of discursivity" (129) in which archiving is a fluid process of negotiating power structures related to language. Simply put, Foucault asserts that language is its own archive that creates systems of discourse from which ideologies, socialities, and institutions emerge. These preexisting discourses create systems of enunciability that confine or control linguistic possibilities—the preexisting discourses regulate what can be said within the systems of enunciability. Foucault's view provides an alternate conception of the archive by accounting for coexisting narrative discourses that interweave in a fluid process of negotiation. Derrida places archontic power in a primary governing body (or person) who oversees a physical archive. Foucault, on the other hand, sees discourse as the governing body that draws from a linguistic archive. While Gilbert and Helen both function as Derridean archons throughout *Tenant*, Helen's narrative is

particularly useful in demonstrating a Foucaultian sense for the systems of discourse to which both Gilbert and Helen are beholden.

It is not enough to look at archiving in isolation. The archiving at work within the novel (in both the Derridean and Foucaultian sense) and the systems of discourse that are tied to *Tenant's* frame narrative are also tied directly to memory. The converging discourses and narratives of the frame narrative are wrapped up in questions of remembering. Paul Ricoeur asserts that archives are social spaces, as well as physical spaces, where archiving is an act of preserving memory. This perspective thus helps us maneuver between archontic impulses that use memory as a means of controlling the narrative (Derrida) and enunciative possibilities that are confined to a discursive and narrative history (Foucault). *Tenant's* framed structure allows us to see the process of negotiating gender politics as a process of negotiating narratives and discourses in relation to memory.

In an attempt to preserve the narrative through their own memories, Helen and Gilbert rely on each other's archives and on each other's archontic power; neither narrative can exist without the other. Paradoxically, Helen and Gilbert function as anarchic figures to each other's narratives in that they undermine the archontic power of the competing archive. Therefore, the frame narrative within *Tenant* is constantly in flux; it is both archive creating and archive destroying, or anarchic. In this way, *Tenant's* framed structure problematizes Derrida's conception of the archive. I argue that while both Gilbert and Helen assert power as archons at key moments within the novel, the epistolary structure demonstrates that the frame narrative is in fact porous. Establishing absolute narrative power within the novel may be impossible since both Helen and Gilbert withhold information from their readers and since both characters control how and when they share the contents of their archives. The frame narrative within *Tenant* thus helps

readers understand something important about how we can understand memory: that archontic authority may exist in a fluid model of memorial and discursive negotiation even while such authority simultaneously breaks down under a web of converging narratives and memories. *Tenant's* frame narrative demonstrates this negotiation of power in which archives and archons uphold each other while functioning anarchically with respect to one another. In layering archives, Brontë creates an anarchic narrative in which the structure of the novel is uniquely implicated in the gender politics governing the transfer, maintenance, and ownership of memory.

Memory and the Archive: Gilbert as Archon

Throughout *Tenant's* complicated and overlapping narrative, Gilbert acts as an archon in two very Derridean ways: first, by laying claim to the physical journal, and second, by shaping the narrative to meet his own rhetorical and social objectives. In relating the story of how he came to know the mysterious tenant of Wildfell Hall to Halford, the addressee of his lengthy letter, Gilbert draws primarily from his own memory and from one key memory aid⁵: Helen's journal. Because Gilbert uses the journal to supplement his own memories, the novel becomes saturated with complex memory-based issues and problems, and the act of archiving memory is a highly gendered one for Brontë, hence the critical preoccupation with the gender politics governing the contents of the journal. The title character, Helen, is a fugitive mother, fleeing from an abusive and unfaithful husband—fertile ground for examining gender issues.⁶ Beyond the contents of Helen's diary, the structure of the novel is also highly gendered. As critics have pointed out, Gilbert's narratorial authority is a complex and fraught area of study. The novel's

⁵ In Derridean theory, memory aids are the material substrates that assist in anamnesis, or memory recall. See Derrida's discussions on *The Mystic Pad* (13–14, 24–31).

⁶ See Lee's article argues on *Tenant* as an "unfolding plot of marital incarceration and escape" (para. 3).

form begs readers to investigate Gilbert as narrator, both his narrative reliability and his patriarchal perspective.⁷ Scholars often recognize the gender power dynamics within the novel as directly connected to narrative control.

Recent studies in memory illustrate that the gender politics within *Tenant* (in respect to the frame narrative) are directly linked to archontic control and the ways in which archons consign and transmit memories. In the preface to his story, which provides an account of Helen's appearance in Lindenhope (Gilbert's hometown) after leaving her abusive husband, Gilbert claims to give a "full and faithful account of certain circumstances connected with the most important event" of his life (41). But if, as David Lowenthal suggests, memory "progressively becomes more shadowy, bereft of sensation, [and] effaced by oblivion" (192), then Gilbert's assertion that he is giving a full representation of his memory implies that quite the opposite is happening: the more he attempts to recall the memory he claims to be sharing in its entirety, the more it slips away.

As though anticipating doubts from his reader, Gilbert openly acknowledges this inherent distrust in memory and attempts to ground his narrative in something more substantial. Gilbert writes, "I have not my memory alone—tenacious as it is—to depend upon; in order that your credulity may not be too severely taxed in following me through the minute details of my narrative" (41–42). Though Gilbert claims to be drawing on other, more grounded sources for his narrative, this claim represents the porous nature of the framed structure within *Tenant* since he is already buttressing his story with someone else's. In some ways, Gilbert's frame is a personal testimony, with his own memory witnessing for the events described to Halford. Helen's journal, then, is the documentary proof (the archive) that substantiates that testimony. The testimony

⁷ See Berg, Gordon, Hallenbeck, Jackson, Jacobs, O'Toole, and Senf.

would be incomplete without the document that substantiates and authenticates (however subjectively) the memories from which the testimony is born.⁸ While the narrative is, supposedly, about the “most important event” of *his* life, he must rely on the journal of another for access to “the minute details.” Helen’s journal acts as the principle archive by which Gilbert authorizes his own memories.

