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THE WOMAN WRITER AND THE SPOKEN WORD:
GENDER, PRINT, ORALITY, AND SELECTED
TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY AMERICAN WOMEN'S
LITERATURE

By

Trinna S. Frever

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ABSTRACT

THE WOMAN WRITER AND THE SPOKEN WORD: GENDER, PRINT, ORALITY, AND SELECTED TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY AMERICAN WOMEN'S LITERATURE

By

Trinna S. Frever

"Separate spheres" has become an all-encompassing paradigm for discussing gender relations in the nineteenth century. Yet increasing evidence indicates that women were overwhelmingly present in the print marketplace of the late-nineteenth century, and such evidence requires a reconsideration of the "separate spheres" model as applied to this period. Using the premise that print was ideologically, though not physically, a male realm in the nineteenth century, this study explores a particular narrative technique which women authors in the 1880-1920 period employed to undermine the perception of print as a male realm.

The fictional texts addressed are categorized as "oral-print" texts. Their technique consists of incorporating the narrative qualities of oral discourse into the printed work. In so doing, Constance Fenimore Woolson, Sarah Orne Jewett, Kate Chopin, and Willa Cather employ a narrative form that resists strict categorization as either print or oral and thus resists the gender ideologies associated with these forms of discourse.

Orality takes varied forms for each of the authors discussed. In the works of Constance Fenimore Woolson,



orality translates into verbal power, employed by female characters through their perpetually-shifting speech as a form of social rebellion. For Sarah Orne Jewett, orality focuses on the storytelling process and its ability to reshape the prescriptiveness of print through the use of local oral language, oral storytelling structure, and the distinct speech idioms of its characters. Willa Cather's *My Ántonia* demonstrates the text's ability to transcend its printed form by casting its orality as one manifestation of a larger oral process. Finally, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* pioneers a sound-based language whose asignifying noises serve to disrupt the linearity of the print discourse. A synthesized theoretical approach is applied to the texts, utilizing a combination of poststructural language theory, linguistic analysis, discourse analytics, folklore studies, and French feminist language theory to describe each text's particular engagement with the oral process.

The oral-print narrative form serves as a reconstruction of printed-narrative aesthetics along oral discursive lines. Rather than being limited to simple dialogue, the oral strategies employed in these works constitute a reformation of the structure, style, thematic focus, and ideology of the print form to a gender end. The oral-print narrative form provides a mode of gender resistance and expression for certain women authors by questioning the ideology of print as a male realm and reshaping the parameters of print discourse accordingly.

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INTRODUCTION

Until recently, the historical narrative of women's writing in nineteenth-century America has been the story of a party. Publishing was the party; women weren't invited. The actual instance of women's exclusion from the *Atlantic Monthly* party for Whittier seemed the perfect metaphor for a discussion of women's exclusion from the print marketplace. The publishers of the *Atlantic Monthly* threw a party to celebrate author John Greenleaf Whittier's birthday as well as the magazine's anniversary, and though the event was much-celebrated and included a large number of *Atlantic Monthly* contributors, none of the women contributors to the magazine were invited. The women protested their exclusion by a humorous letter of response, but their response could not reverse the fact of their absence, through deliberate exclusion, from the party.¹ Actual instances of discrimination like this one seemingly reinforce theories that suggest women were prohibited from participation in the nineteenth-century print marketplace.² Yet it should be noted that there were women contributors, a large number, to exclude in the first place. Against the theory of women's writing which focuses on exclusion, we have an abundance of published works by nineteenth-century women, works which were commercially successful and which often received critical acclaim as well. Clearly, before Hawthorne could deride a "mob of scribbling women" there had to be a *mob* of women writers for him to deride. How, then, to

reconcile the twentieth-century belief that "separate spheres" excluded women from public participation in the nineteenth century with physical evidence that suggests otherwise? One approach has been to view the women who wrote successfully as anomalies, oddities whose very oddity permitted them to transgress cultural bounds.³ Gray also notes this tendency: "Women writers who break new ground, who enact their own truths in their own words, are made safe through critical devaluation, denial, neglect, or reformulation according to gender codes" (18). This "devaluation" and "reformulation" continues in contemporary criticism, both feminist and not, by viewing writers who transgress "female" and "male" writing styles, or who incorporate both in order to dismantle these categorizations, as confused about their own gender identification. In a related maneuver, current criticism also tends toward psychoanalyzing female authors as individuals who were ambivalent in their allegiance to either women's domestic world or to the male world of publishing, and then reading their works through this lens.⁴ A third, and somewhat more useful paradigm, has been to discuss the distinction between "writers" and "artists" arising in the mid-nineteenth century. Though I find this distinction and the discussion surrounding it interesting, it presents the same dangers as the previous approaches, by aligning the women authors who saw themselves as "artists" against the women authors who saw themselves as "writers." Such an identification preserves

the notion of "separate spheres" with some writers in the women's sphere and others marked as male-identified transgressors.⁵ Each of these paradigms relies on the notion of gendered "separate spheres," not just as an ideological construct, but as an actual barrier--psychological or literal--to women's participation in the print marketplace. Why do these interpretive sentiments persist, given the abundant participation of women in the print marketplace throughout the nineteenth century? One answer may lie in a quotation from *Woman's Fiction*, Nina Baym's groundbreaking work on women writing in the first half of the nineteenth century. In the introduction to the second edition of *Woman's Fiction*, Baym addresses this discrepancy between the belief that women were denied access to the print marketplace, and the apparent abundance of women working within that very marketplace:

Women wrote many historical novels, especially during the 1820s; they experimented with orientalist fantasy and sensational melodrama. They also published religious tracts; children's books, local-color stories, village chronicles, and character sketches; plays; lyric, dramatic, and narrative poetry; translations and reviews; biographies, family memoirs, histories, and travel books; text-books in subjects from classical history to botany; cookbooks and other works on domestic economy; advice books for girls, boys,

young women, brides, and mothers; occasional essays, editorials, and manifestoes. They kept family journals and wrote family letters, edited newspapers and magazines, organized literary salons and won literary prizes. Such plenitude requires the abandonment, once and for all, of the long-held (and oddly comforting) belief that the dominant antebellum culture frowned upon literary women. (x)

The very abundance and variety of American women's writing refutes the notion of gendered "separate spheres" which has previously provided the context for understanding these writers' work. But within Baym's firm assertion of women's author-ity, I am intrigued by her parenthetical aside: "the long held (and oddly comforting) belief that the dominant antebellum culture frowned upon literary women" (x). Why has this belief in women's exclusion been "comforting," and hence so prevalent in interpretative approaches to the nineteenth century? Perhaps because the abundance of women's writing points to a critical failure of twentieth-century literary study. If we have not been studying women, it is not because they weren't writing. It is because we, as scholars, have failed to find their writings and analyze them effectively. To face this prospect entails addressing the possibility that contemporary women are in fact more constrained by prohibitions against women's thought than nineteenth-century women were. This is not a comforting realization for a society which prides itself on progress. But aside from

noting our own discomfort in acknowledging our critical shortcomings, Baym's statement highlights the tension between the ideologies that prevail in a society and the actual interactions of people within that society. Baym's statement suggests another possibility than the one she presents. It could be that nineteenth-century culture *did* frown on women authors, but that it didn't matter. Women wrote anyway.

What I am attempting to emphasize here is a discrepancy between ideology and practice in the nineteenth century. There is ample evidence to suggest that "separate spheres" remains a useful model for understanding the ideologies at work in nineteenth-century culture. But the prevalence of "separate spheres" ideology does not create a one-to-one correspondence with lived life. That is, just because people were not supposed to do something doesn't mean they didn't do it. In this project, I am interested in further exploring the ways in which women functioning in a society that purported to believe in "separate spheres" nonetheless resisted, defied, or ignored that ideological construct, using varied methods for their resistance. This analysis requires the letting go of many "oddly comforting" premises through which we read nineteenth-century American literature. Foremost among these is the notion of cultural progress. For while women in the late nineteenth century no doubt functioned within highly restrictive ideological bounds, their techniques for maneuvering, transgressing, and outright defying those bounds may be more complex, varied, and

numerous than we have heretofore imagined, or been willing to acknowledge. Furthermore, while the late twentieth century prides itself on being the creator of self-conscious literary form, that which we name as "experimental," "Modernist," and "postmodernist" finds its clear correlative within this set of writings at the turn of the previous century. A mode of analysis is required that questions the premise that the late twentieth century holds a privileged position in terms of gender and literary progress, and that looks at the late nineteenth century with eyes less influenced by our construction of "separate spheres" ideology as an interpretive mode.

I do not wish to suggest that previous theoretical readings of the nineteenth century are either misguided or useless. Feminist theorists from the nineteen sixties, seventies, and eighties have pioneered the efforts to bring nineteenth-century American women's literature back into print and laid the groundwork for rendering women's literature an acceptable field for serious literary scholarship. Indeed, my own analysis would be impossible without these works and is influenced by them in turn. And previous feminist analyses, while I may not wholly agree with them, at least acknowledge that women were in fact writing in the nineteenth century, a fact which would remain largely hidden if one read a number of "major" commentaries on American fiction written by male theorists.⁶ Yet, theorists who exclude women from their constructs and those who rely on limited views of women's

access to print both fail to capture the majority status of women writers in nineteenth-century America. As we approach another turn of the century, it seems time to reconsider the usefulness of the "separate spheres" model for understanding the nineteenth century, and to move toward a model which dwells less on the supposed exclusion of women, and more upon the varied strategies which nineteenth-century women employed for keeping an exclusionary ideology from becoming an all-encompassing exclusionary reality. Analyses of this sort are beginning to appear in the current criticism. Susan Coultrap-McQuin writes that "...the literary marketplace was not particularly alienating to women who could successfully integrate their female values and behaviors in the pursuit of their literary careers" and notes that while "all women writers were confronted by similar cultural messages about woman's sphere, they did not all respond to those messages in the same way; each writer's temperament, ideals, and life circumstances shaped her response to the cultural prescriptions of her time" (xiii). Likewise Susan Albertine, in her Introduction to the anthology *A Living of Words*, notes that "while men unquestionably hold the vast majority of positions of power and authority in the communications circuit through the early twentieth century, women have been more widely present and active than commonly thought, their positions more various and more fluid" (xvi). I wish to number this analysis among those which aim to enumerate the strategies which nineteenth-century women employed, as

individuals and collectively, to evade the ideology which suggested that print was a male realm, even amidst the overwhelming success of women's writing. Further, I wish to explore the ways in which the works of these authors themselves strive to undermine the strict gender ideologies which may have been unwittingly replicated in current literary theory that utilizes "separate spheres" as the dominant paradigm for understanding the gender marketplace of the late nineteenth-century.

In order to accomplish this task, I use a variety of intersecting critical approaches to analyze the works of Constance Woolson, Sarah Orne Jewett, Willa Cather, and Kate Chopin. I select these four authors in particular because, while their approaches are individual and disparate, I see their overarching literary technique of fusing oral and print discourses within their work as a shared approach, and one which serves a similar function for all of these writers. I do not see their work as either encompassing or representative of all American women writing in this period. Rather, I see it as developing in detail one particular mode of resistance which throws light on the varied possibilities for women's access, and success, in the nineteenth-century print marketplace. The main theoretical frames that I employ for this analysis are a historical reading of gender and the print marketplace at the turn of the century and the affiliated discussion of public and private spheres in this period; a close reading of language use within the fiction of

these authors, particularly their use of oral tradition narrative strategies within their print works; and a related discussion of narrative structure and how it is shaped by the aforementioned concerns.

To understand how "separate spheres" ideology functioned in the nineteenth century, one must first understand the notion of "spheres" of influence itself. Habermas posited the idea of a "public sphere" of activity which was distinct from both the exercise of public power by the ruling class and the "intimate" sphere of home life and private business. This public sphere was, in Habermas' definition, an ideological realm whereby the middle class carved out a public space in which to speak their resistance to the ruling class. By Habermas' definition, the women authors treated in this study were public in numerous senses of the word. They had influence over public opinion. They were recognized as public figures. As women earning a living, they were participants in a public sphere of paid labor, even if that labor itself took place in a private setting, as it did for both male and female authors. And, as published authors, they had access to the public sphere of social and political thought. These women were also public in the most basic Habermasian sense, because they carved an ideological and political space for themselves through which they critiqued-- in a variety of ways, of which this study pursues only one-- the ideology which attempted to deny/undermine their influence in this very public realm.⁷ Given these women's

clearly established stance in the public world, one might well ask how the ideology of their exclusion could even exist, let alone have influence on how these authors' works have been interpreted even to the present day.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, as industrialism was booming, print was becoming increasingly professionalized. There was a greater emphasis on the business interactions of print, and marketing of books and authors took on heightened importance in this era (Brodhead; Kelley). What this meant for the woman author was that there was a greater emphasis on the professional, and thus public, life of the author. Accompanying this change was an increasing emphasis on print as a male mode of discourse belonging to the professional world and public sphere. Not coincidentally, it is also in this era that a hierarchy of books arises. Under this hierarchy, authors whose books have previously gained a large audience are now marketed largely as "popular," in inexpensive editions aimed at moderate income households. By contrast, authors whose works have not sold well are redeemed within this system by being marketed as "literary," in expensive editions aimed at scholars and upper income readers.⁸ This distinction between "popular" and "literary" was not, nor is it today, gender neutral. Rather, since women's fiction was outselling male-authored fiction throughout the nineteenth century, women authors suddenly found themselves relegated to the realm of "popular" fiction,

denigrated by scholars, critics, and the "literary" authors they continuously outsold.⁹

The distinction between "popular" and "literary" fictions intersects with the ideology of "separate spheres." The professionalization of print discourse feeds into the ideology that print, as a public, professional endeavor, is more properly the province of men than of women. Likewise, the popular/literary dichotomy creates the illusion that men are the actual authors, the producers of literature, while women simply write books. Together these two effects of the change in book publishing created the perception that print was the province of men, and that women who chose to write were aberrations. Not that these sentiments were themselves new; but the gendering of print discourse now had an institutional backing for its discriminatory ideology in the American publishing world. This, coupled with the exclusion of women from American universities until the late 1800s, marked off print as an ideologically male realm even as women wrote continuously for publication throughout the century. The increasing professionalization of print culture in the second half of the nineteenth century raised many of the same dilemmas for women writers that the rise of industrialism raised for women workers. It meant an increasing emphasis on writing as a public, wage-earning activity, and thus drew on the ideology that it was a male province by virtue of its publicness. Yet, like industrialism, the increasing level of hostility toward women's participation in print accompanied

an increasing participation by women in the public print world.¹⁰ So even amidst this increasing participation there was an increasing need to justify one's presence in a presumed male realm, a realm claimed as male by its very public-ness. Thus, there is in this period a rift between the ideologies of "separate spheres" and the realities of women's participation in the public sphere.

But the prevalence of the sentiment that women were not fit to write did not mean that women authors eschewed their pens and picked up their brooms. There was a "mob" of women writing in this period. In this context, Hawthorne's statement becomes less persuasive as evidence that women were excluded from the public sphere of print, and instead provides evidence of their presence in that very sphere. Hawthorne's denigration is more likely a type of "backlash," in Faludi's terminology, against the many women who refused to observe this particular version of "separate spheres" ideology than an example of this ideology's pervasiveness.

One might wonder, then, if print is now seen as a male mode of language, how women communicating within that medium assumed authority in their writing. One way in which one particular set of women achieved such authority was by transforming the premise that print was a male realm through their use of language and narrative structure. These women utilized various structures and techniques of oral discourse within the printed text in order to transform print discourse and its premises. By incorporating notions of time,

narrative voice, audience, narrative structure, and, most importantly, the sensory experience of sound, which are aligned with the oral speaking act but normally removed from the writing act, these authors were able to realign their print works with an oral mode of communication. This act, in turn, wrested print from its associations with linear plot, linear time, a single protagonist, a single story, isolation from audience, and the exclusivity of visual sensory input, and further, from its association with men and the prescriptive social control they can represent, and which the print establishment had claimed as its own.¹¹

By "orality" I refer to various types of spoken communication. This could include gossip, storytelling, or more formal oral tradition, as well as other manifestations of the spoken voice, like singing or noisemaking. I also use "orality" here to describe any moment in language--printed or spoken--which draws on the spoken *qualities* of language, such as the sound-based techniques of onomatopoeia. But across these different manifestations of orality, an emphasis on spoken-ness, and thus sound, is shared by these types of communication. Such sound-emphasis is prevalent in oral texts in a manner not readily evident in written literature. Speaking of orality in this manner, my analysis deals only with the realm of "secondary orality" as defined by Walter Ong in his *Orality and Literacy*. That is, the oral qualities described here are qualities of orality which emerge from within a culture already influenced by print. Though these

techniques may share some qualities with the oral techniques of "primary" oral cultures, oral cultures un-influenced by print, Ong indicates that the thought structures of print culture are never fully removed from works produced in a "secondary orality" culture. Thus, this analysis cannot speak to the functionings of orality in non-print cultures, and does not attempt to do so. Instead, it looks particularly to American literate culture and the functions of a mixture of print and secondary orality within this context. However, it may be worth noting that even within the described context, orality is often associated with groups of less power, while print is associated with groups of greater power, as is true in most western cultures.¹² Orality in western culture is often linked to femaleness, and as such becomes a distinctly appropriate tool for women authors seeking to transform the printed project along more gender equitable lines. So spoken mediums, particular types of orality, have been taken, in western cultures, as the realm of women.

As with the gendering of print as male, the gendering of orality as a female realm is an ideologically based perception. Whether or not women have actually dominated the production of oral discourses would be a question difficult to resolve. The women authors in this study, however, do not simply accept the idea of female orality as a given. If they did, we likely would not be reading their written works. But just as women writers employ various strategies to negotiate

the perception of print as a male realm, so women writers have also responded to this gendering of the oral as female within their work. In the particular set of works that I examine here, different aspects of orality are employed. I argue that this incorporation of oral qualities into written texts alters the basic premises of written textuality, aligning it more fully with the qualities of oral performance. In so doing, these women writers transform the written work using the spoken word. In turn, this transformation of writing carries with it a new set of circumstances--new structures, new premises, new techniques, new criteria for evaluation--all based upon its alliance with the oral form. By fusing oral and print discourses in this manner, the women writers treated here create a distinct form, an oral-print, that blurs the boundaries between two linguistic mediums. As a consequence, their texts both draw upon and implicitly question the gendering of discourse along print=male, oral=female lines. These ideological constructs are described within the texts, but treated as malleable and subject to the same transformation as the printed text itself. The act of creating an oral-print narrative thus becomes a distinctly gendered one. By creating a medium which draws on the premises of orality, but conveys itself in print, and so encompasses both of these discourses while being wholly neither of them, the works of Woolson, Jewett, Cather, and Chopin undercut the gendered perceptions associated with both print and oral discourses. That which

is both and neither oral and print is also both female and male, while being wholly neither. Thus this set of women writers uses their status as women, and the perceived links to orality coupled with that status, as well as their status as writers, and the supposed masculinizing force of that act, to confound the gendered ideologies surrounding the writing act.

In order to fully understand this negotiation of language in the woman-authored text, it may be useful first to address the differences and similarities between oral and print discourses, and the different manifestations of these discourses in the specific texts explored here. Writing, and the subsequent publication of that writing which thus becomes print, has two properties which make it distinct from spoken language.¹³ First, it is primarily linear. Words are arranged in lines on textual pages. The eye proceeds down this linear path in order to comprehend the written word. But in addition to this literal linearity, the fictional print medium has often been associated with linear progression in plot and character development. As Ong writes: "...oral culture has no experience of a lengthy, epic-size or novel-size climactic linear plot" (143). This issue of text length as a function of plot is also an issue in texts like *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and *The Awakening*, which may be dismissed as novellas or vignettes rather than novels, though as Ong indicates their length and structure may be linked to the oral project. In addition to

the linearity of reading itself, the affiliated issue of plot is also significant when one considers the techniques used to analyze, and thus to praise or critique, written fiction. The Freytag model of plot analysis asserts that fictional plots move in a linear fashion, from exposition through development to climax through denouement to resolution (Ong, 142). This plot progression is even graphically represented as a line: ^-. This model, though linked to the dramatic arts (Ong, 142), has become the dominant model for the discussion of plot in western literature. As a result, a host of late-twentieth-century adolescents have borne the experience of reading a novel and charting out its plot according to Freytag's model, assigning different narrative moments to the exposition, climax, and resolution. The prevalence of this linear understanding of print narrative has influenced critics as well, who may read any narrative which departs from this form as illogical, chaotic, or confused. The privileging of print linearity has important gender and cultural implications. It suggests that linearity of narrative, and of thought, becomes the preferred mode of understanding in western cultures, placing cultures and genders which may not embrace the linear model at a distinct disadvantage. But regardless of the prejudicial implications of such print imperialism, linearity still prevails as a basic premise of the print medium.