Gilbert interacts with Helen’s journal in a traditionally Derridean way. According to Derrida, the archive is a domicile that houses important constitutive and memorial documents. Archiving is an act of recording memory so that it can be recalled at a later time, and the documents that form the archive “in effect speak the law” (Derrida 2). Derridean theory suggests that the archive stores those memorial documents that create and impose laws and ideologies as well as show the point of origin for authority. While Derrida discusses the archive as an actual physical domicile, Ricoeur posits that “the archive is not just a physical or spatial place, it is also a social one” that collects memories in order to enforce ideology (167). Under this assertion, the archive functions as a place of interaction in which memorial documents establish or in some way influence sociality.

Derrida’s notion of the archive also supposes a type of sociality—the archive’s existence depends on an archon. In the Greek tradition, archons were those who “held and signified political power [and] were considered to possess the right to make or to represent the law. . . . The archons are first of all the documents’ guardians” (2). Derridean theory thus assumes and demands a type of authority figure to protect, uphold, and allow restricted access to the archive.

⁸ Ricoeur explains that vestiges of the past, such as journals and other documents, “play a nonnegligible role in the corroboration of testimonies” (173). He also explains, “The relation of complementarity between testimony and clue comes to be inscribed in the circle of internal-external coherence that structures documentary proof” (174). To Ricoeur, documents are the vestiges of the past that “can be interrogated by a historian with the idea of finding there some information about the past” (178).

The archons who act as authority figures enforce law by supervising memory; they uphold the archive and enforce law by authorizing and privileging some accounts and some memories within the archive over others. The archive, the archons that protect the archive, and the documents derived from the memories that constitute the archive become a means of institutionalization and a means of controlling and enforcing history and ideologies. Under this assumption, memory comes embedded with “a history that is itself ‘authorized,’ the official history, the history publicly learned and celebrated” (Ricoeur 85).

In *Tenant*, the “official history” that is authorized by the text’s primary narrator (Gilbert) is an account of events governed by the politics of gender. Foucault would argue that both Helen and Gilbert are beholden to the systems of enunciability and functioning surrounding gender norms in the Victorian period, and that neither character “owns” or controls the discourses within the novel. Even though both characters exist to a large degree within the discursive systems of their time regarding gender, the archontic power Gilbert derives from this domiciled document (i.e. Helen’s journal) is all the more powerful because of the systems of enunciability that privilege a man’s narrative voice over a woman’s. Gilbert takes control of the narrative when he claims Helen’s journal and her story as his own narrative territory, and readers only gain access to Helen’s memories through Gilbert’s transcription of her journal. On the surface, then, Gilbert assumes the Derridean role of archon since he appears to possess the power to permit and restrict access to the archive. Stepping into this role as he begins his letter to Halford, Gilbert writes, “It is a soaking, rainy day, the family are absent on a visit, I am alone in my library, and have been looking over certain musty old letters and papers, and musing on past times” (41). In many ways, the “musty old letters and papers” in his library make this place sound similar to an actual

physical archive in the Derridean sense.⁹ The quotation also underscores the role of memory in this domiciled archive by connecting “past times” with the act of rifling through documents. Gilbert continues by explaining that it is these letters and papers that put him in the “proper frame of mind” for relating “an old world story” (41). The documents in the archive enable Gilbert in the recall of memory, the act of narration, and the production of discourse. From the very beginning, then, Gilbert reinforces his archontic authority and draws credibility to his narrative from a set of memory documents—an archive—at the center of his story.

Gilbert also asserts his authority as archon by asserting ownership over the domiciled documents of the archive, namely Helen’s journal. It is significant to note from the quotation above that Gilbert writes, “I am alone in *my* library” (italics mine) and not that he is alone in *the* library. The writing highlights Gilbert’s possession of the repository where he stores the documents, and thus the journal and “musty old letters and papers.” Possessing the archive would mean that Gilbert acts, in a very real sense, as the archive’s guardian—its archon. He allows or restricts access to the memories contained within the archive. The text further highlights Gilbert’s sense of ownership as it continues to build up to the narrative that he recreates for Halford. Gilbert writes, “Among the letters and papers I spoke of, there is a certain faded journal of mine” (41–42). While Gilbert could possibly be referring to a personal journal of his own, we may assume he refers to Helen’s journal since hers is the only journal readers learn about and since it is the primary document from which Gilbert transcribes. Gilbert thus claims ownership of a document of which he is not the author. Maggie Berg argues that Gilbert’s “assimilation of Helen’s diary, and his subsequent passing it on to his brother-in-law, is precisely the point of the novel” (23) and that the framed narrative represents the way Helen’s story (and

⁹ Derrida explains that “it is at [the archon’s] home, in that place which is their house (private house, family house, or employee’s house), that official documents are filed” (2).

therefore her subjectivity) is assimilated into Gilbert's. Gilbert asserts control over the journal's contents and acts as archon to the narrative within the journal. Carolyn Steedman points out that archives are "inextricably bound up with the authority of beginnings and starting points" (1). By laying claim to Helen's journal, as well as to the letters and papers that begin his story, Gilbert lays claim to the origin of the narrative, again asserting his authority as archon.