A second quality of print which makes it distinct from spoken language is its relationship with its audience. This

relationship has at least two significant dimensions: its sensory implications and its use of time (Ong; Nanton). Print is processed visually. Its ability to communicate lies in the visual relation between words as they appear on a page. Though its stimulus may be more imaginative than visual, by contrast to filmic media, its basic mode of comprehension nonetheless lies with the visual sense. As such, the relationship between printed matter and its audience is not reliant on a particular time frame. A reader can "interact" with the text at any moment, and for any duration, that he/she chooses, and any interaction with the text's author is mediated by the printed text (Ong; Nanton).

Oral media, on the other hand, observe very different principles of construction. The voice does not observe the same linear constrictions as the printed word. It exists in space, moving in sound waves in the air. Further, its appeal is largely auditory, rather than visual. While the printed word relies primarily on the imagination for stimulus, the oral text relies on both the imagination and the sensual pleasure of sound. These auditory structures have significant temporal implications. Oral media may, on one level, appear to be more temporary than written literatures. Though sound does not "die" after its initiation, it is no longer comprehensible after its initiation. That is, I cannot go back to a place where I heard a conversation two days previously and hear the same conversation reverberating in the air. This transitory quality of the oral medium gives

rise to a set of expectations for orality which are distinct from those associated with the print medium. Among these are the use of sound/inflection, interaction with an audience, and the passing on of the tale from teller to listener to teller--all qualities associated with the oral performance.¹⁴ The performance act, unlike the reading act, relies on the sound of the text as well as its words. Particular sounds may be used to evoke emotion or a sense of location. Moreover, the inflections used when conveying an oral work may create a different text than that visible when reading. Irony, humor, and questioning/critique can all be conveyed in a seemingly forthright text through the voice, thus imposing an oral subtext or over-text on the word-text.¹⁵ Thus, the oral text is reliant upon the interaction between teller and audience. Indeed, this interaction may supersede the text itself. If interaction between teller and listener is the foregrounded goal of the textual act, then this dialectic exchange occurs in a space quite different from that of the written text, which affords no unmediated contact between the author and reader.

Given their differences, oral and print media carry different value systems. In the traditional, western, printed text, values might include coherence, linear progression of the story, a single protagonist with whom a reader can identify, etc. In the oral medium, values might include the use of inflection/sound, the extent of audience involvement, etc. Because oral and print media utilize

different structures, interactions between text and audience, uses of time, and sensory processes, they carry with them different standards of value (Brown; Nanton; Ong). To judge a written text by the standards of an oral text would render it largely incomprehensible. Likewise, to judge an oral text by the standards of a written text would be an equally inappropriate act. Because these different media are ideologically gendered in the late nineteenth century, the act of incorporating print and oral discourses is itself a gendered act. By fusing two media which carry two different standards of textual excellence, women authors confound the standards by which their own texts are judged. This act forces the reader to question the processes by which value is assigned to texts, and, at best, to recognize the structures which privilege--sexually or culturally--one type of text over another.

It is in this latter sense of differing structure and ideology that my definition of the oral-print text lies. Certainly, orality within texts could be viewed on a continuum, with some texts showing a greater engagement with oral processes than others. Even texts which include dialogue, as most fictional texts do, could be seen as demonstrating some aspects of orality. However, while most texts use dialogue, a far lesser number use the structural, aural, temporal, and ideological aspects of orality as the structuring principles of their narratives. Even fewer consciously draw out the distinctions between oral and print

discourses within their works while simultaneously calling these distinctions into question, thus making their texts dialectic, or Bakhtinian dialogic, sites for the interplay of discourses. It is the texts that use orality as an ideological and structural principle that are addressed in my treatment of orality. I treat these oral-print texts as distinct from other printed texts, even those which may show some engagement with orality, because their overriding narrative principles and aesthetics reflect their self-conscious use of the oral form.

There are several forms of orality which recur in narratives that embody the oral-print principle. One way authors utilize orality is to incorporate actual tales from an oral tradition, or simply stories that have been told to them orally, into their written work. In this respect, authors are using the content of the oral medium as content within the written fiction, creating an intersection between the oral tradition and the print tradition. Just as tales within oral traditions may be told and retold, being reshaped by each teller, the written work then becomes part of this chain of tellers, as it reshapes the oral tale into print form for a reading audience. Such texts resist the categorization of print as somehow superior to orality by making the print expression part of the oral process. Likewise, in using this technique in a "secondary orality" context, several of the authors addressed here point to more "primary" oral traditions and cultures--Native American,

Irish, and so on--by recreating their stories in a new context.

Another facet of orality that may be incorporated into written work is its vocabulary. Because oral tradition relies on the sense of sound for communication, its vocabulary is sound-laden. Using alliteration, onomatopoeia, and noise or sound effects, the teller uses auralness as well as orality to achieve a desired effect within the text. Written works which draw on this auditory dimension of the told tale incorporate the ideologies of the oral tale along with its vocabulary. Oral-print texts rely on the assumption of a listener, and on the effects of sound, even within the written context.

The use of particular cultural or regional languages within fiction would also fall into this category. By drawing on the vocabulary, syntax, and style of local languages, writers hover between the written form and the oral form. Though some might argue that writing an oral form stifles it, preserves it like a fossil in a rock, I argue that writing an oral form in this fashion can be a continuation of the oral tradition. Stories in oral tradition continue to change and develop as they are passed from teller to listener. In this context, the writing becomes simply one individual manifestation of the larger oral tradition.¹⁶

Another way in which oral-print texts continue, rather than stifle, oral discourse is through their depiction of the storytelling process. One common strategy in the works

addressed here is to depict characters telling stories to one another, reenacting the oral process as well as its language and content. Due to the descriptions of how characters tell stories, including mannerisms and tone of voice, the idea of performance becomes an issue in the oral-print text. The narrative moves beyond the bounds of written texts and becomes a reenactment of the oral performances of its characters. Beyond this issue of performance, the depiction of the storytelling process gives a sense of the narrative as a product of dialectic interaction, or in a Bakhtinian sense, dialogics. Oral tales are produced through the responsive interaction of teller and listener(s). By recreating this interaction, the oral-print text provides its own textual history, showing the process by which texts are created in the act of creating yet another text. This depiction both informs the reader on how the text may be read (as an instance of this oral process), but also recreates the author as a teller in the chain of tellers, and recasts the reader as a listener in the oral exchange depicted.¹⁷ The reader is drawn into the oral circuit as a full participant, because the reader witnesses the oral process, and thus understands the broader oral context, as well as its textual manifestations.

Clearly, this depiction of oral process within a text will affect how that text is structured (Ong, 139-55). Traditionally, the American literary establishment has privileged works which follow a single protagonist through a

linear series of plot events to a discernible and definitive conclusion. Oral texts, and thus oral-print texts, defy this narrative structure on several levels. First, because each character within a story is potentially both listener and teller, as they are all equally able to hear a story and subsequently pass it on, oral-print texts are often driven by a number of characters rather than a single protagonist. Because each character has a story, narratives are often passed along from teller to teller, as each teller presents her or his story within the larger work. As a result, oral-print works may carry a different emphasis than the traditionally privileged text. They may emphasize an ensemble of characters, rather than a single protagonist. Further, they suggest that everyone has a tale to tell, thus suggesting that the narrative does not conclude with the conclusion of any one story. This may be related to Ong's observation that oral tales do not embody the finality and closure emphasized by printed texts by virtue of their printedness (Ong, 132). As a result, these oral-print narratives may be constructed in a manner which more closely reflects the oral passage of tales than the printed expression associated with novels. The oral-print text resists the linearity of plot by including stories-within-stories, and by introducing a host of characters who carry their own stories with them. This produces a structure which may appear fragmented or even chaotic to those expecting a more linear, single-character driven structure. Moreover,

this structure may create a difficulty in categorizing these stories which has, in part, participated in their critical dismissal. Because these texts appear to be a series of vignettes, they may often be categorized as short stories, and even published as such, when their interconnection implies a context quite different from that of the isolated short tale. Along these same lines, the oral-print text resists the solidified conclusion, because it depicts a never-ending oral process. Because it creates the expectation of an eternal series of stories carried by innumerable storytellers, including both the text's author and potentially the text's reader, it defies the notion of any tale ever being "at an end" (Cather, *My Ántonia*, 41). So in structure, character, plot, language, content, and context, the oral-print narrative presents itself as distinct from both oral and written forms, while participating in both of these realms.

The authors addressed in this study incorporate these oral strategies to particular ends within their written works. They utilize the oral-print form to describe a social structure which presumes print to be a male medium, and then to dismantle that very structure of associations. Constance Fenimore Woolson, Sarah Orne Jewett, Kate Chopin, and Willa Cather manifest orality differently within their works, but respond in a similar fashion to a similar set of contextual issues. Thus, their fusion of the oral-print text represents a somewhat collective response to their historical moment.

The similarities among these authors' gender, race, and class backgrounds suggest that late-nineteenth-century women of a particular status may have responded to the demands of their culture in similar, though distinct, ways. The collectivity of their response also suggests a bridging of the century's turn, as the narrative form addressed here is evident throughout the 1880-1920 period. This particular manifestation of the oral-print text seems to be serving a unique strategic function within this time frame.

Though I see a oneness of purpose for the authors discussed, the goal of this work is to further develop scholarship on *individual* responses to the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century print marketplace. I react against the use of "separate spheres" as a descriptor of women's actual participation in society, rather than as an ideological construct. Therefore, I would like to briefly describe the varied implementations of orality in the works of the four authors addressed here, in order to accentuate the differentness, as well as similarities, of their oral-print technique.

In the works of Constance Fenimore Woolson, orality primarily takes the form of speech--the speech of Woolson's female characters and narrators. Focusing on Woolson's "Lake Country Sketches," the section on Woolson addresses her use of the silent female character who develops an independent voice in the course of the narrative. These speaking women are often pitted against literary men in the text, thus

redramatizing Woolson's own grapplings with men in the literary establishment.¹⁸ Woolson's women are periodically multilingual as well, a structure which, while not inherently oral, is used orally by her characters to resist the restrictions of any single language mode. By aligning her men with print discourse and her women with speech within her own printed text, Woolson dismantles and recreates the gendered bounds of the print medium. By incorporating the powerful female voices of her characters into the printed work, and by subtly flouting the prescriptive linearity of male printedness with her use of narration, Woolson takes possession of print discourses on her own, female, terms.

While Woolson makes use of the spoken word in her printed narrative, Sarah Orne Jewett draws on a broader conception of oral discourse within her works, particularly *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. While Woolson's women often work in isolation, a sole woman pitted against one or many men, Jewett's female characters are inseparable from their locales and the communities that reside there. It is through these communities that Jewett presents a clear picture of the oral process. *The Country of the Pointed Firs* is structured as a series of told stories, accentuating its status as an oral text. The tales are passed off from one character to another, connected through the central figures of Mrs. Todd and the novel's female narrator. In addition to using this oral network as a thematic and structural device in her work, Jewett also draws upon the local language of the Maine

community she portrays to infuse her text with sound. Local language is utilized by most of the novel's characters, but each character also presents her/his own distinct speech idiom, which heightens the oral effect by casting each character as a storyteller. This multi-level engagement with orality throws the status of her novel as a printed text into question, and by extension questions the mechanisms by which print and oral discourses are themselves gendered. The fact that the narrator of the text is herself a writer further complicates the strict paradigms of gender and discourse which Jewett addresses.

Willa Cather's works, including her short fiction and the focal text *My Ántonia*, utilize orality in both content and process. Like Jewett's, Cather's narratives are driven by inset stories. Thus the larger novel is structured around the oral tale. Because these tales are periodically told by characters within the texts rather than through written narration, they reenact the oral process. The reader is given a sense of each character as an oral performer. This technique incorporates the principles of orality by highlighting the varied language styles, vocabulary, and expressions of the storyteller. By casting the character-as-teller within her work, Cather recreates her audience as listeners as well as readers. In so doing, she conveys the process of orality as well as its product, by drawing the reader into the circuit of teller and listener, and perpetuating rather than stifling the cycle of the told tale.

By connecting her inset tales to one another by language, symbol, and theme, Cather recreates the idea of storytelling as a neverending chain, one which is neither finalized nor subordinated by its presence within the written text.

Cather draws on orality in another way as well. A large portion of the inset tales in her fiction are drawn from the stories of her immigrant neighbors in Nebraska (Grumbach, viii-ix). These tales can be viewed as falling into two categories. First are stories drawn from the actual experiences of people around Cather. When these tales are put into fiction, they represent a reshaping of gossip, an oral mode, into the written mode. Just as gossip carries stories of known individuals in a closed setting for circulation among its members (Spacks), so Cather's fiction creates an in-group among her readers by incorporating this oral form into her work. Second, Cather incorporates tales which are themselves drawn from the folk traditions of her neighbors. This type of borrowing, unlike gossip, highlights the oral traditions of various groups: Norwegians, Russians, Swedes, and Czechs/Bohemians. In her use of this second type of orality, Cather's works represent a continuation of oral tradition, but outside of its particular cultural context, pointing toward fully developed oral traditions outside her own use of oral discourse.

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* uses some of the storytelling techniques featured in others' works, but takes the use of orality in a distinct direction through its use of non-verbal

sound. The novel relies upon a notion of male-centered language, carried by the male characters of the work, which is characterized as both prescriptive and linear and is linked to the printed discourse of the day. Early in the novel, Chopin uses instances of noise to disrupt this linear, male model of language, and to divert linguistic control away from the men and toward the women of the text. Later in the novel, Chopin's women begin to use a sound-laden language which reflects and encompasses this earlier noise. Because Chopin's novel itself utilizes the very sound-language that it eventually awards to its female characters, the novel reforms the printed form to a gendered end, through the use of oral sensory conventions within the printed text.

Each of these four authors manifests a different relationship to orality within her work. Yet all of these authors show a significant engagement with the spoken word in their written texts. In each case, orality shapes a broad spectrum of textual issues within the narrative, including structure, characterization, and language use. Equally important, Woolson, Jewett, Cather, and Chopin use oral structures to address a broad spectrum of social and textual issues outside the narrative, including issues of gender, culture, the relationship of author to reader, and the relationship between humans and their stories. These writers collectively enact a response to their historical moment as both women and writers by using the oral-print form. Their narrative style permits the writers to reshape the printed

medium, a medium ideologically defined as male, using the parameters of a female-aligned oral tradition. By merging two language forms, these texts defy the gendered critical standards of both forms, demanding a new theoretical understanding of fictional form and its function. By extension, the works addressed here serve to undermine the notion of public and private spheres, enacting a merger of the principles associated with both spheres through the product of the oral-print text and through the act of writing as a woman in the late nineteenth century. So the oral-print narrative which emerges in this time period, while having individual shapes and implications based on its particular textual manifestation, has larger implications within the context of gender and publishing in America at the turn of the century. The creation of the oral-print text permits this set of women to negotiate the expectations of the marketplace for both gender and writing, and thus to put forth their own conceptions of gender and creative expression.

Though I do suggest that the oral-print text serves a particular function for Jewett, Woolson, Chopin, Cather, and other women writing in this period, I do not suggest that these are the only writers to engage with orality in American literature, or even in the nineteenth century. Mark Twain leaps to mind as an example of a writer who utilizes both the oral voice and the cyclical storytelling structure within his work. Yet his enactment of orality, while collapsing

gender/narrative conventions in its own fashion, has far different implications from the set of authors addressed in this study. In addition, there are numerous African American writers, in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, who have incorporated oral voices into their works. In particular, Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston emerge as artists who have utilized vocabulary, speaking style, and told stories within their written works. Even earlier, writers like Harriet Wilson and Linda Brent experimented with oral and print forms as a means of both expression and resistance. I see the further exploration of these uses of orality as essential to a broader understanding of orality and its function within American literatures. But the larger project of these African American writers seems distinct from that of the writers addressed here. African American writers often use orality both to reinforce their relationship with the African oral traditions they draw upon, and also to create a tradition which responds to, though is not usually allied with, the literary traditions of the white race/culture at that time. Their distinct relationship to ideas of "primary orality," as well as issues of race, gender, and power in the late nineteenth century, mark an engagement with orality which is connected, but not identical to, that explored here. This study elaborates the resistance/expression of the oral-print form in the hands of one set of its practitioners writing in the late nineteenth century. An articulation of the similarities and differences

between these writers' creation of oral-print texts and other writers' creation of their own oral-print works may be the next step in understanding how orality has informed, and continues to inform, the literature of the American tradition.

The use of oral-print form by the four authors under consideration here has clear implications for the turn-of-the-century historical context, but also carries implications for our current theoretical understandings of language and narrative. For example, the discussion of oral and print discourses bears some similarity to discussion of the "symbolic" in language acquisition and the disruption thereof by a fluid, undefinable force which Kristeva labels the "semiotic." As such, the discussion of oral and print discourses is, on some level, comparable with French feminist discussions of gender and language.¹⁹ The principles of orality highlighted within this work--its fluidity, its defiance of linear constraints of space and time--bears some resemblance to the idea of women's language as set forth by Hélène Cixous in her groundbreaking essays "The Laugh of the Medusa" and "Castration or Decapitation?" Cixous argues that male language, using the premises of the Symbolic set forth by Jacques Lacan, prescribes to the values of linearity, fixed meaning, and a strictly representative/signifying linguistic and social order, which is resisted by the fluidness of female language. These sex-based categories correspond loosely to the categories of orality and print set

forth within this analysis. Print exemplifies the linear, fixed aspects of language which are associated with the symbolic, and orality exemplifies the fluid qualities of the semiotic. Unlike the French feminists, however, I see oral and print dynamics as being based in sociolinguistic uses of languages and as constructed within the texts themselves, rather than as manifestations of psychological linguistic precondition. I do not link orality, as French feminists might, to a pre-linguistic or early linguistic oral phase of development, for this would be to inadvertently subordinate orality to the acquisition of print. The uses of language exhibited by Jewett, Woolson, Chopin, and Cather re-envision language and gender categories as mutable. By merging oral and print, their works draw on both the linearity of print and fluidity of orality to create a third language category, a language category which exhibits characteristics of both its components. So the work of Kristeva and Cixous is applicable to this study for its conceptions of female and male language, the qualities associated with each, and their correspondences to the oral and print modes of discourse. I depart from these theories in my resistance to the biological aspects of their readings, in favor of sociolinguistic readings, and in my belief that the narratives in question dismantle the very gender and discourse categories upon which French feminist theories rely.

This study also draws upon, and has implications for, Present-day linguistic, folkloric, and narrative analytic

approaches to literature. It utilizes linguistic resources in creating the orality/print distinction and discussion, but does not take as its project solely an illumination of language use, but rather the interconnection between language, narrative, and social change. Linguistic methods of analysis take a backseat to close textual reading in exploring these interconnections. In a similar manner, this study does not utilize folkloric approaches to textual study, nor does it claim that the materials at hand are more folkloric than literary. Yet the use of local language, tradition, and story within these texts raises the possibility that they are, in part, artifacts of local folk cultures and should be further explored as such.²⁰ The value which these texts place on localities and local voices argues implicitly for the importance of folklore traditions to literature.

Finally, this study can gain by its association with theories of poststructural and "experimental" writing. These texts' ability to slip outside and to unravel standard methods of representation of signification through the use of orality places them within the parameters of poststructural approaches to literature. This same textual quality also aligns my study with those which explore feminist refigurations of narrative.²¹ Similarly, such textual qualities also fit the definitions of "experimental writing" offered by Gray when she writes that "uncoding does not engender chaos but frees language as a thing uncapturable

into fixed classifications, in a state of continual movement, lively and alive" (5). But it is my preference not to classify these fictional works, or this analysis, under any single category--French feminist, semiotic, linguistic, folkloric, poststructural, narrativel, experimental--for this act would reinscribe the very categorizations which the texts defy. A synthesized theoretical approach is required to capture the complexities of texts which actively resist classification.

In suggesting that the oral-print text exists outside the categorical systems of American ideology, both in contemporary thought and in the late nineteenth century, I do not suggest that it represents "writing from the margins." To argue that Jewett, Woolson, Chopin, and Cather wrote from societal margins implicitly reinforces the very binary categorizations which are unravelled in their writings. By merging, intersecting, and redrawing the conceptual categories of male/female, oral/print, and public/private in their works, Woolson, Jewett, Cather, and Chopin dismantle the concepts of marginality and centrality as well. An analysis of any one of their texts indicates an author(s) writing from a sense of her own centrality. Women are central figures in the majority of these texts, their experiences are detailed, and the validity of women's experience is taken as a given. Far from "marginal" writing, these texts demonstrate that it is possible to acknowledge a degree of societal disadvantage while still maintaining a

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sense of centrality within the narrative. As such, these works represent a fusion of marginality and centrality as modes of thought, just as they hover on the line between other binary categorical systems. To argue that authors wrote "from the margins" implicitly suggests that individual writers experienced themselves as less than central figures in the publishing and social worlds of their day. I do not find this to be the case. Though some writers acknowledged that they were *perceived* as less than central by certain forces in the publishing world, they did not accept this ideological categorization as a social reality. The very fact that these women took pen in hand at all indicates that they had a sense of their own author-ity. Moreover, the increasing number of studies on the woman-writer-as-artist in the late nineteenth century indicates that women writers, including those in this study, were not necessarily the shrinking violets they are often thought to be. Instead, these writers' relationship to their social and authorial worlds is more complex and shifting than conceptions of "private" or "marginal" writing allows. The women authors addressed here exercised authority in their social as well as narrative lives, partly through their privilege as white and middle class, partly through their personal relationships to their work, their societies, and to each other, and fundamentally through their writing. By forming social and literary groups; by putting pressure to bear on their publishers through the popularity of their works and thus

their economic importance; by taking a hand in the world of publishing itself; and by the very act of writing, the writers in this study demonstrate that they are central figures to the social and literary worlds of their day.²² We have much to gain by exploring their authorial strategies, and more fully comprehending the complexity of the literary picture in the late nineteenth century and of women's powerful place within it.

Yes, there were times when women weren't invited to the party. But to end the story there is to deny the multifaceted experiences of women authors and the complexity of their narrative productions. Some women may have crashed the party. Others threw their own parties. And other women were powerful enough to demand invitations to the party and receive them lest publishers lose their business, as was the case in the wake of the *Atlantic Monthly* incident (Coultrap-Mcquin 2-7; Donovan, *New England*, 7). For it must be remembered, the *Atlantic Monthly* did not throw the only party in town. Even if the door was closed upon women authors they could climb in through the window, pick the lock, or knock on a different door. Each author creates her own ending to this tale. Through a thorough understanding of both the writers and their stories, we can read those endings through a lens that is more complex, and happier, than that which has heretofore been available, making our own story a successful one.

NOTES

¹ Details of the Whittier incident are offered in Coultrap-McQuinn and Donovan, both of which also use the story as a framing device for their analyses. For books which address this incident and its implications see Coultrap-McQuinn, and Donovan, *New England*.

² For examples of theoretical works which rely on "separate spheres" ideology and/or the concept women's exclusion as a basic premise for analysis, see Cott, Donovan, Heilbrun (who focuses on autobiographies of women in a variety of periods, but whose theories have been applied more widely), Kelley, and to a lesser extent, Showalter. I would like to note that these analyses do not necessarily oversimplify the complex historical case of women's participation, but their use of the exclusion premise has often meant an oversimplification of their own works as translated into common use, and thus a reduction of the fuller historical picture to its exclusionary aspects. In more recent work, Cott herself has even noted the increasingly problematic nature of the "separate spheres" dichotomy and the importance of viewing "separate spheres" primarily as an ideology, at least in the post-revolutionary period (Kerber et al, 566-8).

³ In this context, even works like Ellen Moers' *Literary Women*, while it does attempt to identify a tradition of women writers, is implicated in this anomaly reading, because it purports to treat only "the major writers" of the women's tradition, thus isolating them from their contemporaries (ix).

⁴ I see Mary Kelley's *Private Woman, Public Stage*, which focuses on women's writing from the 1820s to the 1870s, as falling into this

category. Though Kelley's work is extremely useful for its emphasis on the importance of the publishing world and its practices on women's writing and on the unnecessary devaluation of domesticity in literary criticism, and for bringing to light several previously unavailable or undervalued writers, her insistence that these authors "failed to understand themselves fully" (xii), her use of this assumption to understand these authors' works--or indeed, as a substitute for discussing their works--and her insistence that "the gulf between a private domestic existence and a public literary career was immense" (xi), all seem quite outmoded when one looks at the breadth of writing by women in the nineteenth century. Also in the psychoanalytic category, I read Gilbert and Gubar's *No Man's Land* as a work which offers a complex and thorough literary-historical reading, but which tends to group individual writers under a psychologically-based paradigm. I see this approach replicated in more recent criticism as will be discussed in later chapters, particularly the chapter focusing on Cather.

⁵ Though I find Elizabeth Ammons' *Conflicting Stories* to be a compelling analysis in many respects, I see it falling into this category. While I think Ammons is entirely correct in arguing that women authors "intended to claim for themselves the territory of Art--powerful, difficult to negotiate--that in western culture has been defined and staked out by privileged white men as their own" (10), I believe her discussion of women writers who critique other women writers as an act of "saying that one was not a woman writer or a woman of color--that gender or gender and race...did not operate as a part of the

definition of who one was" and that "the benefits and the cost of this denial were considerable" (11), comes dangerously close to suggesting that women who departed from conventional notions of "women's writing," or who chose to experiment in both male and female forms and to demand to be read on their own terms, were gender traitors. An interpretation of this sort may replicate the strict gender boundaries it critiques.

⁶ I am thinking here of Chase's *The American Novel and its Tradition*; Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel*, which does treat some women's works but usually dismissively if not derisively; Fisher's *Hard Facts*; and Bell's *The Development of American Romance*.

⁷ Other theorists who note that authors occupied a dual role as public and private figures are numerous, but include Brodhead, Coultrap-McQuinn, and Habermas himself. For works which explore in detail the gender ideologies of nineteenth-century America, see Cott, and Smith-Rosenberg.

⁸ For a thorough discussion of the professionalization of writing in the late nineteenth century, and its creation of a hierarchical literary marketplace, see Brodhead.

⁹ For details on the publishing industry in this time period from which this discussion is drawn, see again Albertine, Baym *Woman's* and "Melodramas", Brodhead, Coultrap-McQuinn, and Kelley. Baym's "Melodramas" also highlights the more recent critical dismissal of women authors which is, in part, an outgrowth of this nineteenth-century ideology.

¹⁰ For discussions of women's increased participation in industrial and other public work, as well as statistics on women's college

attendance, see Kessler-Harris.

¹¹ My ideas about the effects of the oral moment on the printed text are drawn first and foremost from primary sources: the fictional works discussed in this analysis. However, a number of theoretical works both inform and substantiate my assessment of the distinctions and intersections between orality and print. See Ong, and various essays in Brown.

¹² Much has been written on how print has functioned as a tool of dominance in western and colonializing countries (which are often the same thing). Accompanying these theories is the related idea that print, once established in a culture, will assume a stance of superiority, and often anteriority, toward the artistic productions of the native culture. For compelling discussions of these issues see Derrida, Ong, and various essays in Brown. For discussions of the link between speaking, as opposed to writing, and gender in western culture, see Spacks.

¹³ Again, see various essays in Brown, particularly Nanton, and Ong, for descriptions of the distinctions and intersections between print and oral discourses which have informed this study.

¹⁴ For more specific discussions of the interconnections between sound, textual and physical space, and time, see Ong, particularly 7-8, 31-2, and 117-123. Henceforth in this analysis, the idea of passing a tale on from teller to listener to teller will be referred to as an oral chain. This structure may not be evident in "primary orality" cultures, but is evident and significant in the texts analyzed here.

¹⁵ Again, see Nanton for discussions of sound, performance, audience

interaction, and their collective effect on the oral performance.

¹⁶ The formation of my ideas in this section is influenced by Paula Gunn Allen's discussion of the "story cycle" in Native American oral tradition. However, it is important to clarify that I am dealing here with cultures that are print-based, and are marked by their association with print in Ong's sense of "secondary orality," and therefore will not have the same implications as the "primary orality" cultures which Gunn describes and draws upon.

¹⁷ It may be useful at this point to clarify some of the terms being used in this analysis. I refer to an oral chain when describing the potentially never-ending process of stories being told to listeners who in turn become tellers. I refer to an oral circuit in describing any particular instance of interaction between a teller and a listener, or in the case of the oral-print text, an author or narrator and a reader. The circuit seems an appropriate metaphor for this interaction because it implies a mutual exchange of energy in the creation of the product, in this case, the text. Albertine et al use the same analogy, that of the circuit, to define the interactions of publishing and writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Though I often refer to "the reader" as a unified construct within the analysis, it is with the full understanding that individual readers may or may not feel the effects described. Rather, my concept of "the reader" refers more basically to techniques of the text which have the potential to influence any given reader in particular ways. Further, while I think these techniques and their effects are available to readers in a variety of time periods and cultural contexts, the context of the late

nineteenth century, when works were still commonly being read aloud, may have heightened the oral effects of these texts in ways which are less accessible to the late twentieth century reader. I make the assertion that works were more commonly read aloud in the late nineteenth century, and that these works may in fact have been written to be read aloud, largely based on the numerous depictions of reading aloud within the literary works discussed here.

¹⁸ For more on the correlation between Woolson's depictions of literary men and her own interactions with literary men, see Dean, Gebhard, Torsney, and Weimer.

¹⁹ For further discussion of these concepts see Cixous, Kristeva, and Lacan.

²⁰ For more on these issues see Hoffman and Rosenfelt, and Pry.

²¹ In this discussion of "feminist refigurations of narrative," I am thinking in particular of Duplessis, and Miller.

²² For studies which deal with the biographical aspects of these authors' lives, and for studies that demonstrate the myriad of different strategies of a variety of women authors and literary/publishing figures in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Ammons, Carby, Coultrap-Mcquin, Donovan, Gray, Harris, and the collections edited by Albertine and by Warren.

CHAPTER 1

Defiance and Double-Talk: Orality in the Works of Constance Fenimore Woolson

Constance Fenimore Woolson's short works provide clear examples of orality as a response to the gendered dynamics of the print marketplace of her day. In Woolson's view, women faced an unfair disadvantage in the world of print. Though her publishers were dependent on her successful writings for their incomes, they repeatedly attempted to take financial advantage of Woolson, an act which has gendered implications (Torsney, *Grief of Artistry* 70-72). Furthermore, though Woolson numbered influential men like Henry James and E.C. Stedman among her friends, she had to grapple with prejudices against women writers even within her social circle (Weimer, Introduction xx-xxii). The gender prejudices Woolson perceived in her own day have remained prevalent in the critical response to Woolson, who has disappeared from the canon of American literature while Henry James, who drew much inspiration (as well as themes and plotlines) from Woolson's work, has risen to prominence in scholarly study.¹ Woolson resisted the critical dismissal of women's writing, as well as the attempt to place women's writing in distinct, narrow categories based on the prevailing ideologies of gender.² For example, Woolson once wrote in a letter: "I have such a horror of 'pretty,' 'sweet' writing that I should almost

prefer a style that was ugly and bitter, provided it was also *strong*" (qtd. in Brehm, 53).³ Woolson's work reenacts many of these tensions between men and women over the issue of artistic production, and so her fictions comment on the gender ideologies arising in the print marketplace with the professionalization of print. Woolson's fiction, and her use of orality, mocks the publishers, authors, and critics that dismiss women writers as a result of their gender. The same techniques also permit Woolson to demonstrate her mastery of both print and oral forms, asserting her own importance in the publishing world as both woman and writer.

One technique Woolson uses to critique the male prescriptiveness of women's roles is a Chaucerian "quitting" technique: she ridicules the critic by making him a character in the fictional world, rather than a controller of it. Theorists have noted the prevalence of a particular plot structure in Woolson's short fiction, that of the artist-heroine who encounters a male writer or critic figure who attempts to control her work and her life.⁴ Yet much Woolson criticism focuses on the "grief" produced by these gendered interactions, both within Woolson's fiction and her life. In particular, Cheryl Torsney has used the title of Woolson's short story, "Miss Grief" to argue that, for women writers, "artistry would bring grief rather than triumph" (*Grief of Artistry* 86). But while Woolson does depict the oppressiveness of this gendered relationship, she also depicts a myriad of resistant responses in her fictional

heroines, who enjoy varying degrees of success based on their employment of an oral voice in response to the print prescriptiveness of their male counterparts. One such heroine is Katharine Winthrop of "At the Château of Corinne," who provides an example of the use of female orality to resist and reshape the gender and power structures of the community.

The primary form of orality employed in "At the Chateau of Corinne" is double-talk. The protagonist of the story, the young widow Mrs. Winthrop, consistently engages in verbal play with those around her, particularly the would-be suitor John Ford. It is through these verbal exchanges that Woolson demonstrates Winthrop's superior intellect. Though Ford plays the role of literary critic, trying to prescribe the behavior of women generally and Mrs. Winthrop particularly, Winthrop ultimately triumphs through her use of an ambiguous, oral language. This language permits Ford to "read" Mrs. Winthrop according to his own prejudices, then turns his own prejudices against him, giving Winthrop a tactical advantage in their relationship. Her intelligence, coupled with her gender, places Winthrop beyond Ford's comprehension. Mrs. Winthrop controls their verbal interaction and is ultimately able to express herself within the constraints set forth by Ford's prescriptive ideology. Thus it is Winthrop's verbal power, the ambiguity and fluidity of the spoken word as compared to the fixedness of the printed word, that represents the oral mode of this story as well as the gender

resistance of its protagonist. This character's actions parallel the actions of her author, who manages to express herself despite the gender ideologies of the late nineteenth century. Through this intelligent character and her powerful use of orality, Woolson "quits" the male writers and critics who would deny women writers' place among the literary greats of the day.

From the time of his arrival at Lake Lehman and into the company of Mrs. Winthrop, John Ford drops small insults into the conversations there, apparently testing his audience to see if they will comprehend that he has insulted them. In one such instance, Mrs. Winthrop demonstrates her comprehension of John Ford and confronts him for his presumption. During a walk, Mrs. Winthrop observes of the beautiful view: "...you have seen it all before...To you it is not something from fairy-land, hardly to be believed, as it is to me" (215). She goes on: "...when waking in the early dawn, before the prosaic little details of the day have risen in my mind, I ask myself, with a sort of doubt of the reality of it all, if this is Katharine Winthrop living on the shores of Lake Lemman--herself really, and not her imagination only, her longing dream" (215). John Ford is verbally stymied by this revelation, beginning his response with a stutter: "Yes--ah--quite so" (215). Ford then responds: "You hardly look like a person who would think that sort of thing under those circumstances" (215). From

there ensues a lengthy verbal negotiation, based on the insult couched in Ford's reply:

"What sort of person, then, do I look like?" she said.

He turned. She was smiling; he smiled also. "I was alluding merely to the time you named. As it happened, my aunt had mentioned to me by chance your breakfast hours."

"That was not all, I think."

"You are very good to be interested."

"I am not good; only curious. Pray tell me."

"I have so little imagination, Mrs. Winthrop, that I cannot invent the proper charming interpretation as I ought. As to bald truth, of course you cannot expect me to present you with that during a first visit of ceremony...[intervening dialogue]...If you are going to hold it over me, perhaps I had better tell you now."

"Much better."

"I only meant, then, that Mrs. Winthrop did not strike me as at all the sort of person who would allow anything prosaic to interfere with her poetical, heart-felt enthusiasms."

She laughed gayly. "You are delightful. You have such a heavy apparatus for fibbing that it

becomes fairly stately. You do not believe I have any enthusiasms at all," she added. (216)

In each case, Winthrop challenges Ford's verbal evasions, and reveals her knowledge of Ford's meaning and his motives, beyond the explanations he offers her. As such, Katharine Winthrop is the victor in the first of their verbal battles because she has seen through and exposed Ford's verbal game. In the process, Winthrop extracts a promise from Ford to "believe all she says" (217). This promise gains significance later in the story, when the verbal play takes on more serious consequences.

The backdrop for this verbal play is itself literary.⁵ There are two competing literary contexts at work in "At the Château of Corinne." One of these is a female literary context, represented by Mme de Staël, the author who resided in the Château frequently visited by the Winthrop party and whose own stories intertwine with the text at hand (Weimer, *Introduction xxxv*; Torsney, *Grief of Artistry* 88-90). Katharine Winthrop herself is part of this context, for later in the story she reveals that she is an author. The competing male literary context is described by Katharine's male cousin as follows:

This lake, sir...is remarkable for the number of persons distinguished in literature who have at various times resided upon its banks. I may mention, cursorily, Voltaire, Sismondi, Gibbon, Rousseau, Sir Humphry Davy, D'Aubigné, Calvin,

Grimm, Benjamin Constant, Shlegel, Châteaubriand, Byron, Shelley, the elder Dumas, and in addition that most eloquent authoress and noble woman Madame de Staël. (218)

In this vast company of men, Mme de Staël receives mention as an afterthought, an "addition" which does not quite integrate into the whole. It is this male print context that both Winthrop and Woolson battle against, and both use orality as their tool of entry into the male print world. Even Mme de Staël shares in this oral context, as Ford observes with derision:

All her books were talked into existence; she talked them before she wrote them. It was her custom, at the dinner-table here at Coppet, to introduce the subject upon which she was engaged, and all her guests were expected, indeed forced, to discuss it with her in all its bearings, to listen to all she herself had to say, and never to depart from the given line by the slightest digression until she gave the signal. The next morning, closeted in her own room, she wrote out the results of all this, and it became a chapter. (229)

This passage confirms that orality is the province of women within this tale, and that it is through orality that women gain access to the print world. While it may appear that Ford is dismayed by the idea of recruiting textual material from others, this is not the aspect of de Staël's behavior

that receives his criticism. Ford is clearly dismayed by this woman's verbal manipulations, as well as her encroachment upon the male print realm. The emphasis is placed on the fact that the books are "talked into existence" and that the guests must "listen" to their female host and "all she has to say," since it is a woman who controls the verbal exchange. This verbal power is linked to the writing act and it is this aspect of de Staël's behavior that seems most disquieting to Ford. Ford further reveals his discomfort with women's writing when he learns that Mrs. Winthrop is herself a writer, and offers the following critique of her poetry:

We do not expect great poems from women any more than we expect great pictures; we do not expect strong logic any more than we expect brawny muscle. A woman's poetry is subjective. But what cannot be forgiven--at least in my opinion--is that which I have called the distinguishing feature of the volume, a certain sort of daring. This is its essential, unpardonable sin. Not because it is in itself dangerous; it has not force enough for that; but because it comes, and can be recognized at once as coming, from the lips of a woman. For woman should not dare in that way. Thinking to soar, she invariably descends. Her mental realm is not the same as that of a man; lower, on the same level, or far above, it is at least different. And to see

her leave it, and come in all her white purity, which must inevitably be soiled, to the garish arena where men are contending, where the dust is rising, and where the air is tainted and heavy-- this is indeed a painful sight. Every honest man feels like going to her, poor mistaken sibyl that she is, closing her lips with gentle hand, and leading her away to some far spot among the quiet fields, where she can learn her error, and begin her life anew. (233)

This speech sums up Ford's position on women's writing.⁶ It is "dangerous" simply because it is female. Moreover, it is the actual "daring" to contest in the public world which is as much at stake than the writing itself. It is not difficult to see this passage as a representation of the print marketplace of Woolson's age. Joan Myers Weimer, in her reading of the tale, sees Ford as a direct transcription of Woolson's male contemporaries: "In the character of John Ford...Woolson combines Henry James's arrogant charm and dislike of women writers with Edmund Stedman's 'entire disbelief in the possibility of true fiery genius in women' (letter to Stedman, 23 July 1876)" (Introduction xxxvi). This reading of Ford as representative of the male literary establishment is confirmed within the text. Just prior to this speech about Winthrop's writing, the narrator refers to Ford as "her critic" (233). But what the critic does not comprehend is that Winthrop is mocking him throughout this

scene, as Woolson does through her writing. When Katharine Winthrop first reveals to him that she is a writer, she asks Ford to read and critique a volume of her poetry, published anonymously. Ford claims that he read it when it was initially released, and Winthrop replies: "So much the better. You can give me your opinion without the trouble of reading" (231). The implication is that this is what Ford, and the critics he represents, would do anyway--critique a woman's work without reading it, and critique upon the grounds of her gender rather than her writing. This is largely what Ford proceeds to do, though Winthrop's little quip about critics who do not read what they critique is lost on him. Again, Woolson demonstrates Winthrop's mental superiority to Ford. She comprehends his couched insults, while her verbal play is lost on him. This depiction heightens the critique of male critics within the tale. Not only do they judge without reading, but they fail to comprehend women's verbal capacity, even when they encounter it directly. In this scene the woman writer is, simply, over the critic's head.