Gilbert further asserts archontic authority by directly interacting with and drawing from the physical documents so that they become essential to his story. For example, just before the narrative transitions to Helen's voice, Gilbert tells Halford: "I have it [Helen's journal] now before me" (130). To Halford, this quotation may present the façade of truthful or factual storytelling. By explaining that he has the journal in front of him, Gilbert implies that he copies directly from its contents, attempting to give the narrative an actual concrete structure and prove its veracity. Yet memory theorists suggest that this is impossible. Ricoeur explains that "the exercise of memory is its use; yet use includes the possibility of abuse" (57). In exercising memory to draft his letter to Halford, Gilbert moves closer to the line of abuse, and if not abuse then subjectivity, revision, or censorship. Speaking of memory's fallibility, Lowenthal says, "Historical forgeries are known to abound; could not the entire past be a contrivance? . . . Our capacity to understand the past is in many other ways deficient. The surviving residues of past thoughts and things represent a tiny fraction of previous generations' contemporary fabric" (191). In other words, our understanding of the past is reliant on an imperfect and subjective system that reconstructs memory. Under this assumption, Gilbert's efforts to prove the veracity of his story are moot.

However, revising Helen's journal and reframing her narrative does not necessarily weaken Gilbert's archontic authority or narrative voice. Instead, his ability to claim veracity

despite the possibility of abuse strengthens his archontic authority. By claiming that he draws from outside sources to build his story, Gilbert brings a supposed level of objectivity to his narrative. Gilbert writes and transcribes almost with complete impunity, and without access to the original documents, his reader (Halford) can never verify the objectivity Gilbert claims. Gilbert both asserts power over the documents and draws power from them. So despite the possibility of abuse, Gilbert uses the journal to build his archontic authority and draw credibility to his narrative. “The multileveled architecture of the social units that constitute archives,” explains Ricoeur, “calls for an analysis of the act of placing materials in such archives, their archiving, capable of being situated in a chain of verifying operations, whose provisory end is the establishing of documentary proof” (167–68). Gilbert’s outer frame situates his own narrative and Helen’s memory in a “chain of verifying operations” in an attempt at establishing “documentary proof” for the ostensible reader, Halford.

It is important to note that while Gilbert uses Helen’s journal to supplement his own memory, actual evidence within the text reveals that Gilbert does not transcribe the journal completely. Arguably the most problematic part of his segue into Helen’s journal is the admittance that he may have left a part of the journal out. He writes that he will present the “whole [story], save, perhaps, a few passages here and there” (130). While this line may be a ploy on Brontë’s part to maintain the novel’s pace by accounting for why Gilbert’s translation leaves out the sometimes mundane details that often end up in diaries, there is still an open admission of censorship that comes directly from the primary archontic figure. His editing may not be manipulative or nefarious (though some scholars might disagree¹⁰), yet it nevertheless

¹⁰ Berg draws from Derrida’s conception of carno-phallogocentrism to explore the sacrificial structure of the patriarchal society depicted in *Tenant* and the ways in which Helen’s

privileges some parts of the journal over others. In one sentence, Gilbert asserts complete accuracy and authenticity and then contradicts himself by admitting a kind of censorship. The quotation further underscores Gilbert's archontic authority by demonstrating his subjectivity. Gilbert does not merely present the contents of Helen's journal objectively as he claims earlier in the page when he assures Halford that he has the journal before him. Instead, Gilbert acts as a content editor. At the beginning of his letter he claims to give a "full and faithful account" (41) of the story, but he later admits that his transcription of Helen's journal will not include every entry or passage. Readers are left to wonder what is missing and what was sacrificed at the altar of "temporal interest" (130).

Knowing that Gilbert has been at least somewhat selective in the memories he chooses to include in his letter to Halford allows us to approach his transcription of Helen's journal with greater awareness of Gilbert's archontic power. Gilbert chose to exclude passages of Helen's journal because they "would serve to encumber the story rather than elucidate it" (130). This quotation implies that Gilbert is not merely a passive scribe; rather, he actively shapes the narrative. Instead of being the conduit through which the story comes back into being, Gilbert is the interpreter of the story. Lowenthal explains, "The need to use and reuse memorial knowledge and to forget as well as to recall, force us to select, distil, distort, and transform the past, accommodating things remembered to the needs of the present" (194). In transcribing Helen's journal, Gilbert distils her memories, making selective decisions about what elucidates his narrative and what encumbers it.

The process of reading and recording Helen's journal illustrates the archon's role in using the archive to shape collective memory. Gilbert's archontic power ensures the emergence and

narrative is gobbled up by Gilbert. Joshi similarly sees Gilbert's transcription of Helen's journal as violent (914). See also Jacobs and Senf.

maintenance of some ideologies and memories and the absence of others—the proliferation of one memory and the repression of another. Likewise, though Gilbert’s narrative pulls directly from Helen’s journal, the letter to Halford is an altered version of the original journal. We can be sure that there are parts of the journal that are not included in Gilbert’s letter—he admits as much before beginning the transcription. As readers, we rely on Gilbert for knowledge and, therefore, will never recover the missing memories from Helen’s journal. Thus, Gilbert exercises archontic control by preventing readers from accessing the parts of the journal deemed unimportant, uninteresting, or otherwise unworthy of inclusion. According to Steedman’s interpretation of the Derridean archive and archon, “An absence [in the archive] is not *nothing*, but is rather the space left by what has gone: . . . the emptiness indicates how once it was filled and animated” (11). Readers are aware of an absence in the narrative, and the gap left by that absence reinforces Gilbert’s archontic power.