The parallels between Ford's ideology of women's private role and the ideologies of Woolson's day are marked. But the story takes a metaphoric, and metafictional, turn in this passage. For the verbal exchange surrounding Winthrop's poetry may itself be a "talking into existence" of Katharine's next written work. Because we are reading this verbal exchange between Winthrop and Ford, the story doubles

back on itself, suggesting that the fiction which we read is exactly the type of story Katharine would produce as a result of their conversation. Thus the possibility of Katharine's turning this episode with Ford into later fictional material underlies the entire exchange, and indeed the entire story. In this fashion, Woolson's tale argues for the dominance of women's writing, in spite of male criticism. This argument is achieved through the implicit suggestions that Katharine has written this very tale, or inversely, that this fictional exchange is based on a real-life conversation which has been "talked into existence." In addition, this section reinforces the reading of Ford as a dolt who cannot comprehend Katharine's superior intellect. For while Ford acknowledges that Katharine is controlling this conversation in saying "you forced me to speak" (234), he is oblivious to the fact that he may be participating in just the type of verbal exchange which he deplored in *de Staël*. He sees no connection between Katharine's "force" and the "force" *Mme de Staël* exercised over her dinner guests, though he uses the same terminology to describe both instances. So, even in the act of asserting his own dominance, Ford's inability to recognize his participation in a female print world highlights his ignorance, offering a potent critique of male critics generally.

The discourse issues in this story are both confirmed and complicated by its romantic implications, for John Ford proposes to Katharine Winthrop at two points in the

narrative. The first occurs immediately following his critique of her poems. In his proposal, John tries to win Katharine over to his version of womanhood:

Show me the sweet side of your nature, the gentle, womanly side, and I will then be your suitor indeed, and a far more real and earnest one than though I had become the victim you intended me to be. You may not care for me, you may never care. But only let me see you accept for your own sake what I have said, in the right spirit, and I will at least ask you to care, as humbly and devotedly as man ever asked woman. For when she is her true self she is so far above us that we can only be humble. (234-5)

Though it is possible to read this passage straightforwardly, in the context of the oral-print dynamics of this tale Woolson's ironic comment on Ford's statement becomes plain. While Ford would enforce a domestic passivity on Winthrop, her "true self" is one of verbal power and of participation in the public realm of print. Katharine Winthrop is already "far above" John Ford, in ways that he does not comprehend. Winthrop goes on to point out to Ford that what he would deem a "true self," a submissive, domestic femininity, might be more dissemblance than truth. When he reasserts the "conditional" nature of his proposal, that she demonstrate the "womanly" side of her "nature," Winthrop replies: "No, not conditional in reality, although you might

have pleased yourself with the fancy. For I need not have been in earnest. I had only to pretend a little, to pretend to be the acquiescent creature you admire, and I could have turned you round my little finger" (235).

Again, Katharine demonstrates that her mental and verbal capacities are beyond Ford's understanding in this scene. He uses the terminology of woman's "nature" and "true self." Winthrop throws his terminology into disarray by demonstrating that what was deemed true can be false, what was deemed natural can be facade. What Ford cannot "believe" is that the "poor sibyl" is something other than what he deems her, and that her linguistic power over him may in fact be stronger than his ideological power over her.

Though Katharine Winthrop has the economic independence to reject Ford's first proposal, when she loses her fortune, she is forced to marry for economic security. But even in this instance of defeat, Katharine Winthrop demonstrates her verbal power, and her ultimate triumph over Ford's ideology of submission. For, in the end, Katharine does what she had threatened to do in the first instance. Using ambiguous language, Winthrop permits Ford to "read" her as the acquiescent woman, securing her marriage to him, and retaining her linguistic power in the process.⁷ Admittedly, this is a limited triumph. She must live her life with a man who is not her intellectual equal. But the final passages of the tale suggest that even such a marriage has its advantages for the "woman of genius."

Katharine is mourning her reduced circumstances at the Château of Corinne when John Ford returns from abroad to make his second proposal. Katharine does not immediately accept this proposal, however. Instead, she negotiates verbally, in a passage which foreshadows their potential married life:

"It will be very hard for you to give up your independence, your control of things," he said.

But she turned toward him with a very sweet expression in her eyes. "You will do it all for me," she answered. (245).

On the surface, it appears that Katharine has agreed to give up her independence, to let Ford "do it all," in running her life. But a second possibility suggested by Katharine's ambiguous double-talk is that Ford will be the one to give up his independence. The interpretation of this passage relies on what "it all" is. If surrendering "independence" and "control of things" is all, then Ford will be giving up his independence and control of things for Katharine, rather than the inverse. Thus "doing it all for me" does not mean running Katharine's life, but rather doing Katharine's bidding. Katharine's double-talk permits two conflicting readings of this passage. To take Katharine's language at face value is to underestimate her as Ford does. Katharine's previous verbal games and her ability to manipulate Ford through language demonstrate the multiple levels of her speech, and the control she gains through it in opposition to Ford's efforts to prescribe her role.

A similar exchange occurs surrounding Katharine Winthrop's writing career. Ford tells her after proposing: "You will write no more" (246). Katharine replies: "Always so sure! However, I will promise, if you acknowledge that you have a jealous disposition" (246). Ford answers: "Whether I have a jealous disposition or not I do not know," and continues, "[b]ut I was never jealous of Lorimer Percival..." (246). Katharine knows that Ford's conceit will not permit him to admit jealousy of her former suitor. She reasserts her own rights to the pen while simultaneously feigning acquiescence to Ford's demands. The result is that, by the end of the exchange, "he was kneeling at her feet, and, not only that, but she saw something very like mist in the gray eyes she had always thought too cold" (247). Just as Ford attempts to bring Katharine to her knees as a writer, she brings him to his knees as both critic and suitor. Katharine achieves her dominance by using verbal ambiguity, and the critic is none the wiser, for he is unable to keep up with her verbal play. John Ford sees only the acquiescent surface of Katharine's language, rather than the complex nuances of meaning which lie beneath. He "believes that appearance and reality are synonymous" (Torsney, *Grief of Artistry* 95). But the ultimate indication that Katharine has not been "led away" from "the arena where men are contending" is that the library of their home, after marriage, contains a prominent shelf holding "all the works of that eloquent authoress and noble woman, Madame de Staël" (247). Katharine, though in a

marriage of convenience, has used her position to bring another woman author into the place of prominence she deserves among the "persons distinguished in literature" (218). The implication that this tale may itself be a production of Katharine's, "talked into existence," and the certainty that this tale is the production of a woman, collectively cement the power of women's language to secure women a place in the world of print.

Several theorists have taken Katharine's "acquiescence" as sincere, and thus read the ending of "At the Château of Corinne" as a tragic loss of women's power rather than its triumphant gain.⁸ However, Katharine's ability to comprehend Ford's verbal games while he fails to recognize hers, coupled with Katharine's hint at dissemblance during his first proposal, support a reading of Katharine's acceptance as an act of control rather than submission. But there is one final hint that Katharine, on behalf of women, has prevailed in this tale. The cryptic final phrase of the story is Ford's comment: "...I found it out afterwards: Benjamin Franklin understood English, after all" (247). "Benjamin Franklin" is a nameless servant at the Château of Corinne, who is dubbed Benjamin Franklin for his resemblance to that historic figure. Throughout the second proposal scene, Ford speaks freely in front of the servant and encourages Winthrop to do the same, insisting "he does not understand a word of English" (244). The servant functions much like Katharine does in the story. In his assumption of

class and gender dominance, Ford does not hesitate to categorize, or even name, his supposed inferiors.⁹ Further, he assumes that his actions are beyond their comprehension. Yet both Katharine and "Franklin" use Ford's conceit to their economic advantage, and it is he who is ignorant of how he has been manipulated. The final line, "Benjamin Franklin understood English," becomes Ford's final admission that the people he assumed were his intellectual inferiors actually "understood," him, and exceeded his own capacity to understand them.

Woolson uses the Ford figure and his intellectual/verbal limitations to ridicule the male print climate which attempts to control her own print productions. She does this, not from a position of accepted marginality, but from a position of power which goes unacknowledged by the male ideology it conquers. Within the tale, the woman's power is verbal power, and Woolson harnesses both this verbal power and her own printed power for her fiction, arguing for her own intellectual superiority over the voices that would criticize her, and recovering another female voice from the past in the process.

While "At the Château of Corinne" uses the verbal capacity of a female character as its primary form of orality, another Woolson tale uses a technique common to other oralists: the narrative frame. Woolson's acclaimed short story "The Lady of Little Fishing" uses the oral technique of passing off a story from teller to teller to transfer the linguistic import

of the tale from the male narrator to the narrated woman. In the process, Woolson voices her own significance as a woman writer.

"The Lady of Little Fishing" opens with the first person narration of an unnamed narrator. Though we are not told the sex of this narrator, said narrator is immediately allied with male print discourse in the opening passages of the story:

The late summer of 1850, and I was coasting along
the south shore of the great lake, hunting,
fishing, and camping on the beach, under the
delusion that in that way I was living "close to
the great heart of nature,"--whatever that may
mean. Lord Bacon got up the phrase; I suppose he
knew. (3)

Through the invocation of Lord Bacon this narrator is identified as male through his association with a male print tradition.¹⁰ This association also exists on a metatextual level, because "The Lady of Little Fishing" is often read as refiguring the work of male writers. Caroline Gebhard, for example, reads "The Lady of Little Fishing" as an "intertextual play" on Bret Harte's "The Luck of Roaring Camp" (228), while Joan Myers Weimer reads the story as a refutation of James Fenimore Cooper's *The Deerslayer* (Introduction xxvi-xxvii). The tale's opening scene thus draws on the men-in-the-wilderness print genre represented by these, and other, male-authored texts of the nineteenth

century. But while a male print tradition is established on several levels from the opening of this story, this same print tradition is simultaneously called into question. For example, this narrator who is representative of male print tradition within this story admits himself to be "under delusion." Further, Lord Bacon is implicated in his delusion. The narrator has no sense of the "meaning" carried by the phrases he uses, such as "close to the great heart of nature." His linguistic authority is immediately undermined by this unknowing use of language.¹¹ By extension, the narration encourages the reader to question whether Lord Bacon had any stronger sense of meaning for the phrases he used. The picture created is one of men roaming about the wilderness and writing about it, without any clear sense of either their task or the language which describes it. As Weimer explains, Woolson "turns Cooper's solitary woodsman into a recreational hunter and parodies as Romantic affectation his desire to live 'close to the great heart of nature'" (Introduction, xxvi). This framework implicates Bret Harte as well, for each of these men participates in a pattern wherein he attempts to name, and to fix meaning upon, the vast expanse of nature which he observes. This narrator's incompetence in the linguistic act creates the possibility that each of these men, in their efforts to control nature through language, is likewise incompetent. Woolson's opening narration thus critiques male print

discourse on several levels, exposing and deriding its project of naming the world according to its own standards.

In both presenting a male view, as Woolson constructs it, and highlighting the flaws of this view, Woolson creates a type of point-counterpoint in the opening passages of "The Lady of Little Fishing." She introduces the influence of male print discourse, then promptly dismantles the authority of this discourse. This dual-voiced narration becomes even more pronounced when the narrator begins to speak in parenthetical asides, which highlight his own hypocrisy. Upon unexpectedly finding a town in the middle of the wilderness, he states:

"Hail, homes of the past!" I said. (I cultivated the habit of thinking aloud when I was living close to the great heart of nature.) "A human voice resounds through your arches" (there were no arches,--logs won't arch, but never mind) "once more, a human hand touches your venerable walls, a human foot presses your deserted hearth-stones." (3)

This passage continues the themes introduced in the opening passages of the story. Though the narrator is speaking, he adopts the formal address of a male print tradition. The inadequacy of this tradition is emphasized by the parenthetical asides, which contradict the prescriptive mode of the formal address. While the hypocrisy of these dual-voiced statements, and of man's attempt to fix his reality

upon nature, may seem humorous and benign in this passage, it soon begins to take on a more sinister tone. Though the narrator states, "a human hand touches your venerable walls," we abruptly learn exactly how venerable he finds those walls, when the "human hand" tears them apart to use for firewood. It is here that Woolson demonstrates the destructiveness of the prescriptive linguistic act. The language veils the man's consumptive impulses, and so colludes in his act of destruction when he slowly burns the town, piece by piece. Though he is destroying a human construction--a town--he is also destroying trees, an extension of the "great heart of nature" which he is presumed to live close to. One can only wonder how many logs were destroyed before the fact that "logs won't arch" was confirmed. So in these early passages, Woolson paints a clear picture of male print discourse as both prescriptive and potentially lethal. As the tale unfolds, the destructive power which has been released onto the wilderness through language is turned toward a woman as well. Though the destructive print language mode has already been gendered male through Woolson's narration, the gendered critique of the tale is heightened when "the lady of little fishing" is introduced.

The narrator who opens this story does not tell the interior story of "the lady of little fishing." Instead, a second narrator is introduced into the storytelling frame. Reuban Mitchell wanders into the camp of the initial narrator, and while sitting around the fire, he tells the

tale of the town they are burning as it was thirty years before. An exchange between these two narrators makes it evident that Mitchell, too, participates in the prescriptive language mode associated with male print discourse in the story. In setting up his tale, Mitchell describes the entrance of the nameless Lady as follows:

"...there wasn't any nonsense at Little Fishing-
-until *she* came."

"Ah! *the she*!"

"Yes, the Lady, --our Lady, as we called her."

(6-7)

This exchange sets up the Lady as the object of the men's discourse: the men of Little Fishing, and the two men around the fire destroying it. The Lady is referred to as "*the she*" (emphasis mine), emphasizing her object position in the men's language. This objectifying language act is translated into a possessive physical act. The woman is "called" "our Lady" and the men collectively assume possession of her both linguistically and physically. They have claimed the power to both name and define the object of their language. Because we have witnessed the destructive results of the men's prescriptive language up to this point in the story, this sequence foreshadows the ultimate destruction of the Lady, brought about by a male linguistic ideology.

By handing off the story from the initial narrator to Reuban Mitchell, Woolson is invoking an oral form within her written text. The story is being passed from person to

person as oral tales are passed on, rather than being rendered in a fixed printed form. In using this structure, Woolson evades the rigidity and prescriptiveness that she associates with the print and print-like discourse of the men. Instead, her tale appears fluid, as if it were being continually reshaped in the retelling, and in the passing on from one narrator to the next. In this fashion, the story incorporates "multiple points of view" in the narrative act (Gebhard, 223). As the tale proceeds, the oral power is handed off yet again, to the Lady herself. Though the Lady is never a formal narrator, she acquires an oral linguistic power in the course of the story which gives her space, albeit limited, to throw off the imposing definitions of the men. In this process, the dynamics of gender and print are both complicated and clarified. Though the men are speaking, they invoke both the language and the prescriptive practice associated with print discourse. Though Woolson is writing, she adopts the fluid and ever-changing style of orality by creating a structure wherein the tale is passed from storyteller to storyteller. This style creates the context for the Lady's own assumption of oral power, as the tale is passed to her in turn.¹² This inner narrative structure mimics the inter-narrative structure, whereby Woolson has taken male-authored stories and, in her retelling, infused a female oral power into a male written narrative.

The Lady is a representative of oral power early in the story, because she is a travelling preacher, and thus a

travelling speaker. But, in my view, the Lady does not assume her oral power until the story's conclusion.¹³ Rather, she becomes the object of the men's prescriptive discourse early in the tale, and attempts to free herself only after it is too late. A signal of the Lady's initial collusion in the men's ideology is her name. Mitchell states: "She did not give any name; we called her simply our Lady, and she accepted the title" (7). By accepting the men's naming of her, the Lady makes herself subject to their will, just as the venerable homes of Little Fishing were subject to the will of the initial narrator. As in that instance, the linguistic impulse is quickly transferred into destructive action. In this case, the men begin by making a home for the Lady which is in actuality a prison, described thus: "For we had given her our best wigwam, and fenced it off with pine saplings so that it looked like a miniature fortress. The Lady did not suggest this stockade; it was our idea, and with one accord we worked at it like beavers, and hung up a gate with a ponderous bolt inside" (8). This "stockade" is ostensibly to protect the Lady's virtue from the men, who are both protectors and, in their own eyes, the potential danger. In reality, the "fortress" is used to enforce the Lady's virtue. The men create an ideology of the Lady as a saint, and proceed to enforce this ideology on the human woman in both word and deed.¹⁴ This ideology is expressed in the language of Reuban Mitchell:

The Lady wore always her dove-colored robe...She came and went among us like a spirit; she knew no fear...It seemed as though she was not of earth...so heavenly was her pity. She took up our sins, one by one, as an angel might...It was a wonderful sight, that lily face under the pine-trees, that spotless woman standing alone in the glare of the fire. (8)

The Lady is cast as angelic by the men, and this ideology is imposed upon her. Moreover, because she is viewed as something other than human, she is deemed public property and denied any individual rights, including the right to individual desire. The phrase describing the fortress, "it was our idea, and with one accord we worked at it," suggests that the Lady is imprisoned by the common ideology of the men. This ideology is made physical in the symbol of the fortress, but it is also an imprisoning linguistic ideology, manifested in the phrase, "our Lady."

The story makes it clear that ideology and reality are not necessarily in accordance, however. The men attempt to cast the Lady as someone in need of their protection, someone risking danger by entering the public world of men rather than retreating within her private fortress. The delusional status of this ideology is revealed by an account of the Lady's travels prior to arriving at Little Fishing:

At the Sault the priests had driven her out, but nothing fearing, she went on into the wilderness,

and so, coming part of the way in canoes, part of the way along-shore, she had reached our far island. Marvellous kindness had she met with, she said; the Indians, the half-breeds, the hunters, and the trappers had all received her, and helped her on her way from camp to camp. They had listened to her words also. At Portage they had begged her to stay through the winter, and offered to build her a little church for Sunday services. Our men looked at each other. Portage was the worst camp on the lake, notorious for its fights; it was a mining settlement. (9)

Though the Lady fears nothing, the men use their language in an attempt to recast the Lady as their dependent and they as her protectors. When the Lady asserts her individual will by revealing her plans to leave the camp, the men immediately assert their own notions of her frailty and inability to travel alone as an inducement for her to stay. Though the Lady has been travelling alone with great success prior to her arrival in Little Fishing, the men attempt to dissuade her in her project by verbally representing her as a weak woman. They mention the snow: "The Lady could never travel through it, --could she, now?" (9). The men's consensus as to the Lady's inabilities is taken for an objective assessment of her capabilities. In this manner, the men use their language to force their ideology on the object of their discourse, the Lady.

The men also use their language to impose their view of reality on the world around them. When the Lady proposes moving on to the Burnt-Wood River settlement, they tell her it "no longer exists," colluding with one another to destroy it after dissuading her. As the group's doctor puts it: "It will be an easy job to clean it out, boys. We'll send over a party to-night..." (10). Again, the men take their ideology, which is presumed to represent reality, and then violently alter reality to accommodate ideology.

It is not difficult to see the parallels between the men's treatment of the Lady and the societal climate at the end of nineteenth-century, particularly in the world of publishing. Woolson casts the print world as male and hostile to women. She exposes the ideology imposed upon strong women by men who would view them as weak, and highlights that language, particularly the print-informed language of men, is used as the vehicle of this ideology. As with "At the Château of Corinne," Woolson emphasizes that ideology and reality are not identical, though the men who participate in the ideology would attempt to make it so. But "The Lady of Little Fishing" goes one step farther, in suggesting that prescriptive language necessarily becomes destructive action. The narrators destroy Little Fishing just as the residents of Little Fishing plan to destroy the Burnt-Wood River settlement, for the preservation of their mistaken beliefs about women. The fact that the latter town is called "Burnt-Wood" heightens the similarity between the actions within the

story and its framing narrative. In both cases, prescriptive language has led to destructive action. This connection is reinforced by the death of the Lady at the conclusion of the story. However, the story does offer a strategy of both resistance and expression to the woman: her voice.

Woolson's story employs the same strategy it advocates, by presenting an oral structure with a powerful, verbal woman as its source. In so doing, Woolson creates her version of print discourse as something other than the prescriptive, destructive discourse of the men. Incorporating aspects of orality, the printed form becomes more fluid, more open to the interaction of particular tellers and listeners, and thus potentially less subject to the imprisoning collective ideology she depicts.

The Lady's verbal power is brought to the forefront of the story when she asserts her existence as a human woman, admitting that she loves one man among the group. When the Lady does finally free herself from the ideology of the men, it is not an unambiguous declaration of independence. She states: "Let me be your servant,--your slave--anything--anything, so that I am not parted from you, my lord and master, my only, only love!" (22) The Lady fairly debases herself to an individual man in the party, the one man who does not share the collective obsession with the Lady. Yet in making this choice the Lady frees herself from the ideology of the group, even in the act of self-deprecation toward the individual man. As Gebhard states: "...her

gesture of submission is nevertheless a claim to power" (227). This idea is carried in the response of the Doctor in learning of the Lady's individual desire: "...our idol come down among us and showed herself to be but common flesh and blood! What wonder that we stand aghast? What wonder that our hearts are bitter? What wonder (worse than all!) that when the awe has quite vanished, there is strife for the beautiful image fallen from its niche?" (20). When the Lady finally makes her proclamation of love for the man of Little Fishing, this statement frees her from the constraining definitions imposed by the group of men who define her as "angel," "spotless woman," and "saint." It is in this declaration that the woman ceases to be a possession, "our Lady" of Little Fishing, and obtains an autonomous identity as "the Lady of Little Fishing." The fact that this subject-position forms the title for the story indicates that it is the Lady's autonomous identity that survives even after her death. And though the Lady laments her own actions in the last passages of the story, she has acted, and has found the ability to speak. For the majority of the story, the Lady's words are carried only in paraphrase or narrative description. By the conclusion, she speaks at great length in direct quotation. The *form*, if not the content, of her final words indicates that she has grasped oral power and moves beyond the defining powers of the men. Though she is self-critical, her last words verify her independence: "I thought..." "I held..." "I am..." (23).

In the framing narrative, Reuban Mitchell states: "Love is not made to order" (24). It is in loving that the Lady finds her voice and frees herself from the men who would order her universe. Likewise, in her incorporation of oral forms into her writing, Woolson creates a narrative form which resists the ordered prescriptiveness of the print discourse identified with the nineteenth century male, and allows her to express herself in the midst of the constraining demands of the marketplace as both author and woman.

The title character of "Jeannette" also faces a society that would constrain her verbally and physically. But for Jeannette the battle for autonomy is not solely a gendered one, but a racial and cultural one as well. Jeannette is described as follows: "Strange beauty sometimes results from mixed descent, and this girl had French, English, and Indian blood in her veins, the three races mixing and intermixing among her ancestors, according to the custom of the Northwestern border" (144). Jeannette status as a woman of "mixed descent" subjects her to the various prejudices of the Fort Mackinac community that forms the primary setting for the story, and to encroachments on her identity based on others' perceptions of how she should behave. For example, when the Fort Mackinac community learns that Jeannette has become the pupil of narrator Sarah Corlyne, their responses reveal the mindset of the area. The "young wife" of a major who has trouble with her servants suggests teaching Jeannette to cook; Madame Captain, who sews for a number of small

children, suggests that Mrs. Corlyne teach Jeannette to sew; the "most dashing lieutenant" suggests inviting her to their social events, to the shocked dismay of his wife; and the local chaplain asserts: "Why not bring her into the church? Those French half-breeds are little better than heathen" (144). The roles assigned to Jeannette, based on her sex and race, are domestic servant, sexual object, and "heathen." Though narrator Sarah Corlyne resists these traditional stereotypes, calling them to the reader's attention for their reprehensibility, she engages in yet another sort of encroachment on Jeannette's identity; a distinctly printed one.¹⁵ Jeannette initially enters the Corlyne home as an instructor, teaching Sarah Corlyne beadwork. But Sarah quickly turns the teacher-pupil tables, and proposes that she teach Jeannette to read English. This project is not Jeannette's idea. Indeed, Sarah Corlyne must pay Jeannette to be her pupil. In this respect, Sarah Corlyne colludes in the prescriptive male world, which is represented in this story by Fort Surgeon Rodney Prescott.¹⁶ Like the Doctor in "The Lady of Little Fishing," Prescott, while claiming a secret love for Jeannette, repeatedly tries to confine Jeannette to his cultural and gender codes. Yet Jeannette's peculiar predicament, being viewed as a racial, cultural, and gendered inferior who needs to be altered in accordance with the paradigms of the white, middle-class, predominantly male community, also carries its own distinct form of resistance. While Sarah Corlyne and Rodney Prescott represent the

educated, printed traditions of literature and medicine, Jeannette represents an oral mode which is the product of French, English and Native influences. While, in printed language, meaning is derived through a linear progression of words, Jeannette's speech gains both its meaning and its subversive/expressive power by shifting between French and English, by using sentence constructions that defy traditional English grammar, and by altering the meanings of the words she encounters. What Sarah Corlyne naively describes as "her patois of broken English and degenerate French" is the basis of Jeannette's orality (142). This oral power enables Jeannette to assert her identity even in the face of the various attempts to reform her.

In some cases, Jeannette's oral power is used in direct contrast to the printed tradition, as when Sarah Corlyne teaches Jeannette the poem "Ivry." Though Sarah proclaims the reading lessons "slow," she finds Jeannette has a particular aptitude for orality: "When wearied with the dull routine, I gave an oral lesson in poetry. If the rhymes were of the chiming, rhythmic kind, Jeannette learned rapidly, catching the verses as one catches a tune, and repeating them with a spirit and dramatic gesture all her own" (145). It is Jeannette's ability to make the printed words "all her own" in the act of speaking which enables her to assert her identity, even in the face of Sarah Corlyne's efforts at linguistic conversion. And though Corlyne's statement seems to indicate that it is ability rather than interest or

resistance that makes one lesson "slow" and another "rapid," there is indication that Jeannette is shaping the language lessons to her own ends. This reading is reinforced by Sarah Corlyne's lament over "Ivry": "And yet, after all my explanations, she only half understood it; the 'knights' were always 'nights' in her mind, and the 'thickest carnage' was always 'thickest carriage'" (145). Sarah Corlyne's blatant assumption that she knows what is going on "in her [Jeannette's] mind" is belied by Jeannette's ability to take the English words she is taught and translate them, not only into her own style, but into her own code of meaning as well. This theme appears again when Sarah asks Jeannette to recite for Rodney Prescott. Though she begins with "Ivry," Sarah tells Jeannette to choose another selection. Sarah expresses her surprise when Jeannette selects a poem in French, "[i]nstead of repeating anything I had taught her" (151). Jeannette furthers her dominance over print discourse when she intentionally leaves off the last verse of the poem, to alter its meaning and import: "More sad so...Marie she die now...she die for love; *c'est beau!*" (152-3).

Though both Sarah and Rodney are impressed by Jeannette's performance, their admiration does not prevent them from trying to alter Jeannette, both linguistically and socially. Rodney's social impositions on Jeannette increase throughout the story, as he realizes his growing "love" for her, but resists his impulses due to Jeannette's race. But Jeannette's ability to resist the prescriptions of print

through speech serves her in her social dealings as well. One episode which exemplifies both the prescriptive efforts of the suitor and Jeannette's verbal ability occurs when Sarah and Rodney converse at Arch Rock, and Jeannette comes upon the scene. The Arch itself, which plays a significant role in the episode, is described as "a natural bridge over a chasm one hundred fifty feet above the lake" and "a narrow, dizzy pathway hanging between sky and water" (156). Sarah and Rodney are discussing the "foolhardiness" of anyone who would dare to cross the bridge. Rodney has no sooner stated, "I would not so much as raise my eyes to see any one cross," when Jeannette runs out onto the arch bridge to refute him, "balancing herself and laughing gayly" (157). Both Sarah and Rodney assume that Jeannette is in danger. Rodney rushes onto the bridge to "save" Jeannette, though it is he who is in danger when a "fragment of rock broke off under his foot and fell into the abyss below" (157). Yet Rodney asserts his paradigm of the helpless woman in need of rescue and insists on Jeannette's compliance, despite her sure-footing and his precarious ground, in the following exchange:

"Go back, Monsier Rodenai," cried Jeannette, seeing his danger.

"Will you come back too, Jeannette?"

"*Moi? C'es aut' chose,*" answered the girl gayly, tossing her pretty head.

"Then I shall come out and carry you back, wilful [sic] child," said the surgeon.

A peal of laughter broke from Jeannette as he spoke, and then she began to dance on her point of rock, swinging herself from side to side, marking the time with a song." (158)

Rodney does attempt to carry Jeannette back, and they struggle on the Arch Rock until Jeannette flees into the woods.

Jeannette's resistance is multifaceted in this scene. Initially, she uses her actions, running out onto the Arch, to demonstrate the inadequacy of Rodney's words. He has claimed he would not lift an eye to see anyone cross, which is clearly not the case. But Jeannette's resistance is verbal as well. When Rodney attempts to cast Jeannette in a chivalric script with himself as the rescuer, Jeannette's warning that he is in danger makes it clear that she, as with "Ivry," has no need of "knights."¹⁷ When Rodney reasserts his claim, asking Jeannette to leave the rock, her self-assertive response comes in French. By shifting the language of their dialogue, Jeannette shifts its terms as well, placing her version of self above the one which Rodney creates for her, and taking charge of their conversation by controlling its form as well as its content. It is this particular form of orality--a perpetually shifting multilingualism--which creates Jeannette's self-expression and provides her primary form of linguistic resistance. She forces others to keep up with her jumps from language to language, thus forcing them to follow behind her as she leads the conversation.

Jeannette employs this technique again when she encounters Sarah after the incident on the Arch. Sarah attempts to scold Jeannette like a child for her game upon the rock, and Jeannette replies: "Ce n'est rien, madam. I cross l'Arche when I had five year. Mais, Monsier Rodenai le Grand, he raise his eye to look this time, I think," and goes on to laugh "triumphantly" at the conclusion of her remark (158). Here again, Jeannette shifts back and forth between French and English, thus controlling the form of the conversation. Even when Jeannette speaks in English, she employs oral forms by altering conventional English pronunciations, as in "l'Arche," and "Rodenai." She also creates sentence structures which resist the traditional forms of English syntax and tense, as in "I had five year." In each of these techniques, Jeannette uses the oral form to "triumph" in the linguistic medium in which Sarah considers herself the instructor. Jeannette uses her shifts in form and meaning to take the dominant role in the conversation, reversing the child-parent and pupil-teacher relationships which Sarah Corlyne has attempted to impose upon Jeannette through her use of language. Jeannette also uses this language form to ridicule her misguided protector, by referring to him as "Rodenai le Grand." So though Jeannette is repeatedly treated as an inferior, she is able to demonstrate her linguistic superiority through her use of orality. Jeannette's multilingualism provides the key to her

resistance to white society's linguistic imperialism, as well as to the gender imperialism of "Rodenai le Grand."

Jeannette employs other modes of oral resistance as well. Her conversation with Sarah concludes with laughter, and her conversation with Rodney concludes with Jeannette's laughing and singing, all of which are non-verbal oral expressions. These non-linguistic communications are both expressive and disruptive of the linguistic codes of her antagonists.¹⁸ Because she is laughing and singing on the bridge, Jeannette is expressing her comfort with this seemingly dangerous environment, her ease and confidence in her own ability to protect herself, her mockery of Rodney's ironic efforts to save her, and the joy that she takes in winning the linguistic and social games in which the Fort community engages her. In addition, the laugh and the song, as non-verbal communications, disrupt the linearity of Rodney's own speech. These expressions break the pattern of grammar and signification associated with written language, creating a new code of communication which is both non-linear and non-verbal. So in this manner as well, Jeannette uses her verbal abilities to disrupt the language of her would-be protector, and to assert herself into the linguistic space created by this disruption.

Despite Jeannette's continual reassertions of herself and her abilities, and despite his own assumptions of racial, gender, and cultural superiority, (he is, for example, disgusted because Jeannette cannot "write her name

correctly"), Rodney persists in trying to "train this forest flower so that it could take its place in the garden," by proposing marriage (166). The proposal scene exemplifies most fully the gender and cultural assumptions of both Rodney and Sarah, and demonstrates the full abilities of Jeannette's linguistic resistance.

When Sarah and Rodney arrive at Jeannette's home, Rodney does not ask Jeannette to marry him. He orders: "I will marry you. You shall be my wife. Do not look so startled. I mean it; it is really true" (172). Like the men of Little Fishing, Rodney mistakenly believes that what he *means*, what he expresses in language, is necessarily synonymous with what is "true." Neither Sarah nor Rodney even supposes that Jeannette may refuse him. Moreover, though Rodney tells Jeannette "I accept you as you are" and "You shall have everything you want," it is clear that his idea of marriage is inextricably bound up in his own class, race, cultural, and gender assumptions, when he describes their prospective marriage: "You need not go to school...You shall have silk dresses and ribbons, like the ladies at the Mission-House this summer. You shall see all the great cities, you shall hear beautiful music" (172). But like the Lady of Little Fishing, Jeannette is not made to order, nor will she take orders. When she first questions the proposal, Sarah and Rodney assume she has not comprehended the offer, and again Rodney states: "It is quite true; you shall be my wife...Do you understand what I am saying Jeannette? See! I give you

my hand, in token that it is true" (172). But Jeannette's response is incredulity and not ignorance, for she refuses the proposal flatly, citing her engagement to another man. Jeannette is forced to state her case twice before her audience begins to grasp her refusal. She states first, "You think I marry you? Have you not heard of Baptiste? Know, then, that I love one finger of him more than all of you, ten times, hundred times" (172). When this refusal does not sink in, she tries again, this time employing the multilingual shifting she demonstrated on the bridge: "*Oui, mon cousin Baptiste, the fisherman. We marry soon--tenez--la fête de Saint André*" (173). Even after these two sound refusals, Rodney "looked bewildered" and proceeds to dismiss her previous engagement as "one of your customs" (173). Jeannette responds by crying out, "*Je vous abhorre; je vous déteste,*" but even after this seemingly incontrovertible statement, Sarah takes up the case in saying: "perhaps you do not understand. Dr. Prescott asks you to marry him; Father Piret shall marry you, and all your friends shall come" (173). Even in the face of Jeannette's persistent refusals, both Sarah and Rodney continue to read Jeannette as an uncomprehending simpleton, rather than as an adult making an autonomous decision regarding her own life. At one point Sarah Corlyne even scolds Jeannette by crying out "Child!," and Jeannette offers the conversation's closing comments in response to this presumption: "I am not a child. *Je suis femme, moi!...Allez!*" (174).

Throughout the refusal scene, both Sarah and Rodney try to impose their paradigms on Jeannette using language. They believe that by repeatedly asserting their version of "truth" that they can create the reality they name. Moreover, both Rodney and Sarah assume throughout the conversation that Jeannette does not understand them. But Jeannette's verbal power demonstrates that the inverse is true; they do not understand her. Jeannette's verbal power places her beyond their grasp, and thus beyond their comprehension. Throughout this exchange, Jeannette uses an oral mode particularly suited to the identity she protects and asserts. Jeannette repeatedly shifts between English and French throughout this conversation, forcing Sarah and Rodney to shift their own forms of communication in deference to her. But in addition to controlling the discourse through her use of multilingualism, Jeannette also affirms her cultural identity through this linguistic act. Because neither Sarah nor Rodney is able to jump rapidly from language to language as Jeannette does, her very use of this oral mode demonstrates their verbal inadequacies in dealing with her, and thus refutes their repeated assertions of cultural and racial superiority. In addition, Sarah and Rodney are made to look idiotic for their incomprehension by the conclusion of the exchange, in a precise reversal of the intelligence hierarchy they assume throughout the conversation. Compounding Jeannette's racial and cultural assertions, she concludes with an assertion of her womanhood which refutes both

Rodney's vision of "the ladies at the Mission-House" and Sarah's exclamation, "Child!" The implication is that, in English, Jeannette's only options are to be the middle-class "lady" or the "mixed descent" "child." By offering her gendered self-assertion, "*Je suis femme, moi!*", in French, Jeannette evades the social script which others force upon her in their language.

In each of these stories, the heroine uses an oral medium to resist the impositions of male language, as Woolson constructs it, and male society as well. Through this technique, Woolson is able to call to task the publishers and writers among her peers who would denigrate women writers on the basis of their sex. But Woolson's use of orality is more than reactionary, more than a simple act of revenge. By employing the narrative frame of the storyteller in selected short works of fiction, by incorporating the female voice into her work, and by employing her own multilingualism in the verbal communication of one of her characters, Woolson participates in an oral-print narrative mode, which carries different narrative standards and functions than a strictly printed mode. As such, Woolson distinguishes her own fiction from that she would critique, by resisting the prescriptive narrative act which claims itself to be "truth," and foregrounding a more subjective narrative style, where each speaker has the ability to shape and "own" a particular tale. Moreover, Woolson casts this narrative form as one particularly suited to women in their efforts to resist the

ideology of passivity and "separate spheres" which the men about them advocate. So Woolson, within her tales, provides a strategy for resistance, but a strategy for expression as well. Her own works enact the strategies which her characters employ, by drawing on the same source of verbal power as her female heroines. Further, while her heroines arrest male linguistic prescription and turn it to their own ends, so Woolson's stories, in responding to male-authored texts, reenact this framework by creating her fellow male authors as characters in her works, characters whose power of language is usurped by their female counterparts through the use of language.

The modes of orality portrayed within Woolson's tales vary from heroine to heroine. For Mrs. Winthrop, verbal ambiguity is the key to obtaining economic security and restoring a female literary tradition. For the Lady of Little Fishing, speaking is the means for freeing oneself from a male-created prison of language. And for Jeannette, both multilingualism and non-verbal expression form the tools for asserting a self in the face of racial and gender prejudice. Each heroine uses an oral strategy particularly suited to her situation. Moreover, the results vary from heroine to heroine: Mrs. Winthrop is forced into a less-than-desirable marriage, but it is one in which she exercises her verbal power; the Lady of Little Fishing dies, but she dies self-defined; Jeannette chooses her own life and marries the man of her choice. It is perhaps in this creation of individual female characters

with personal verbal strategies and varied results that Woolson best represents the situation of the woman author at the turn of the century. For Woolson's work demonstrates that, while the dilemmas and strategies faced by women are similar, their responses will be their own.¹⁹ In this respect, Woolson negotiates the implications of writing-as-a-woman and writing-as-herself, for she participates in an oral strategy which has shared gendered associations, while simultaneously acknowledging that not all women's writing will be alike. Thus Woolson's work asks us to reconsider the category of "women's writing," as well as reconsider the ways in which we evaluate writing itself. Woolson's work forces us to distinguish between an ideology of separate spheres and a social reality where women have power, and enact this power in varied ways and with varied degrees of success.

In creating fictions which question the gendered categories of writing, Woolson creates works that demand to be read on their own terms. Yet she does this, in part, by drawing strict gender lines and then crossing them; by depicting a male mode of print discourse which destroys and a female mode of orality which defies, then reshaping both these modes for her own distinct written expression. There are other means by which to challenge the gendered categories of speech and writing while reforming the narrative project, however. Turning to the works of Sarah Orne Jewett, we see the sexes less stringently divided in their language use, as both men

and women are incorporated into the pastoral, oral world of *The Country of the Pointed Firs*.

¹ For further discussion of Woolson's absence from scholarly study, see Torsney, *Traditions* 153 and Torsney, *Grief of Artistry*, particularly 5-13. A thorough delineation of Woolson's influence on James' work appears in Dean's "Constance Fenimore Woolson and Henry James: The Literary Relationship."

² Dean notes Woolson's discomfort with "women's limited sphere for writing" (*Homeward Bound* 17). For other readings which confirm Woolson's resistance to the gendered ideologies of writing, see Brehm, 52-54; Gebhard; Kitterman, 49; and Weimer, *Women Artists*.