By choosing what to include and exclude in his narrative, Gilbert reframes the archive and reframes the memories contained therein, accommodating them to meet his current objective as writer and archon. In Derridean archive theory, memory transmission has an objective, often to reinforce ideology or to control those within the archive’s influence. The archons share contents from the archive deliberately. Likewise, Gilbert shares information from the journal with the specific objective to repair his relationship with Halford. At the beginning of the novel, we learn that Halford shared “a very particular and interesting account of the most remarkable occurrences” of his life and then “requested a return of confidence” from Gilbert. When Gilbert declined because he was not in a “story-telling humour at the time,” he offended Halford (41). Gilbert writes the letter, which forms *Tenant’s* complicated narrative structure, as atonement. The novel thus springs from an attempt to repair a homosocial relationship.

As narrator, Gilbert is constantly aware of Halford (his reader) and Halford's interests, and his reassurances of accuracy and truthfulness seem to be little more than an attempt at establishing narrative credibility with his reader. After claiming authenticity and explaining to Halford that he has Helen's journal in front of him, Gilbert writes, "and though you could not of course, peruse it with half the interest that I did, I know you would not be satisfied with an abbreviation of its contents" (130). Instead of merely providing proof of his narrative, the quotation also displays a preoccupation Gilbert maintains with his brother-in-law's perception of the story. Though Brontë's readers understand that the entire novel is fictitious, Gilbert must make *his* ostensible readership believe the story is true in order to build his ethos and maintain archontic power and archival priority. If Halford does not buy Gilbert's story or his attempt to establish confidences, the relationship may not recover. Even Gilbert's decision to edit the story by excluding "a few passages here and there of merely temporal interest" (130) displays a certain hyperawareness of the reader. Believing he knows what is best for his reader (and for his own relationship with his reader), Gilbert steps into the role of archon, examining the archive, discriminating between its contents, and ultimately privileging some memories over others by allowing them to exist in his narrative. Gilbert's letter emphasizes this concept repeatedly, as demonstrated in an earlier quotation in which Gilbert promises, based on Halford's interest, to be a stickler for the facts: "I will not spare you: my own patience and leisure shall be my only limits" (41). Thus, the content and architecture of the narrative is directly tied to Gilbert's objective to influence his reader.

For Gilbert, using and maintaining his archontic power allows him to form a homosocial bond. Though his narrative describes at length his efforts to win over the mysterious tenant of Wildfell Hall, Gilbert's main objective in writing the letter is to repair his relationship with his

brother-in-law. This current objective affects how he remembers the past and how he conveys the past to Halford. For example, in describing what he remembers of Frederick Lawrence (the owner of Wildfell Hall and Helen's brother), Gilbert writes:

Our intimacy was rather a mutual predilection than a deep and solid friendship, such as has since arisen between myself and you, Halford, whom, in spite of your occasional crustiness, I can liken to nothing so well as an old coat, unimpeachable in texture, but easy and loose—that has conformed itself to the shape of the wearer, and which he may use as he pleases, without being bothered with the fear of spoiling it;—whereas Mr. Lawrence was like a new garment, all very neat and trim to look at, but so tight in the elbows that you would fear to split the seams by the unrestricted motion of your arms, and so smooth and fine in surface that you scruple to expose it to a single drop of rain. (64)

At this point in the novel, Gilbert is deep into his narrative; however, his present self (twenty years after the events he describes) interjects to reassure his reader of his affection so that Halford does not feel threatened by another male friend. Furthermore, the comparison Gilbert makes between Halford and an old coat applies equally to Gilbert: he is constantly aware of his relationship to the reader, so like an old coat he conforms himself “to the shape of the wearer.” While this interaction may appear to have little to do with Helen or the archiving process, it demonstrates Gilbert's relationship to the narrative. Lowenthal explains, “We interpret the ongoing present while living through it, whereas we stand outside the past and view its finished operation, including its now known consequences for whatever was then the future” (191). Gilbert's memories and his narrative, even the methods by which he transcribes and edits Helen's journal, are affected by an awareness for how his life will play out through to the

present. He shapes the memories of his past relationships to secure what he deems to be his damaged or threatened relationship with Halford.

Gilbert's archontic impulses are wrapped up in the homosocial relationship he hopes to secure with Halford. Commenting on Gilbert's narrative role, Tess O'Toole explains that "It strikes the reader as curious at best that Gilbert would transcribe for another man the contents of his wife's intimate diary, and disturbing at worst that Helen's hellish experience is used for a homosocial end" (720). Gilbert sees Helen's journal, this physical document that he claims for his own, as coin to repay a debt that will mend his relationship with Halford. Hoping his efforts in transcribing the journal are not wasted on Halford, Gilbert says, "If the coin suits you, tell me so, and I'll send you the rest at my leisure" (50). Thus, the power of narration and the power to control memory transmission, for Gilbert, is a power to control relationships, specifically masculine relationships. In Gilbert's hands, archontic power is used for strictly male-centric ends. Setting up his letter to Halford, Gilbert explains that he will share information leading up to "the most important event of my life [ostensibly, his marriage to Helen]—previous to my acquaintance with Jack Halford at least" (41). While the statement may be tongue in cheek, the premise and structure of the novel suggest that Gilbert would go to great lengths (countless hours and hundreds of pages rewriting Helen's journal) to secure and repair his relationship with Halford.

Helen as Archon

Gilbert's narrative establishes the novel's frame as operating according to a specific kind of narrative authority, that of the Derridean archon. Helen's narrative is less traditionally archontic in that her authority appears less domiciled than Gilbert's. However, Helen's narrative challenges the dominant narrative authority that Gilbert asserts while submitting to the discursive

forces to which her narrative is bound. And like Gilbert, Helen's archontic authority emanates from her physical interaction with her journal.

In Derridean terms, Helen's journal serves as both a point of commencement and commandment—it is the central archive, the crux around which everything in the novel circulates. According to Derrida, the archive indicates a type of beginning or origin: “the principle according to nature or history, *there* where things *commence*—physical, historical, or ontological” (1). Archivists return to archives in search of documentary, ideological, and institutional commencements. Helen's journal functions as an archive since it is the closest readers come to finding the novel's point of origin and accessing the “place where things begin” (Steedman 1–2). Helen's journal is a point of commencement in a very literal sense. It is the earliest document readers gain access to. While Gilbert begins his letters to Halford in 1847, Helen's journal begins in 1821; the earliest memories recorded in the book come from her journal. It is thus the commencement in a chronological sense.

Furthermore, the journal provides the answer to the central question around which the novel's outer and intervening frames¹¹ circulate: who is the tenant of Wildfell Hall? Gilbert's attempt to answer this question in his letter to Halford hinges on an archived version of Helen's past. Ricoeur discusses the act of archiving memory, explaining that it “is thus the mediation of an essentially retrospective science, of a thinking ‘backwards’” (170). The layered narrative within *Tenant* works through these layers of “backwardness,” through Gilbert's frames to arrive at the literal center of the novel—Helen's experience in and escape from an abusive marriage. Thus, Helen's journal as archive matches Derrida's definition for the term: the journal is the

¹¹ According to Birden, the outer frame consists of Gilbert's letter, directed to Halford in 1847. The intervening frame consists of Gilbert's experiences “from 1827 to 1829, ending in [his] marriage to Helen” (267).

arkhe, the origin of the narrative “in the *physical, historical, [and] ontological* sense, which is to say the originary, the first, the principal, the primitive, in short . . . the commencement” (Derrida 9).

Although Gilbert uses Helen’s journal for his own purposes (to repair his relationship with Halford), Helen’s narrative achieves a level of archival and archontic priority since both ends of Gilbert’s frame gesture forward to and back at her personal journal. Helen’s journal exists as the novel’s primary narrative body, and Gilbert spends more time transcribing Helen’s journal than framing it. In other words, he spends more time transmitting her voice than silencing it. Birden explains that Helen’s diary “forms the central block of the narrative” and that while “45% of the 174,224 words of the novel contribute to the creation of the outer frames [Gilbert’s narrative], . . . 55% [belong] to the inner Grassdale core” (267). This inner core is Helen’s journal, and though Gilbert later claims the journal as his own and even censors it at his own discretion, the primary narrative (the narrative that commands the most space in Gilbert’s letter to Halford) still ultimately belongs to Helen and her memories, which is significant because archives also function as points of commandment, not just commencement. They gain power not merely because they constitute a beginning but also because they hold jussive power, meaning they have a force of law. They command authority. Derrida explains that the archive is “also the principle according to the law, *there* where men and gods *command, there* where authority, social order are exercised” (Derrida 1).

The journal functions as a point of commandment for Helen’s archive because through the journal she influences Gilbert’s narrative abilities. Her jussive power derives from Gilbert’s narrative reliance on her journal and her ability to limit (at least partially) the information his narrative can include. Secondarily, and by extension, because Gilbert relies on Helen’s version of

events, she also commands Gilbert's ostensible reader in that she commands the knowledge Gilbert can share from her journal; Helen therefore maintains partial archontic authority over the journal. Helen's narrative pours through the cracks in Gilbert's story, filling in the spaces where his own memory alone is inadequate for repairing social order (i.e. his relationship to Halford). Thus, even within a homosocial narrative web, Helen's narrative exercises at least some jussive power over Gilbert's narrative. So though she is not a typical Derridean archon, she maintains a level of authority over her archive and hence exhibits archontic characteristics.

Various moments within the novel further reveal Helen's archontic authority. For example, much in the same way Gilbert censors the narrative, Helen also withholds information from her reader. When Helen decides to share the story of her past and the circumstances leading to her move to Wildfell Hall, it is not without an attempt to control what Gilbert learns and how he learns it. Gilbert describes the scene as follows: "She did not speak, but flew to her desk, and snatching thence what seemed a thick album or manuscript volume, hastily tore away a few leaves from the end, and thrust the rest into my hand" (130). Helen censors the content of her journal, and by withholding information from Gilbert, she maintains a level of ownership over the journal. On the one hand, Helen surrenders power to Gilbert by handing the journal over to him. Yet she retains power because she holds part of the archive hostage, rendering Gilbert's archive incomplete. Like Gilbert, then, Helen handles and interacts with an actual physical archive.

Helen also maintains archontic power in the very act of keeping a journal. Though Gilbert pins his name to the beginning and end of the novel, most of the narrative belongs primarily to Helen. Each of the chapters that form the inner narrative begins with a date in relation to Helen's experience—not in relation to Gilbert's experience reading or transcribing the

journal. Derrida explains, “The archontic principle of the archive is also a principle of consignation, that is, of gathering together” (3). Helen assembles the bulk of the narrative, gathering her experiences and consigning them to her journal. Ultimately, Gilbert’s knowledge about Helen’s experience and her origins before Wildfell Hall is still subject to her narrative and archival decisions: Gilbert learns and shares only what she allows him to read, based on what she chooses to include (or exclude) in her diary.