³ Brehm draws this quotation from Clare Benedict's *Constance Fenimore Woolson*, 21-22 (London: Ellis, 1929-30).

⁴ Works which have identified the woman artist theme and its distinct plot in Woolson's short fiction include Torsney's *Grief of Artistry* and Weimer's "Women Artists, Women Exiles." See also Kitterman, 49.

⁵ See Torsney, *Grief of Artistry* 88-90, for a full discussion of the connections between Woolson and Mme de Staël; Weimer, Introduction xxxv, addresses Woolson's invocation of de Staël and of Elizabeth Barrett Browning as a female literary context for this story.

⁶ Most feminist readings of this story address this passage as evidence of Woolson's "critique of men who belittle women writers" (Weimer, *Women Artists* 11). For examples, see Torsney, *Grief of Artistry* 92; Weimer, *Women Artists* 10.

⁷ Two theorists have noted this concept of a woman's feigning conformity to a male ideology of femininity in order to secure an

economically advantageous marriage in Woolson's novel *For the Major*.

See Dean, *Homeward Bound* 19-20 and Weimer, Introduction xxv.

Interestingly, no prior theorist has suggested the possibility of this same theme's presence in "At the Château of Corrine," nor noted the possible correspondence between these two Woolson works.

⁸ Examples of this reading occur in Torsney, *Grief of Artistry* 87-107; Weimer, *Women Artists* 9-10; and Kitterman, 53. Torsney argues that "the story ends tragically" (90), while Weimer refers to "Katharine's acquiescence" (9). I concur with these theorists' readings of Katharine's quest for independence, and Woolson's critique of male critics, but we depart in our readings of the story's conclusion.

⁹ For a discussion of the significance of naming and identity in Woolson's tale "Miss Grief," see Torsney, Introduction 12. For an alternate reading of the Benjamin Franklin figure, see Torsney, *Grief of Artistry* 94.

¹⁰ This narrator precurses the narrator in "Miss Grief," a writer/critic who has been described as "unreliable" (Dean, *Literary Relationship* 6), "unable to see beyond surface representation" (Torsney, *Grief of Artistry* 83), and as possessing a "self-incriminating egotism" (Dean, *Literary Relationship* 5).

¹¹ My reading of "The Lady of Little Fishing" concurs on several points with the reading offered by Caroline Gebhard. Though Gebhard does not deal specifically with discourse analysis, her observations on the self-centeredness and limitations of the frame narrator, her belief in the Lady's linguistic power in spite of an ultimate demise, and her reading of the tale as an overturning of a male-centered domestic/sexual

ideology, all correspond to my own readings of "The Lady of Little Fishing."

¹² Gebhard makes a similar argument, asserting: "Through the filter of a dialogue between these two men, Woolson gives speech and desire to a woman" (224) and "By making the woman's voice central to the story...Woolson breaks Harte's illusion of a self-sufficient, all-male world" (224).

¹³ Joan Myers Weimer argues that the Lady's linguistic power is concentrated at the opening of the story, when her words give her power over the men, and is lost at the end of the story (Introduction xxvi-xxvii; Women Artists 6-7). My reading reverses this model, seeing the Lady as having gained verbal power at the tale's conclusion. Gebhard offers a reading similar to my own, 227.

¹⁴ Gebhard, 227, identifies this ideology in terms of the nineteenth century "Cult of True Womanhood" discussed by Barbara Welter. Weimer sees "The Lady of Little Fishing" as an overturning of the "angel in the house" concept (Introduction xxvii). In both cases, the story is read as a response to nineteenth century gender ideologies.

¹⁵ For a discussion of Sarah Corlyne as narrator, see Weimer, Women Artists 5.

¹⁶ The gender dynamics of the tale are altered somewhat by the fact that Sarah Corlyne is both female and a representative of prescriptive, male discourse. Though I have chosen to focus this analysis on Jeannette rather than Sarah, I see Sarah as a figure who initially colludes with male discourse, represented by Rodney Prescott, but retrospectively gains some insight into the cultural assumptions in

which she has participated. It is only then that she gains the power to tell the tale.

¹⁷ For a discussion of Woolson's inversion of the chivalric knight model in her tale "Miss Grief," see Torsney, *Grief of Artistry* 80-1, 86.

¹⁸ This idea is derived, in part, from Hélène Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa."

¹⁹ The conception of women's writing which I advocate here has been influenced by my reading of *A Living of Words*.

CHAPTER 2

Writing in Bergamot-Scented Ink: The Fusion of Oral and Written Narrative Forms in Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs*

In Woolson's world, print power belonged to men and verbal power belonged to women, and only a particularly skillful exercise of verbal power permitted a heroine, and by extension her author, to claim a printed power of her own. Verbal power is the primary form of orality in the Woolson text. Sarah Orne Jewett greatly expands the possibilities of orality within the female-authored text. In *Country of the Pointed Firs* local language, a distinctly oral mode, belongs to the entire community. Moreover, Jewett takes her depiction of orality beyond the level of verbal power, using orality as a structural and aesthetic principle of narrative form. While orality still refers to verbal power in the Jewett text, it also refers to incidents which prompt the structural reformation of the narrative along the lines of the oral told tale, using principles of sound and narrative structure drawn from oral storytelling traditions.¹ This expanding of the oral project does not disassociate orality from its gendered implications, however. Like each of the works in this study, Jewett's novel depicts orality as having a particular function when exercised by women. Orality permits the Fir-country women to express their individuality;

to play a pivotal, powerful role within their community; to reshape that community and its meaning in the act of storytelling; and by extension, to draw both author and reader outside the strict bounds of the textual relationship and into the oral tradition in which they participate. In so doing, the gendered presentation of orality in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* asks its reader-listener to reconsider the defining points of print discourse, and to formulate a new definition of narrative which includes oral structures and aesthetics, by extension acknowledging women's contributions to the narrative act.

The two most evident types of orality in Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs* are the extensive use of local language in the text and the use of an oral narrative structure whereby the narration is handed off from character to character through a series of inset tales. Previous theorists have observed these uses of language and narrative/narratorial structure in Jewett's work.² However, when taken in combination these two oral structures produce a third type of orality which defines the distinct oral mode of the novel. By combining the narration hand-off with the use of local language, Jewett creates each of her characters as a speaking subject within the novel. She defines each of her characters as a storyteller. The frame narrator tells her story through writing; nearly every other character encountered tells stories verbally, with distinct emphasis on speaking style (vocabulary, accent, sentence structure,

inflection, facial/body language, etc.). Through this technique, Jewett recreates the verbal aspects of storytelling which are normally absent from the written work, thus drawing on an oral sensibility to shape and inform her written work.³ Individually, each of these techniques might be characterized as an oral structure. A trend in the previous scholarship on Jewett has been to relegate each of these textual qualities to a different area of discussion. Local language is seen as part and parcel of the local color/regionalist project, a way to create colorful characterizations and to convey a sense of region; the creation of individual speech idioms for individual characters is taken as a simple outgrowth of this descriptive characterization process, a way to invest further quaintness into the depiction of the community; the handing off of the story from teller to teller is often taken as a purely structural issue, part of the ongoing debate as to whether Jewett's use of a "non-narrative" or non-plot driven style negates the work's categorization as "novel."⁴ What I would like to emphasize is that the use of local language, individual speech idioms, and the use of the inset story are not disparate entities.⁵ Collectively, these techniques--the use of local language, the handing off of the story from narrator to narrator, and the creation of narrators as storytellers, with distinct speaking styles--point to a larger, oral sensibility at work in the novel. They reflect

the work's larger engagement with the processes of oral tradition.

Using this framework, criticism which highlights the so-called fragmentary or incoherent aspects of the text is misplaced, applying a set of critical judgements for literature which are based solely on printed texts. The aspects of *The Country of the Pointed Firs* which are most heavily criticized are the very structural components which speak to an oral dynamic within the written work. Therefore the critique of Jewett's work on these grounds is not only gendered, based on a male model of printedness, but drastically misjudges the literary traditions to which the work belongs.

From very early in the narrative, the narrator is characterized as both a writer and a listener. She recalls, in near juxtaposition, "a long piece of writing...which I was bound to do" (8), and also the many instances when Mrs. Todd "told [to her]...very commonplace news of the day, or...all that lay deepest in her heart" (9).⁶ This dual role represents a two-fold engagement with language. The narrator participates in a tradition of print discourse as a producer of written works. She also participates in the oral tradition of Dunnet Landing as a listener. By identifying this dual role early in the narrative, Jewett renders the reader's role ambiguous. Is the reader a reader of a written tale produced by this writer? Or is the reader cast as a *listener* to the tales of Dunnet Landing, just as the narrator

is? I believe that the reader is asked to play both roles throughout the balance of the narrative, and that this expectation is modeled by the narrator's own participation in both print and oral discourse traditions.

For the purposes of analysis, I will refer to characters as "inset narrators" when they tell a story in their own voice within the course of the larger narrative. Though some argue that even these stories are filtered through the frame narrator's perceptions (Hild, 115), I align myself with the school of thought which sees a variety of narrative voices in *Country of the Pointed Firs*, "distinct characters whose languages and voices interact dialogically with the language and voice of the narrator" (Strain, 132, footnote 5). I see these characters as narrators in themselves, and therefore read the entire narrative as a written depiction of the storytelling act, a constant interplay between multiple narrators functioning in an oral chain whereby listeners become tellers, a chain which is carried on by the *listening* act of the reader.

Mrs. Todd appears as the first such narrator in the novel. In her first story, Mrs. Todd tells of her thwarted first love, a story which Mrs. Todd retells in greater detail later in the text. This first oral interchange between Mrs. Todd-as-narrator and frame-narrator-as-listener hearkens up selected qualities of women's gossip, as described by Patricia Meyer Spacks, by offering "a crucial means of self-expression, a crucial form of solidarity" (5) in "a verbal

mode marked above all by its fluidity" (6). Though Mrs. Todd's and the narrator's conversation is neither "idle" nor politically "serious," in the dichotomy Spacks describes, it does serve as a means of expression and community-building for both of the women involved (4-6). Or perhaps it serves as a source of community-building for *all* of the women involved, because the reader of the novel participates as a listener to Mrs. Todd's voice within this scene, thus creating an in-group status, like that described by Spacks, for the reader-listener of the tale as well as the characters. As such, this act of tale-telling transcends textual boundaries by placing the reader within Dunnet Landing's verbal community. Further, this tale-telling bridges the boundaries of the public and private, which Spacks also notes as a quality of gossip (6), by making this seemingly private conversation open to a wide audience of listeners. By incorporating Mrs. Todd's voice into the text in this manner, Jewett takes the particular qualities of orality--its fluidity, its ability to create a community, its ability to transcend the public and the private--and incorporates them into her written work, thus investing the written work with both its own powers and those of the spoken word.

Though this first inset tale is considerably shorter than the more elaborate tales which appear later in the text, it establishes the oral style which shapes the narrative, and offers a microcosm of the various techniques which I consider

under the blanket term "orality." First, the story of Mrs. Todd's first love is told in Mrs. Todd's voice. Though this fact is frequently noted in theoretical responses to the novel, it is often dismissed as a piece of colorful characterization. But I see the function of Mrs. Todd's voice, and the other various voices in the narrative, as having a significance far beyond their status as tidbits of the local color medium. By conveying Mrs. Todd's voice in direct discourse, Jewett transforms the reading act into a listening act. She conveys Mrs. Todd, not just as a colorful object of narrative, but as a creator of oral narratives. In so doing, Jewett establishes an oral chain, a mechanism whereby tales are transmitted from teller to a listener who then has the power to become the teller in turn. This idea of an oral chain is demonstrated by the novel itself, which depicts a variety of storytellers conveying tales to the narrator, who then shifts into the teller mode by transmitting the tales in turn to the reader. However, the narrator's role in the oral chain is an ambiguous one, which can be read in a variety of ways within this oral context. On the one hand, the narrator may be seen as a representative of print discourse, because she has, in theory, placed the written work which we now read into our hands. But she is also an active participant in oral discourse, because of her role as both listener and harvester of tales, going about Pointed Firs country and collecting tales to share with others. But the role of listener in the oral chain is always

potentially the role of teller, because a heard tale, created as a product of interaction between teller and listener, is subsequently in the repertoire of the listener. Thus it is possible to read the narrator of *The Country of the Pointed Firs* as both listener/teller and writer, occupying multiple roles in this language world.

But even acknowledging the narrator's function as a teller of tales does not wholly clarify her role in the oral chain. Is she a type of medium, who acts as simply the means for the new reader-listener to hear the actual voice of the previous teller? Or is she the true oral performer, who reenacts the voices and personalities of characters for the pleasure of her audience? This second reading raises many possibilities for the interpretation of *The Country of the Pointed Firs* as a theatrical, as well as oral, text. A third possibility created by the text is that the narrator is not the teller at all, but is instead sharing the moment of listening with the reading audience. Though there are cues which suggest a role of mediation/moderation for the narrator, the different time scope occupied by oral and written narratives collapses the use of the past tense and makes it possible for the reader to share the moment of telling and listening directly with Mrs. Todd and alongside of, but not necessarily moderated by, the written narrator.⁷

The very multiplicity of readings of the narrator's role within the oral context, and the wide variety of readings of the narrator's role in previous theory on Jewett, suggest

that the text already occupies a space outside of the linearity of traditional written discourse.⁸ The text generates multiplicity and ambiguity in its scholarship through its narrative structure. Regardless of whether one sees the narrator as the source of the voices in the text, as a passive transmitter of textual voices, or as a compatriot of the reader in the act of listening to Mrs. Todd, it should be clear that under any of these circumstances, the qualities of oral tradition/transmission are being employed by the text of *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. This usage of oral voice throws all traditional conceptions of author, narrator, reader, and audience into disarray, and requires a new, multi-valenced conception of these entities in order to grasp the linguistic complexities of the text. I argue that the text simultaneously invokes each of these structures, by refiguring itself as both oral and written tale.

When Mrs. Todd states in this initial story: "No, dear, him I speak of could never think of me...When we was young together his mother did n't favor the match, an' done everything she could to part us; and folks thought we both married well, but 't wa'n't what either of us wanted most..." (10), we recognize not only the local speech patterns, characterizing the novel as regional/local color fiction, but also the distinctive speech idiom of Mrs. Todd.⁹ This presentation of Mrs. Todd's distinctive voice conveys a sense of her as a *speaker*, emphasizing the distinctness between the printed narration and the oral-informed qualities of Mrs.

Todd's speech.¹⁰ Characterizing Mrs. Todd as a speaker, with a speaking voice clearly distinguishable from the more literary narration, is significant to the text's overall oral project. It emphasizes both the oral tradition of the depicted community, which forms the structural framework for the novel, and also utilizes the oral techniques of this tradition for sensory effect in the text, turning readers into listeners. The narrative description--a written technique juxtaposed against Mrs. Todd's oral speech--also highlights Mrs. Todd's qualities as a speaker, in ways that a transcription of her language cannot provide. For example, the speech quoted above is immediately followed by a chapter which highlights the speaking style of several characters. Mrs. Todd's medicinal consultations with her neighbors are described as follows: "...oftener two stout, hard-worked women from the farms came together, and detailed their symptoms to Mrs. Todd in loud and cheerful voices, combining the satisfactions of a friendly gossip with the medical opportunity" (11). The narrator goes on to state: "One afternoon when I had listened--it was impossible not to listen, with cottonless ears..." (12). These characterizations indicate that Mrs. Todd's interactions with her neighbors are "loud" and "cheerful" and "friendly." By emphasizing the qualities of volume and emotive inflection in the three women's voices, the narration heightens the sense of these women as speakers. Coupled with the previous transcription of Mrs. Todd's own speech, this description of

speaking style lifts the conversation off the two-dimensional page and asks the reader to listen to it, just as the narrator herself has found it "impossible not to listen." More than just an interesting bit of characteristic local color description, more than a presentation of characters both quirky and quaint, Jewett's narrative style asks us to reconsider the formation and aesthetics of narrative itself. Hers is an aesthetics of the ear, a narrative which demands that its readers be also listeners, and read within the stylistic parameters of both literary and oral traditions.

Gender is also raised as a pertinent issue with regard to orality in this passage. It is specified that Mrs. Todd's visitors, in this instance, are "two stout, hard-worked women" (12). Yet this description is generalized by the term "oftener," suggesting that the appearance of any two farm women, rather than a particular two, is a regular occurrence at Mrs. Todd's. Though we know Mrs. Todd has male visitors--the doctor, for example--it is her interaction with women that carries information about Mrs. Todd's speaking style and her qualities as a storyteller. Moreover, this information is conveyed here in the context of "friendly gossip," a description which relates to Patricia Meyer Spacks' discussion of gossip as a gendered activity. Moreover, the early example of orality, wherein Mrs. Todd tells her tale of lost love to the narrator, sets a pattern for the rest of the novel, creating orality, in these instances, as a product of this women's circuit. I use the term "oral circuit" to refer

to a single oral/storytelling event. Because the relation between teller and listener is reciprocal, involving mutual verbal negotiation, I see the individual storytelling act as having a circular, rather than linear, form. Hence the term "oral circuit." The term "oral chain" refers to the ongoing process of passing a story from teller to listener, who in turn becomes teller to a new listener, and so on. While these terms are intimately related, the term "oral circuit" confines itself to the individual oral storytelling act, while the term "oral chain" refers to a series of connected oral circuits. In the latter example, the oral circuit is made up of the narrator and Mrs. Todd, and is gendered female. Collectively, these depictions suggest that orality is the province of women. This depiction is both reinforced and questioned by the narrator's subsequent interaction with Captain Littlepage.

The very passage which indicates a characteristic marker of Mrs. Todd's speech--its volume--also prompts the narrator's retreat from the world of speech and into the world of writing. "One afternoon, when I had listened,--it was impossible not to listen, with cottonless ears,--and then laughed and listened again, with an idle pen in my hand, during a particularly spirited and personal conversation, I reached for my hat, and, taking blotting-book and all under my arm, I resolutely fled further temptation, and walked out past the fragrant green garden and up the dusty road" (12).¹¹ This passage sets up a rather precarious relationship between

speech and writing, or between print and orality. Mrs. Todd's speech forestalls the narrator's writing. The speech world seems to take over the written word, preventing its production while the narrator is defined as listener rather than writer. This passage sets up a power relationship between the spoken and the written word, with the spoken word dominating. When one is "listening" and "listening again," the pen is "idle." Clearly, this power relationship inverts the privileging of print discourse often exercised by the dominant culture.¹² But because this oral language forms the text of Jewett's written narrative, the relation between speech and writing is not solely defined by dominance and submission. Rather, the figure of the narrator serves as a link between the worlds of speech and writing, participating in both and synthesizing the principles of each into a new whole.¹³ The narrator's skill at listening provides her with narrative material and, even further, with an aesthetics of literature formed in the oral as well as the written tradition.

Yet the narrator's move, in this passage, into the world of her own writing, also represents a move away from the community of women and into the company of men. As such, print is defined as a male realm; and yet the narrator is clearly defined as a woman who traverses without difficulty in realms male and female, print and oral. In this fashion, Jewett simultaneously associates print with maleness and demonstrates women's ability to transcend these

categorizations. Just as the narrator's writing ink is scented with herbal bergamot, Jewett's text combines supposedly male and female forms to create a synthesized narrative product, one which has the power to "refresh the labors of anxious scribes" caught in a binding gender ideology (18).

Not surprisingly, the narrator's choice of a writer's retreat is a school. Here, the act of writing is intimately associated with education, specifically with institutional learning. It is into this context, and not "among the pennyroyal," that Captain Littlepage makes his entrance. He is immediately associated with the printed word upon his arrival. The narrator recalls Mrs. Todd's criticism that he "had overset his mind with too much reading." Appropriately, the first words from his mouth are printed ones, a quotation from *Paradise Lost*. He proceeds to address the merits of *Paradise Lost*, and his discomfort with the "great deal of low talk" one encounters in Shakespeare (21). Each of these instances places Captain Littlepage firmly within the context of print discourse. His very words are not his own, but rather are those of Milton and other writers. He is introduced to the reader through the lens, and words, of previous male authors. Further, while Littlepage presumably resists the crudeness in Shakespeare's plays, the phrase he uses to describe this discomfort, "low talk," suggests that his discomfort is as much with the speaking mode as with the content of the speech. The hierarchical relationship

suggested by the phrase "low talk" may imply that talk itself is low, compared with the elevated writing of Milton, which Littlepage himself describes as "lofty" (21). As Strain puts it, "Littlepage distinguishes between high and low talk, initially implying that he prefers the poetic language, which aestheticizes life, to colloquial speech, which recounts lived experience" (137). Thus Littlepage's critique of Shakespeare is based on Shakespeare's use of the colloquial tongue--a criticism that Jewett would not have been likely to share, given her own narrative project. Though Shakespeare is himself male, his use of "talk" makes him "low," and it is this rank that he shares with women, while the "lofty" ranks are reserved for male writers with no such oral or gender engagement.