To a lesser degree, we also see Helen acting as archon by recovering her journal after her first husband, Arthur, takes it from her and reads it without her permission. Prior to fleeing to Wildfell Hall, Helen recounts a disturbing scene in which Arthur steals her journal, discovers her plans to leave him, and destroys or confiscates her possessions, thus barring any hope of financial independence. Arthur tells Helen, “It’s well you couldn’t keep your own secret—ha, ha! It’s well these women must be blabbing—if they haven’t a friend to talk to, they must whisper their secrets to the fishes, or write them on the sand or something” (312). By comparing Helen’s journal to writings in the sand, Arthur discredits and overlooks the power of the archive and of the archon who creates or protects it. Her journal is the opposite of writings in the sand—it is a material artifact that attempts to preserve her words from erasure, giving her the power to control how her memory (and even Arthur’s memory) is preserved.

Though Arthur reads Helen’s journal without her permission, and though he destroys Helen’s art supplies and confiscates her money and jewels, he does not destroy her journal. Helen writes, “Leaving him to his self-congratulations, I rose to secure my manuscript, for I now remembered it had been left upon the drawing-room table, and I determined, if possible, to save myself the humiliation of seeing it in his hands again” (312). Helen maintains possession of her journal, thus maintaining archontic authority. While she is clearly distressed by Arthur’s abuse,

Helen seems relieved that the only thing he discovered from her journal was her plan to desert him. Although Arthur has discovered one secret (that Helen plans to escape from Grassdale with their son), he appears to remain ignorant of Helen's other secrets, hence her relief at being able to recover the diary before he can amuse "himself over [her] secret thoughts and recollections" (312). Thus, by recovering her journal and hiding it from Arthur, Helen retains archontic power over the memories contained within the journal and can control the transmission of her memories at a later time.

Tenant and Foucault's Systems of Enunciability

Like Gilbert, Helen exercises a type of Derridean archontic authority over *Tenant's* central archive. However, further textual analysis reveals that unlike Gilbert's rather straightforward Derridean archontic authority, Helen's interaction with and guardianship of the archive is more restricted. One possible way of understanding this restriction as well as the complicated archival narrative negotiation taking place within *Tenant* is through Foucault's conception of "The Historical *a priori* and the Archive." In opposition to Derrida, whose conception of the archive revolves around domiciliation with a dominant governing body (archon), Foucault sees language or discourse as its own archive, bound by linguistic and enunciative forces. These are the discourses that grow out of and are bound to ancestral discourses. According to Foucault, "we have in the density of discursive practices, systems that establish statements as events . . . and things. . . . They are these systems of statements (whether events or things) that I propose to call *archive*" (128). In Foucault's conception of the archive, then, discourse is an archive unto itself. Foucault notes that in the act of discourse, writers often "intersect their unique discourses in a web of which they are not the masters, of which they cannot see the whole, and of whose breadth they have a very inadequate idea" (126). In much the

same way, *Tenant* is comprised of “unique discourses” that overlap and form a web through which simultaneous narratives and memories pass. The fluidity and porousness of discourse allows for competing and coexisting discourses within the larger systems of enunciability and functioning.

In *Tenant*, the narrative layers are beholden to systems of enunciability of which Helen seems to be at least partially aware. She writes from and within a discourse in which the legal, social, and religious systems privilege a male perspective over a female perspective. Helen demonstrates a type of Foucaultian awareness of these systems primarily in her discursive reticence. Unable to control the systems of enunciability that mitigate her narrative authority, the only way she can push back is by withholding from the system. We first see her withholding in how she responds to and attempts to manage the gossip in Linden-Car. Joshi explains, “Gossip has long been identified with women and danger, but, in Linden-Car and *Tenant*, it is neither exclusively feminine . . . nor particularly malignant. . . . Brontë’s lengthy transcriptions of such chat make evident that, while annoying to Helen, the village talk in fact builds social contact and community” (910). Within *Tenant*, gossip becomes an important means of dispensing information.

From a Foucaultian perspective, gossip is a subtle way of enforcing the preexisting systems of enunciability—gossipers deploy discourse that places people in relation to how they fit within these systems. Linden-Car is full of gossipers seeking to learn Helen’s secrets. Helen must therefore learn to limit that form of discourse in order to protect her secret and prevent Arthur, the husband she’s abandoned, from discovering her whereabouts. All of Linden-Car is, of course, curious about the new tenant of Wildfell Hall. Gilbert’s sister, Rose, reports that the tenant “is called Mrs. Graham, and she is in mourning—not widow’s weeds, but slightish

mourning” and that she is “*so reserved*” (44–45). Helen has changed her name (Huntingdon is her actual married name) and allows her neighbors to believe she is in “slightish mourning.” The clothes provide her neighbors with a narrative they recognize and can easily circulate—it is a discourse they are all too familiar with because it forms part of their discursive memory. Furthermore, Helen’s reservation renders all the “pertinacious and impertinent home thrusts” and “skillful maneuvering [*sic*]” of her new neighbors useless; despite meddling and crafty interrogations, they are unable to “throw the faintest ray of light upon her history, circumstances, or connections” (45). The villagers’ inability to discover anything useful, scandalous, or otherwise informative about Helen is indicative of how she works within the systems of enunciability. In the act of withholding, Helen attempts to control the discourse surrounding her by limiting her neighbors’ enunciative possibilities. According to Foucault, “The archive is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events” (129). In other words, the archive controls what can be said and, by extension, what can be thought. For Helen, secrecy becomes the method by which she can control what others can say or think about her.