This ranking of writing as privileged, and as associated with maleness, continues as Littlepage speaks further. Littlepage goes on to quote Darwin's autobiography on the topic of sea-captains: "there is no such king as a sea-captain; he is greater even than king or schoolmaster!" (23). Darwin is implicated in the characterization of print as a male realm, both by his invocation in the conversation and through the hierarchy of power which his quotation suggests. First are the sea-captains, second are the kings, third are the schoolmasters. All are male. There are no queens or schoolmistresses in Darwin's philosophy. In this instance, the hierarchy is more literal: a hierarchy of social and political power represented by men in powerful professions.

Littlepage's invocation of this hierarchy, through the use of Darwin's printed words, intimately links a male hierarchy of social and political power to the print realm. So this introduction of Captain Littlepage demonstrates a significant link between maleness, power, formal education, and the printed word. This link is emblematic of the nineteenth-century print ideology which Jewett resists through her text.

Even as this picture of male power is being presented it is being undermined. The "schoolmaster" here is the narrator, and not Captain Littlepage. Prior to his arrival, the narrator has used the teacher's stick to discipline a set of invading bees: "I rapped to call the bees to order as if they were unruly scholars" (18). The seating arrangement upon Captain Littlepage's arrival reflects their power arrangement: "I stepped down from the desk and offered him a chair by the window, where he seated himself at once...I returned to my fixed seat behind the teacher's desk, which gave him the lower place of a scholar" (20-21). Though the narrator offers to switch seats with Captain Littlepage, who declines, Captain Littlepage's authority as both a male and a representative of print discourse is called into question before he even speaks. Littlepage is placed in a lower position within the schoolroom hierarchy, and the narrator's knowledge on the origins of his "lofty" quotation suggests that he cannot pull rank on her through the use of literary reference. Far from the "secret handshake" which indicates a "joint participation in male discourse" between Littlepage

and the narrator (Rohloff, 42), the narrator's acknowledgement of Littlepage's quotation, in the context of their positions in the classroom, places her in the position of the teacher hearing her pupil's recitation. The narrator's status as a writer herself further skews the power hierarchy of sea-captain, king, and schoolmaster, since she, like Darwin, is the creator and namer of these power relationships through writing, rather than a passive participant in them. Captain Littlepage's name itself, Little-page, suggests his dwarfed status in the realm of print discourse, despite his lofty quotations.¹⁴

This subtle mockery of Captain Littlepage in an otherwise sympathetic treatment points to yet another dig directed at the maleness of print discourse and its associated power. For Captain Littlepage's inset tale can be seen as an intertextual questioning of the seafaring fictions of Poe and Melville. The fact that Littlepage is depicted as solid, with a "slow correctness" to his speech (26), then slightly insane, subject to "spells" and "reverie," (21, 34) places him among the company of Captain Ahab, Ishmael, and Poe's Pym. By taking these characters out of their contexts as adventurers and epic-tragic heroes within the male print tradition, and refiguring them as dotty old men peopling the same towns as the more astute and capable women characters of local color fiction (who are curiously absent from the male texts), Jewett subtly twits Poe's and Melville's written texts. Her refiguration of these characters through the

character of Captain Littlepage can be read as an ironic portrayal of the monomaniacal male hero, as well as a pointed critique of the absence of women in these male-authored texts. The fact that the narrator of *Pointed Firs* is frequently obliged to humor Captain Littlepage, that she finds his initial narrative "a little dull" and finds the man's appearance both "old" and "pathetic" by the conclusion of his tale, deftly reinterprets the grand "sea captain" lauded by Darwin as a sadly diminished figure who unknowingly parodies his own imagined grandeur through his narrative. This intertextual portrayal adds another dimension to the critique of male printedness within this episode and throughout the novel. The male figure is overthrown from his position in the Darwinian social hierarchy by his re-creation as a figure for sympathy rather than admiration, and because the story he tells is an alternately "dull" and lunatic rendering which attempts to aggrandize its own "pathetic" author and his ilk. As such, both the figure of Littlepage and his story, tempered by the narrator's reaction to them, suggest the misguidedness and self-importance of the male print tradition which they reference.

Yet even within this criticism of male writers there are levels of ambiguity. The structure of Captain Littlepage's narrative, including portions relayed to him by inset narrators such as Captain Gaffett, greatly resembles the narrative structure of *Frankenstein*. Moreover, the content of Littlepage's narrative, with its supernatural elements and

its action among the ice flows of the North Pole, further suggests an intertextual relationship with this female-authored text. It could be argued that Mary Shelley and Sarah Orne Jewett are, in effect, sharing a joke at the men's expense. Both Shelley and Jewett depict men who have gone slightly insane and, in so doing, critique the egotism of their male characters and their counterpart male authors. At the same time, however, the points at which Jewett's and Shelley's narratives intersect are also points of intersection between these narratives and the Melville and Poe texts. Therefore, it is possible to see Jewett's invocation of Shelley's narrative in one of two lights. First, she could be suggesting that we re-read Shelley's narrative as itself a parody of male social power and a critique of the exclusion of women from men's socio-political world. Or alternately, Jewett could be suggesting that all of these depictions are of a kind. Despite her own subtle critique of male seafaring fictions, Jewett's depiction lays the groundwork for the argument that these male and female-authored fictions are more similar than different. Each takes as its subject issues of social hierarchy, discovery through travel, and the implicit questioning of male exercise of power. Each is shaped by its engagement with the sea as setting, subject, and metaphor for the human dilemma. Therefore, the intertextuality of *The Country of the Pointed Firs* with these three other novels could be read as much as a bid for similarity as a condemnation.¹⁵ Within this context,

the soft mockery of Littlepage, and of the male tradition, rests on this tradition's inability to recognize its participation in a dual gender context. In the latter reading, Jewett makes a bid for recognizing male and female writing as both similar and equally valuable, though only the female writers seem aware of this circumstance.

Supporting this reading are the ambiguities in the presentation of Captain Littlepage. For while he strongly aligns himself with print discourse, he is participating in an oral storytelling process within the aforementioned sequence. He has heard a tale from Captain Gaffett, acting as listener in the oral circuit. He has conveyed this tale to the narrator, shifting from listener to teller in the oral chain. Captain Littlepage, in keeping with the oral project, conveys Captain Gaffett's tale in that man's own voice, complete with vocabulary and inflection characteristic of Gaffett rather than his own. We are even given descriptions of Captain Littlepage as a storyteller, as when he "made excited gestures, but still whispered huskily" (39). In each of these respects, Captain Littlepage is likened to Mrs. Todd and the other storytellers in the novel through the descriptions of their storytelling abilities and idioms. As Strain has noted, Littlepage even abandons his "lofty" language for the colloquial tongue as his story progresses (137). So while Captain Littlepage's overt printedness seemed to drive a wedge between his world and Mrs. Todd's, we are reminded that they are ultimately of the same stuff.

Thus, when the narrator suggests that Captain Littlepage "might have belonged with a simple which grew in a certain slug-haunted corner of the garden, whose use she [Mrs. Todd] could never be betrayed into telling me..." (17), Jewett could be critiquing male literature as "simple," slug-infested, and "use"less, or alternately could be bringing the male tradition Littlepage represents under the protective wing of Mrs. Todd and into the local color context represented by the herbs in the garden. In either reading, this presentation verifies that while male and female, and print and oral, may appear to be disparate realms, they are intertwined in a vine-like tangle of intertextual connection. The distinctions drawn between male and female, between print and orality, are associated with Captain Littlepage, with his division of "high" and "low," and his affiliate writers like Darwin with their hierarchies of power and their failure to depict women within their texts. So while Jewett demonstrates the participation of both sexes in both literary realms, she also calls our attention to the ways in which men, men associated with the printed word in particular, create a set of distinctions which seem to bar women from participation in their worlds of print and power.

This interplay between discourse and gender realms is continued in the episode with Mrs. Fosdick, an episode which represents the fullest uses of orality in the novel. The "Poor Joanna" chapter begins its engagement with orality through Mrs. Fosdick and Mrs. Todd's relaying of several

local legends about Shell-Heap Island. Mrs. Fosdick begins: "Yes, I remember when they used to tell queer stories about Shell-heap Island. Some said 't was a great bangeing-place for the Indians, and an old chief resided there once that ruled the winds" (100). She continues with yet another local tale: "...others said they'd always heard that once the Indians come down from up country an' left a captive there without an bo't, an't was too far to swim across to Black Island, so called, an' he lived there till he perished" (100). Mrs. Todd adds: "I've heard say he walked the island after that, and sharp-sighted folks could see him an' lose him like one o' them citizens Cap'n Littlepage was acquainted with up to the north pole" (100). Mrs. Todd continues: "There was Indians--you can see their shell-heap that named the island; and I've heard myself that 't was one o' their cannibal places, but I never could believe it. There never was no cannibals on the coast 'o Maine" (100-101).¹⁶ This early discussion of Shell-heap Island points to several oral dynamics at work in the novel as a whole. On the one hand, it is a presentation of the local language, with its frequently clipped words and, as Pry notes, its use of "'yes' or 'no' as intensifiers" (9). But while both Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Fosdick use Maine-specific language styles, they are distinguished as storytellers from this opening sequence by both their vocabulary and their distinctly individual personalities as storytellers. For example, when Mrs. Todd makes the reference to Captain Littlepage, she speaks

"grimly" (100). When the discussion turns to the whaling industry, Mrs. Todd comments that she surmises whaling to be "dull for a lady" (101). Through the combination of her language and the descriptions of her speaking style, Mrs. Todd is established as the more steady and the more critical of the two narrators, a depiction which is borne out by the subsequent discussion of Poor Joanna, wherein Mrs. Todd is deeply concerned with preserving Joanna's dignity throughout the telling of the tale. Mrs. Fosdick, on the other hand, is the livelier of the two narrators, and the more given to free-wheeling tales, which are subsequently reined in by Mrs. Todd. In this opening sequence, Mrs. Fosdick "exclaimed" while Mrs. Todd "announced...grimly" (100-101). Mrs. Fosdick's speech is marked by an increased use of exclamation points, and also an increased clipping of her words, as when she gives her own contrary version of the whaling days: "Sakes alive, yes!...Ought to see them painted savages I've seen when I was young out in the South Sea Islands! That was the time for folks to travel, 'way back in the old whalin' days!...'it was excitin', an' we always done extra well, and felt rich when we did get ashore. I liked the variety" (101). Both of these qualities suggest the speed and enthusiasm of Mrs. Fosdick's speech and provide a contrast to Mrs. Todd's staidness. Further, Mrs. Fosdick finds whaling itself "excitin'" as compared to Mrs. Todd's pronouncement that it must be "dull." These contrasts in temperament and speaking style between the two narrators are heightened when

Mrs. Fosdick makes a comment, "laughing" (102), and Mrs. Todd later expresses an "anxious" concern that she "never want[s] to hear Joanna laughed about" (103). While these descriptions serve to characterize the two women, they go beyond characterization. By highlighting the varied emotions, speed of speech, inflections, and storytelling style (rushing headlong vs. restraint) of the two women, Jewett foregrounds Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Fosdick as speakers and as narrators within the novel.

Through this technique, Jewett erodes the privileged stance of the writer, and recasts the reader as a listener to many voices rather than a reader of one. The depiction of the text's varied narrative voices shifts the terms of print discourse and recreates the printed text in a new mode. The printed text now captures the oral qualities, and actual tales, of the community it depicts, aligning itself with oral discourse as well as with print. This immersion in the storyteller's qualities these women embody, each in their own way, is only one of the oral dimensions addressed in the Shell-heap Island sequence of the "Poor Joanna" chapter.

In addition to casting both of her speakers as storytellers, Jewett makes it clear that these two women are not anomalies in their claiming of oral narrative power. Their recitation of the varied tales of Shell-heap island make it clear that they are participants in a larger community of oral storytelling. First, there is the unnamed "they" who "used to tell queer stories about Shell-heap

Island" (100). Moreover, it is clear that these stories are shaped by their varied tellers, because "some" tell it one way while "others" tell it another (100). In addition, it is also clear that these stories were not generated solely by Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Fosdick's peers, because we are told "others said they'd always heard..." (100). Because these stories have been "always heard," they exist in the collective memory outside the current moment in time. The stories themselves act as a series of artifacts from the oral culture, just as the Indian "stone tools" found on Shell-heap Island act as artifacts of its culture (100). But in addition to referencing these tale-artifacts, these passages also describe Dunnet Landing's storytelling community. We know that it has been in existence for several generations; that it permits alternate interpretations, and that stories are shaped and negotiated in the act of retelling; and that each listener in the chain becomes a potential teller. This last quality is emphasized both by the fact that the ones who had "always heard" the story go on to share it, and the fact that Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Fosdick themselves are sharing stories that they have previously received as listeners in the storytelling circuit. That the subject of many of the tales is Indians suggests yet another facet to this depiction of a storytelling culture. Because most Indian tribes were themselves oral cultures, Jewett may be drawing a comparison, valid or not, between the storytellers of Dunnet Landing and the storytellers of the Native people. Further, Jewett may

be suggesting that the Indian tribes serve as a literary influence for these oral storytellers, because the tale of a "chief...that ruled the winds" bears similarity to tales found in Native culture. Through this potential intertextuality, this episode suggests an alternative literary tradition for both the storytelling culture of Dunnet Landing and for *The Country of the Pointed Firs* itself. The tradition of Native oral cultures is suggested as equally potent as, if not more potent than, the literary tradition represented by Captain Littlepage.

Mrs. Todd's invocation of Captain Littlepage in this exchange has implications for the oral dynamics of the episode as well. Captain Littlepage is a figure who claims alliance with print discourse, even while participating in oral discourse. As such he privileges the print over the oral even while he acts as a participant in both.¹⁷ By mentioning his North Pole visions in the context of, and as a comparison to, the various oral folktales of the community, Mrs. Todd wrests Captain Littlepage and his tales from the world of print discourse and places them firmly within the context of the community's oral tradition. In so doing, Mrs. Todd also juxtaposes the oral tradition of the Shell-heap Island tales and the oral tradition of the Indians who dwelt there against the various Anglo-European literary referents called up by the association with Captain Littlepage. In a sense, Mrs. Todd's gesture is one of identifying both traditions which inform the literary production which depicts

her, while simultaneously shifting the emphasis away from the privileged print text, placing both oral and print traditions on equal ground. This textual act can be seen as a social act as well, for Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Fosdick use their oral tales to incorporate the dead and the exiles (or both, in the case of Joanna) into the fabric of community verbal interaction. As such, their tales act as a force for unity, a means by which to reclaim lost or peripheral members of the community back into its folds.¹⁸

The "Poor Joanna" chapter is significant in another way as well. It shows the possibilities of orality for transforming the narrative form. This is achieved primarily through two techniques: the passing off of the narration between Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Fosdick, and the presence of the frame narrator as a representative of both the print and oral traditions. The narration of novels tends to be linear, both in the sense of the words on the page, but also in the sense of a single narrative voice carrying the narration throughout the text from beginning to end. Likewise, this linearity of form is often coupled with a linear perspective, since the perspective presented is consistently the narrator's, even when that narrator's views may alter or change. Even in cases, such as epistolary novels, where perspective shifts from narrator to narrator, these narrators' texts are still linear and whole unto themselves. That is, one letter does not usually contain multiple voices. Contrarily, Jewett's novel has already seen several shifts in narration, rendering

it alinear and providing a multiple of perspectives in contrast to the usual unified one.¹⁹ The multivocal, spatial qualities of a larger narrative which encompasses several linear narratives are then further heightened in the Fosdick sequence, where multiple narrators interact in the telling of the tale. The interplay between Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Fosdick, whose distinct voices have already been established, creates a text which takes the appearance of being spontaneously created, like a conversation, its meaning shifting and being negotiated even in the act of the telling. In this respect, too, the Fosdick sequence resists the parameters of the written text, which assume a fixedness of the text, and instead creates a sense of fluidity, motion, and negotiation in the place of the stasis suggested by written text.

As the narration continues, Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Fosdick move from the discussion of the various tales of Shell-heap Island to one very specific tale among the set: the tale of Poor Joanna. This scene demonstrates the thematic, as well as structural, significance of the oral moment, because it suggests one of the functions of orality within the community. Orality cements the relationship between the living and the dead within *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. So the Joanna scene carries forth the types of orality seen in the previous sequence, but heightens their thematic significance.

The Joanna storytelling sequence opens when Mrs. Fosdick "abruptly" mentions that she "was talking o' poor Joanna the

other day" (102), with one of her other female companions. This reference suggests that the storytelling act stretches beyond the parameters of the text, because it makes reference to storytelling occurrences in the Dunnet Landing community at large. The narrator "expressed her interest" in hearing the tale, but Mrs. Todd immediately offers the regulatory comment, "I never want to hear Joanna laughed about" (103). Before the tale has even begun both its content and its meaning, and thus the audience reaction to it, are being negotiated. Mrs. Fosdick, as before, is content to let the tale proceed in any direction; Mrs. Todd wants to exert authorial control over the tale.²⁰ But it is Mrs. Fosdick who proceeds, making sure to account for Mrs. Todd's concerns and thus modifying her telling to suit Mrs. Todd's editorial comments. The narrator steps in as well, asking a series of questions which guide the tale in particular directions, directions which themselves mimic the structure of *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. For example, the narrator asks twice about the season, investing the inset story with a seasonal structure, a structure which Sherman has observed in the larger narrative of *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (xliiii). Then, when Mrs. Fosdick proceeds, she reiterates, "No, I never could laugh at Joanna, as some did" to again stay the concerns of her co-teller of the tale (104). But even with Mrs. Fosdick's cautions, Mrs. Todd intervenes, "taking up the story gravely" soon thereafter (105). But Mrs. Fosdick's more exuberant storytelling style gets the

better of her, and after "fidgeting with eagerness to speak" she interjects and takes up the narration again in her turn (106). Mrs. Todd again takes up the narration a spell later, "losing her sad reserve in the growing sympathy of these reminiscences" (108). This statement gives a sense of the purpose/function of the communal storytelling process. It creates a "sympathy" between all involved--the tellers, the listeners, and the subject of the story, Joanna. Like the "empathic style" noted by Folsom, the storytelling act as presented here serves as a bond between the various participants in the tale, including the woman who created it. While both women's personal styles are emphasized, Mrs. Todd's "reserve" and Mrs. Fosdick's "fidgeting," there is also a sense that the personal is being de-emphasized in an effort to reach a collective understanding of Joanna.

Again, this inclusion of the oral tale in the written text lends a fluidity to the novel, because it suggests that the meaning of Joanna's tale is constantly shifting, renegotiated with every act of telling, and refigured for each group which shares in the telling process. The narrator, as both listener and shaper of the tale through her questions, in turn becomes a teller, whose influence on the tale is less an act of appropriation than a part of the fluid storytelling process. This sentiment is further conveyed by the fact that as the story goes on, the mutual interruptions between Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Fosdick become more and more frequent, and the long passages of text are replaced by the quick interjections

of each woman upon the other's act of speaking. Mrs. Fosdick "interrupted," Mrs. Todd "suggested," and Mrs. Fosdick counter-"suggested," as the details of Joanna's story are worked out on an increasingly mutual level (109).²¹

The content of the tale comments upon the language act which is being played out in its telling. For the tale of Joanna is one of a hermit woman, and much of the discussion centers around the issue of sympathy. Because she is the subject of the tale, the narrative makes Joanna part of the storytelling community made up of Mrs. Fosdick, Mrs. Todd, the narrator, and even the reader, as well as the larger community of Dunnet Landing, through the act of storytelling. Because Mrs. Todd has insisted on a sympathetic rendering of Joanna, the story serves to reincorporate Joanna into the community from which she departed.