Further evidence throughout the frame, after Gilbert directs the letter to Halford but before we learn of the diary, attests to Helen’s attempt to control what others know and learn about her origins. For example, when Fergus (Gilbert’s younger brother) meets Helen for the first time, he quickly sets out to learn all he can about her: “The questions you are requested to solve are these:—First, concerning your birth, extraction, and previous residence. Some will have it that you are a foreigner, and some an Englishwoman; some a native of the north country, and some of the south. . .” (81). Fergus’s interrogation reflects the general curiosity spreading throughout Lindenhope about Helen’s origins. She alone, however, controls that knowledge and

chooses to disclose very little. She tells Fergus, "I'm an Englishwoman . . . and I was born in the country neither in the extreme north nor south of our happy isle; and in the country I have chiefly passed my life, and now, I hope you are satisfied; for I am not disposed to answer any more questions at present" (81). Ultimately, Helen cannot control the gossip or the systems of enunciability reinforced by the gossip. However, she can withhold information, thereby preventing her personal narrative from entering the discursive systems until the moment of her choosing. If she remains silent, she limits the kind of gossip that can exist about who she is and how she came to live at Wildfell Hall. Helen views the truth as privileged information, so ignorant gossip, though undesirable, is preferable to the uncontrolled discourse about her actual circumstances that might lead Arthur to her.

When Helen eventually breaks her reticence she maintains power over her narrative's point of entrance into discourse. Her choice to share her journal is a strategic decision that, while Derridean on some levels (as discussed above), also reflects her awareness of the systems of enunciability to which her discourse is bound. Helen uses the journal to clear her name, and it allows Gilbert to understand her complicated circumstances. After finishing the journal, Gilbert writes, "I could readily forgive her prejudice against me, and her hard thoughts of our sex in general, when I saw to what brilliant specimens her experience had been limited" (334). Using the journal, Helen elicits sympathy from Gilbert, and it changes the way he thinks about her and how he discusses her with others in Lindenhope and in his letter to Halford. Gilbert also admits that "The effect of the whole [journal] . . . was to relieve my mind of an intolerable burden and fill my heart with joy as if some friend had roused me from a dreadful nightmare" (334). The journal performs the function Helen hoped it would: it changes and controls, at least somewhat, the discourse and memories surrounding her past that Gilbert thereafter disseminates.

The ability to speak for herself and retain narrative control is important to Helen. As an illustrative moment from the book, Helen tells Gilbert that instead of believing lies about her past, he should have come to her first. “You should have come to me, after all,” says Helen, “. . . and heard what I had to say in my own justification” (129). Though Helen desires Gilbert’s good opinion, she is more concerned with the discourse surrounding her, and she desires to speak for herself. Helen uses archives (physical, memorial, and enunciative) as an attempt to control the kinds of discourse that *can* exist about her. By influencing the narrative, Helen can partially control knowledge about her past and the memories that exist about her. If she cannot completely control what people say about her, if she cannot prevent gossip, then she can at least control what people *cannot* say about her. By removing the pages from her journal and refusing to elucidate on her past, Helen uses the inertia of discourse to her benefit by working within the constraints of the enunciative systems. Her reticence harnesses the enunciative impossibilities that affect what can and cannot be said about her.

Even Helen’s decision to withhold pages of her journal from Gilbert is an act of pushing back against the systems of enunciability. Gilbert notes that Helen does not simply hand over her journal—she “tore away a few leaves from the end” (130) before allowing Gilbert to read it. Withholding information is a method of influencing memory, and it is also a method by which Helen influences discursive systems. Gilbert cannot share that part of her journal because Helen did not grant him access to that memory, and he therefore cannot adopt it into his own narrative. Foucault explains that “if there are things said—and those only—one should seek the immediate reason for them . . . in the system of discursivity, in the enunciative possibilities and impossibilities that it lays down” (129). The act of withholding creates enunciative impossibilities to which Gilbert’s narrative power is beholden. And Gilbert never explains

whether or not he reclaims these lost pages. When the inner core of the novel, Helen's journal, comes to a close, it does so abruptly. The abruptness marks the point at which Helen tore the pages from the journal. Gilbert writes, "Here it [the journal] ended. The rest was torn away." He admits, "I would have given much to have seen it all . . . but no, I had no right to see it: all this was too sacred for any eyes but her own, and she had done well to keep it from me" (334). In this passage, Gilbert expresses his frustration that he never gets to recover the information from the missing pages while acknowledging that Helen's archive is sacred and hence not meant for his eyes.

By ceding control, Gilbert demonstrates the narrative and archival negotiation at work in the novel. Following Foucault's views of the archive, Gilbert's sense of propriety that acknowledges Helen's claim to her journal comes from the systems of enunciability in which he must abide standards of decorum and privacy: systemic discourse trumps Gilbert's desires to see and read what belongs to Helen. From an alternate view of the archive, by recognizing her journal as "sacred," Gilbert displays a Derridean reverence for Helen's archontic authority and her claim to the archive. Gilbert therefore cedes archival priority (at least partially) to Helen. Helen's narrative is similarly bound by systems of discourse, especially where gender politics are concerned. Understanding or intuiting the gendered discursive forces of courtship and propriety, she chooses to work with the systems by turning her journal over to Gilbert. (Interestingly, Foucault's view of the archive is also implicated in *Tenant's* actual publication since Brontë published the novel under a male pseudonym, thus taking advantage of the discursive systems that privileged a man's narrative over a woman's.) Alternately, from a Derridean perspective, while Helen does maintain a level of archontic control, she must work within a system that privileges the male voice over the female voice. Therefore, to maintain a level of archontic

authority and to ensure her archive's protection, she must do the one thing a Derridean archon would typically avoid: surrender a portion of the archive.

Conclusion: Anarchy and the Frame Narrative

In *Tenant's* narrative structure, the borders between Helen's narrative and Gilbert's narrative are fluid. The organization of Bronte's novel layers narratives in a complex structure that moves through multiple perspectives into the past and back out to the present. In the end, Helen's and Gilbert's narratives converge in a porous structure that is both challenged and supported by the memory archiving taking place in different times, from within different spaces, and by different narrators. Derrida's theory of archiving as an act of institutionalization helps us understand the implications of these converging and sometimes competing narrative discourses. In archival studies, this theory of institutionalization "supposes a bundle of limits" (5) carrying the force of law that is consigned and imposed by the archons. When the "limits, the borders, and the distinctions" of the archive have been shaken, "[o]rder is no longer assured" (5). In *Tenant*, the layered structure never fully congeals into a single governing narrative, and this lack of order implies anarchy—a breaking up, redistribution, or overthrowing of narratorial governance. The porousness or fluidity of the novel's framed structure is a type of narrative anarchy that deflects memories through a system of interweaving narratives and discourses. These systems at once challenge each other while simultaneously supporting each other in an anarchic narrative web.

I do not select the word "anarchy" randomly; the term is bound up in archival studies. According to Derrida, anarchy is, at its linguistic roots, anti-archive, "anarchic, one could say, or archiviolithic" (10). If something is anti-archive, it is necessarily anti-archon and will "always have been archive-destroying" (10). Any thought, any action, any perspective that threatens to deconstruct the archive would be seen as anti-archive, or anarchic, in that it breaks from

established rules that govern social institutions. Moreover, because anarchy simultaneously challenges the archives that uphold society and the archons that uphold the archives, often the biggest backlash against subversion is from the archons whose power is vulnerable if or when the archive is deconstructed. Yet in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, we do not see one dominating narrative and one subverting narrative. Instead, both Gilbert's and Helen's narratives dominate and subvert—both are archive-creating and archive-destroying.

Though Gilbert's and Helen's narratives compete for archival priority and undermine the other's at various moments throughout the novel, neither narrative can exist without the other. There is a symbiotic relationship that exists on the level of discourse and on the level of the archive. As the novel comes to a close, Gilbert tells Halford, "But it is time to bring my narrative to a close—any one but you would say I had made it too long already" (406). Gilbert claims possession of the narrative at both the beginning and end of the novel, and yet the statement that others "would say [he] had made it too long already" paradoxically points back to the middle section in which Helen's diary forms the bulk of the narrative. Additionally, Helen's voice does not interject during Gilbert's narrative, and Gilbert's voice does not interject while he is transcribing Helen's journal. Each narrative remains separate. However, neither narrative can exist without the other: Gilbert gives voice to Helen's struggles in an abusive marriage, and Helen provides the memory document (i.e. the journal) upon which Gilbert's narrative relies.

Furthermore, by withholding information or by censoring information, Helen and Gilbert each hold part of the actual physical archive (the journal) hostage, thus preventing the other from possessing the entire archive. Because of the Foucaultian systems of enunciability to which both of their narratives are bound, both Helen and Gilbert end up ceding archontic authority and surrendering parts of their archives at different key points within the novel. Neither Helen nor

Gilbert has a completely domiciled archive. So while they are both archons in the sense that they oversee and protect the archive, they are also both failed archons because their archives are incomplete. They must rely on the archontic authority of another for access to the whole archive.

The narrative structure within *Tenant* thus displays a kind of interactivity of discourses and provides a space in which narratives can exist in relation to each other but still maintain a separateness that allows for distinct anarchic but codependent archives. This codependent relationship also has interesting conjugal implications, especially in relation to Helen and Gilbert. Their first intimacy is not so much physiological as it is archival. The negotiation of archontic authority begins before they are married—each surrenders parts of their physical archive to the other, yet each narrative remains distinct or separate. Perhaps the framed narrative structure also reflects the type of discursive and archontic negotiation present in Helen and Gilbert's marriage.

Tenant thus experiments with narratorial archontic supremacy by presenting layered narratives that buttress one another while simultaneously challenging one another, and the frame narrative represents the layered gender power negotiations at work in the novel. Brontë provides a problematic anarchic narrative that simultaneously gives its own semblance of power and order without assigning complete narrative power to one person or to one gender. Critics often condemn Gilbert for subsuming Helen's narrative, or they excuse his narrative control by attempting to verify his credibility as a narrator. In either case, critics usually see Gilbert as maintaining narrative control. Yet recent studies in memory illustrate that the frame narrative is far more fluid than critics generally recognize—it is, in fact, anarchic since it never fully settles on one voice, one memory, or one archon. And when Derridean archons go head to head,

perhaps it is at the level of discourse. In a narrative, there can exist polar opposites that are both essential to that discourse. It allows for both archive creation and archive subversion.

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