One episode in the Poor Joanna tale reinforces this interpretation. At one point during Joanna's exile, Mrs. Todd and a minister visit her on the island, presumably to offer her comfort and see how she is getting along. Much to the women's dismay, the visiting minister "put on his authority" with Joanna, aggressively questioning her religious devotion (118). Again, the male character is aligned with a prescriptive and unsympathetic print discourse, a detached author-ity. His print-style prayer fails in its goal to minister to Joanna's religious wants, and Mrs. Todd comments upon this failure: "He did offer prayer, but 't was all about hearin' the voice o' God out o'

the whirlwind; and I thought while he was goin' on that anybody that had spent the long cold winter all alone out on Shell-heap Island knew a good deal more about those things than he did" (119). As previously, the male character is ignorant of the importance of "voice" even as he draws upon it, and it is the woman who knows "a good deal more about those things than he did." Mrs. Todd later comments, "...he seemed to know no remedies, but he had a great use of words" (123). The minister's "great use of words" is based in a printed, Biblical tradition, and this printed tradition fails to apply effectively to Joanna's actual life. The implication is that Mrs. Todd, unlike the minister, "knows" both remedies and words. Holstein notes that Mrs. Todd's words are themselves healing words; just like her herbalist impulses, her storytelling serves to mend rifts in the communities of people she addresses and discusses. I would add that, in Jewett's conveyance, this effect is achieved largely because Mrs. Todd recognizes the power of the spoken word, recognizes that the pretense and author-ity which are claimed by the (often male) written text pale in comparison to the sympathy of the spoken word. Thus Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Fosdick's communal telling of Joanna's tale serves to draw Joanna, the narrator, and the reader into the community through the act of telling.

However, the presence of the narrator in this sequence serves as a reminder that we are, in fact, reading a written text. Yet this writer is a writer of a different sort, a

writer who is both writer and teller, whose authority stems from her participation in, rather than separation from, a shared community of tellers and listeners, readers and writers, wherein any who listen have the potential to become those who tell. As the sequence proceeds, Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Fosdick dominate the narration, and the questions from the narrator which guided the early portion of the Joanna story are phased out. The narrator does intervene to address the reader in the opening of "The Hermitage" chapter, which continues Joanna's narrative and includes the previously mentioned anecdote regarding the unsympathetic minister, but the narrator does not step in again to guide the telling of the Joanna story as she did in its early moments. This treatment serves to heighten the oral sensibility of the text, giving the impression that we are in an audience listening to Mrs. Fosdick and Mrs. Todd rather than reading the text which has come to us under the guise and guidance of the narrator. This sensation is furthered by the fact that the Joanna story bridges two chapters. Rather than being confined within a single unit, it resists the divisive categories imposed upon it by the print medium by spanning the length of two chapters, making the tale exist outside and across the print parameters. But the fact that the narrator does intervene to ease the chapter transition, and the fact that the narrator is a constant presence as a fellow listener to the tale, serve as a reminder that this text is not wholly an oral one. The narrator's presence in this sequence

highlights the fact that the tale is, ultimately, rendered in print, and that the narrator has served as the means for conveying this printed tale to the reader. Thus *The Country of the Pointed Firs* names itself as a participant in both oral and print discourses, and distinguishes itself from those texts which claim alliance solely to one or the other of these language forms. In so doing, Jewett's text crosses the boundaries between discourses, and their associated gender ideologies. It requires a reading methodology which is informed by both types of discourse and which is removed from strict gender ideologies for their use.

The narrator's presence in the Joanna story acts as a connection-point between the world of oral discourse and the world of print discourse. She is a participant in the oral realm first as a listener; she continues in the spirit of the oral realm by passing on the tale she has heard, by shaping it in her own telling, and by conveying the tale with an emphasis on its oral qualities, such as its sound and its fluidity. But print is the medium used to convey the story to the reader, and the narrator's status as a writer emphasizes the printedness of *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. Her intervention at the beginning of the Hermitage chapter brings with it an awareness of the reading act, of the narrative's status as a printed text. But because the narrator functions in both worlds, without a clear privileging of one over the other, she acts as a fusion-point between the worlds of print and orality. Like the text

itself, she crosses the bounds of the printed and the oral to forge a language system which draws on both as full contributors to the act of storytelling. Developing this narrative form permits Jewett to resist the gender ideologies of the nineteenth-century print marketplace by dismantling the gendered associations of oral and print narrative forms.

Just as the narrator serves as a point of connection between oral and print discourses, bridging the parameters of both, she also serves as a connector between the male and the female, "strategically poised between the women and men in the novel" (Rohloff, 35). It is in the concluding episode with Elijah Tilley that the bounds of gender are most clearly transgressed as accompaniment to the transgression of print and oral discourses.

Elijah Tilley is a figure who himself overtly crosses traditional gender bounds. On the one hand, he is the gruff fisherman who apparently seeks only the company of other men, described as "these self-contained old fishermen" (187). On the other hand, he seeks out the female narrator for comradery, and when she arrives at his house, she finds him engaging in the supposedly female arts of knitting, gardening, and housekeeping. Like the narrator who moves in both female and male worlds, like the cross-dressing uncle of Jewett's "Autumn Holiday," Elijah Tilley fuses the qualities of maleness and femaleness. Likewise, Elijah as a narrator is ambivalently attached to the oral form. Though he speaks at length in conversation, this speech is largely descriptive

and summary-oriented, giving the listener points of information and background. There is very little storytelling, very little narrative, until Tilley tells the story of the china cup. It is here that the story comes into the novel's oral framework because, like the story of Joanna, Tilley's story brings someone departed, his deceased wife, into the community he has formed with his visitor. By taking on the oral mode previously associated with Mrs. Todd, Tilley as a character collapses the distinctions between female orality and male orality. And yet he does so in a manner which brings those very categorizations to light, because of his overt gender-crossing behavior, and because of the overwhelming presence of his wife as a driving force behind the tale. Tilley even goes so far as to highlight his wife's abilities as a storyteller and mimic: "She had nice manners with all, but to me there was nobody so entertainin'. She'd take off anybody's natural talk winter evenin's when we set here alone, so you'd think 't was them a-speakin'" (203). The episodes with Mrs. Todd, Captain Littlepage, and Mrs. Fosdick, served to balance the demands of print and oral discourses, in part through the presence of a narrator who moves through multiple language worlds. Likewise, each of these episodes serve to simultaneously emphasize and confound gender expectations, particularly those associated with language use. Again, the narrator proved instrumental in this overturning of gender delineations, as a female character who moves in both male and female social-linguistic

circles in the text. The Elijah Tilley sequence, the last visit of the novel, serves as a culmination of all of these themes. It shows the possibility of fusing the characteristics associated with maleness and femaleness into a given character; it shows a willingness to toy with the idea of orality as a female realm, by placing its power ambivalently in an androgynous male character; and again the presence of the narrator serves as the knot-point which connects all of the disparate strands of male/female, print/oral by passing fluidly through and around the expectations associated with each. In the same manner as its narrator, *The Country of the Pointed Firs* itself acts as an embodiment of the gender and discourse dynamics it portrays. It is a text which appears allied with a female, oral world, through its centering of Mrs. Todd and her storytelling style. But it is a text which also persistently reminds us of its printed status, emphasizes its intertextual relationship with both male and female printed works, and places a writer at its center. And it is also a text in which men--Captain Littlepage, brother William, Elijah Tilley--figure prominently, despite the insistence of theorists that the text presents a "female world."²² Finally, through its use of oral voices and distinctive speech idioms, as well as its passing off of the narration to numerous inset narrators and its presentation of numerous inset tales, *The Country of the Pointed Firs* is a text which participates in an oral storytelling mode even in its printed form. As such,

the book as a whole represents a fusion of oral and print discourses in its structure, content, and style. Through this utilization of both oral and print qualities, the text transgresses the categorizations of oral and print discourse. Likewise, by pointing out the gender associations of language use, the transgression of oral and print boundaries acts as a mechanism for the transgression of gender boundaries as well. The text thus resists strict categorizations of "male" and "female" literature in the same way that it resists strict categorizations of "print" and "oral." The text calls our attention to these distinctions only to cross them, to produce a text which engages actively with the literature of its age produced by both men and women, and which participates in the world of print, in part, through its ability to resist the notion of print as a male realm.

It is not surprising that *The Country of the Pointed Firs* should function in this fashion, given Sarah Orne Jewett's own status in the print culture of her day. Jewett published frequently in the *Atlantic Monthly*, and was successfully able to negotiate around any barriers to her active participation in the print marketplace. Her "Boston marriage" to another prominent woman in print culture, Annie Fields, further demonstrates Jewett's ability to function as central rather than marginal within print culture, despite some gender-based exclusion from publicity events in the publishing world (Donovan; *New England*; 1). Thus, *The Country of the Pointed Firs'* ability to cross discourse and gender bounds also

serves as a metaphor for its writer's own ability to transgress strict categories of public and private, female and male, in her own life, questioning and even transforming these categories as she moved fluidly between them. Like her narrator, Jewett was fully both woman and writer, and yet shows the ability to be move beyond these categorizations and produce a literature which demands to be read on its own terms, rather than those prescribed by its status as woman-produced print. Yet Jewett's narrative itself argues against the interpretation of Jewett as a rarity or anomaly whose unique talents gave her unique access. Donovan has surmised that Jewett's theory of writing "allowed the reader a creative role in the process" giving "some authority and control over to the reader" ("Theory," 217). As such, Jewett's narrative demonstrates that oral power exists in the voice of the commonplace woman as well as the successful woman writer, and that this power is ultimately the province of communities as much as individuals. By bringing the reader within this oral-print community, and by suggesting the reader's potential as a speaker/writer, Jewett indicates that the road to print access is open to a range of women, and that their travels will not be made alone.

NOTES

¹ For examples of the construction principles of the oral tale as opposed to the printed work, see again Brown, Nanton, and Ong.

² Hild deals with the use of local language and, using Louis

Auchinloss' *Pioneers and Caretakers: 9 American Women Novelists*

(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965), the "layers of interpretation" made possible by the multiple narrators (115-117). Hirsch sees the narrative, which he describes as "non-narrative," structured around the "double movement" between Todd family events and events which focus on others (286-7). Pry discusses Jewett's use of local language and folk tales in the context of a "folk literary aesthetic," see particularly 8-10. Rohloff addresses the text's "irreverence toward the written word" (39). Sherman, commenting on Marilyn Mobley's *Folk Roots and Mythic Wings in Sarah Orne Jewett and Toni Morrison: The Cultural Function of Narrative* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), deals with the importance of storytelling and the importance of the various characters' language interactions with the narrator, see particularly xxiii. Strain offers a Bahktinian reading of Jewett's use of language, focusing on the language interactions between the various speaking characters. Subbaraman deals with "narrative plurality" through the use of multiple narrators and inset tales (62).

³ For additional discussion of oral qualities (volume, inflection, etc.) which are distinct from writing, see various essays within *The Pressures of the Text*, ed. Stewart Brown.

⁴ For an overview of debates on the textual categorizations of *Country of the Pointed Firs*, see Subbaraman 60-61.

⁵ Both Pry and Strain acknowledge the interconnectedness of the structure and language use within *Country of the Pointed Firs*, but point to different overarching frameworks as the source of their

connectedness. While I focus on orality as both method and literary tradition for *CPF*, Pry links Jewett's usage to a "folk aesthetic," an extension of the regionalist project beyond the use of language and landscape description. Strain uses a context of Bakhtinian dialogics to integrate the use of language with the novel's structural principles. Though we name the overarching frameworks differently, and thus ascribe different implications to them, our analyses all focus on the multiple implications of the narrative structure and "voice," and thus intersect in several points of analysis.

⁶ For others who note the narrator's status as a "listener" see Strain 139 and Subbaraman 67.

⁷ My readings of the distinct uses of time, and also of participation, in the oral narrative are an outgrowth of Nanton's discussion of orality and its distinct qualities as compared to the written form. For the discussion of time, see particularly 88.

⁸ There is wide range of interpretations of the narrator's role in the text. On one end, there is the school of thought which suggests that the narrator does not shape the text at all, but instead is merely the mechanism through which the text is conveyed. Donovan, for example, characterizes the reader as a "passive recorder" who resists being "an active participant in events" of the Dunnet Landing community ("Theory," 221); Folsom's theory of "empathic style" suggests that the narrator "remains nearly invisible while she observes and sees into the world of Dunnet Landing" (67) and that "the narrator effaces herself to enter the spirit of other characters" (77). At the other extreme are the theorists who argue that *Country of the Pointed Firs* is drastically

reshaped by the narrator's presence, or that the novel is in fact predominantly about the narrator and not about Dunnet Landing. These include Hild, who states that "the narrator refashions every character in the text to serve her own purposes as a writer" (118); Holstein, who argues that "Jewett's characters are fragments of the narrative self that tells their story in order to adapt them to her purposes" (42); and Subbaraman, who writes "[if], on the other hand, *Pointed Firs* is not the narrator's story, but a charming piece of regionalism about a Maine coastal town, and all the characters mere daubs and dabs of local-color, then why make the narrator the visible focus of interest, and a writer to boot?" (61). I, like Strain, see the text as more a multiplicity of voices, including the narrator's, than either a narrator-controlled written text or a text in which the narrator is an "invisible" transcriber of events. I see the narrator's functioning on a nearly equal level with the other characters as part and parcel of the fusion of oral and print discourses within the text.

⁹ For more on Jewett's use of regional language, and on Mrs. Todd's individualized language mode, see Hild 115-116 and Pry 9-10.

¹⁰ I find it interesting that students, when assigned readings from Jewett and other local color writers, have informed me that they find they must read the texts aloud for the local language to become comprehensible to them.

¹¹ Subbaraman also analyzes this passage, arguing that the narrator's "literary labors at the schoolhouse are part of this need to flee 'the temptation' of female talk--symbol of communal love and existence" (67).

¹² The traditional privileging of print discourse in white, Western

societies has race and class, as well as gender, implications. For in-depth discussions on the privileging of print discourse in colonized countries, see various essays in *Pressures of the Text*, as well as Cooper.

¹³ Other theorists have noted the narrator's occupation of multiple roles and as function as a mediator between opposites in the text. Hild discusses the narrator's mediation between the folk of Dunnet Landing and the assumed urbanity of the reader (114-118); Hirsch deals with the narrator's role as both educator and educated (287); Holstein discusses the narrator's simultaneous pull to seclusion and to community participation, and the associated issues of public and private (47); Rohloff addresses her position as a gender mediator (35), and a participant in both "symbolic and presymbolic discourses" (42); and Strain takes a Bakhtinian approach to the narrator's linguistic mediation. I believe that the other mediator roles which have been identified with the narrator confirm her ability to act in multiple modes of discourse, and thus confirm my own reading of the narrator as a character who functions in male and female, public and private, and print and oral spheres.

¹⁴ I came to this interpretation of Littlepage's name through Hobbs, who in fact argues the opposite, that Littlepage's name, and his story, indicate a miniature of the whole of *Pointed Firs*, rather than a lesser literary status (27); and also through Holstein who sees Littlepage's name as indicating his "diminished version of Romanticism" (44).

¹⁵ This view may also be supported by Folsom's observation that part of the Shell-heap Island sequence is described "in a sentence saturated

with memories of Melville's prose..." (71), likening Jewett's and Melville's writing styles in this particular segment of the narrative.

¹⁶ Pry also notes the use of multiple stories within this sequence, a technique which he posits as part of a "folk-literary aesthetic" within the work as a whole (10). While I find Pry's discussion of the "folk-literary aesthetic" useful in establishing the various techniques of local color fiction, I believe Jewett's use of language has implications involving gender issues and the print marketplace which stretch beyond the regionalist project.

¹⁷ My understanding of the ways in which writing is traditionally privileged over speech and orality is informed by various essays in *The Pressures of the Text*, ed. Stewart Brown. These essays deal primarily with orality as the native literary tradition in colonialized nations. See also Derrida, and Ong. The gendered implications of the privileging of print (within anglicized nations) are addressed in Spacks.

¹⁸ Holstein also notes that the narrative serves to reclaim departed members back into the community formed by Dunnet Landing and by the reader's interaction with the text, a move which he associates with the spiritualist movement of the late nineteenth century, see particularly 44-45. Several of the stories he addresses, however, did not appear in the original edition of *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. Folsom, too, sees Mrs. Todd as recuperating Joanna into the community, though she identifies this act as being a result of Mrs. Todd's "empathic perception" and "empathic style"--Mrs. Todd's ability to place herself in another's situation and thus to take on their perceptions--rather than Mrs. Todd's participation in an oral mode (72; 78). While Folsom's

reading is very compelling, it fails to account for the possibility that Mrs. Todd is imposing her own perceptions onto another, rather than accurately reading that other's viewpoint.

¹⁹ A number of theorists have looked to Jewett's multi-voiced narration as a means to explain or justify her use of an alternative narrative structure. Donovan sees Jewett's narrative structure as "an escape from the masculine time of history into transcending feminine space" (223); Subbaraman has investigated Jewett's use of "narrative plurality" and a variety of "narrative levels" (62), the latter technique also being identified by Hild, 117; Strain sees the *Country of the Pointed Firs* as an example of Bakhtinian "double-voiced discourse" and "heteroglossia," "subordinating concerns of dramatic action and plot development to the overriding importance of discourse" (144). Strain's emphasis on the importance of language to the narrative project comes closest to my own use of the observed alinearity in the narrative structure.

²⁰ Strain has also noted Mrs. Todd's verbal negotiation with Mrs. Fosdick, writing: "She [Mrs. Todd] replaces Mrs. Fosdick's misjudgments about the recluse with a narrative, a miniature which echoes the writer's storytelling ability and reflects the herbalist's own experience with the solitary woman" (140). While I agree that the meaning of the story is being verbally negotiated here, I see Mrs. Fosdick not as a source of "misjudgment" but as a representative of a distinct storytelling style.

²¹ Though Folsom does not deal specifically with orality, language, or storytelling, but instead with the use of empathy as communication,

she also notes that the act of conversation here serves as a means to a collective understanding of Joanna's plight. See particularly 70.

²² For proponents of the view that Dunnet Landing is a female community, see Donovan, *New England* and "Theory"; and to some extent, Rohloff.

CHAPTER 3

The Story "Never at an End": Transcending the Printed Text of Willa Cather's *My Ántonia*

In *My Ántonia*, orality appears in the forms of gossip, local history, verbal power, storytelling, and the sounds which inhabit both the language and the landscape of the Nebraska region. Each of these oral forms carries with it a myriad of thematic and structural functions in the text. The gossip, speech styles, and inset stories represent the culture of the Nebraska plains. They also provide insight into the national and cultural heritages of the region. Within the text, gossip and story function a means of passing information, both scandalous and newsworthy, across the often-inaccessible plains. Each form of orality also serves to convey larger narrative themes and to transform the printed narrative structure. Verbal power, storytelling, and gossip shape the gender dynamics of the novel. Oral stories create a structural principle for the novel. The narrative is driven by interconnected inset tales, told by distinctly voiced characters. And the sounds of both voice and environment play a significant role in the discourse scheme of the novel, building on the aesthetics of the ear seen previously in Jewett's work. Direct references to oral traditions appear in the work, linking *My Ántonia* to the

larger world of orality outside the novel. Collectively, the techniques of the novel suggest a larger oral narrative of which *My Ántonia* is but one part, one manifestation of an oral story which transcends, rather than being contained by, the written text depicting it.¹

The only character who seems to stand outside this overwhelming engagement with orality is the text's narrator and supposed writer, Jim Burden. Jim's association with print discourse is clearly established by the novel's framing device. In this encounter between the frame narrator and the adult Jim Burden, within the novel's Introduction, Jim stresses that he has been "writing down" his memories of Ántonia Shimerda (2).² The status of Ántonia's story as an expression of print discourse is confirmed when the narrator describes Jim's actions: "Jim called at my apartment one stormy winter afternoon, carrying a large portfolio..." (2). The physical, written manuscript is itself presented to the narrator, and to the reader, in this scene. The image of Jim holding the printed matter parallels our own experience of holding the book as we read. The conspicuous written-ness of this document is reinforced when Jim Burden is actually seen in the act of writing: "He went to the next room, sat down at my desk and wrote across the face of the portfolio 'Ántonia.' He frowned at this moment, then prefixed another word, making it 'My Ántonia.' That seemed to satisfy him" (2).

Jim's act of writing is also an act of possession, as several theorists have noted (Funda, 209-13; Rosowski, *Approaches*, 66; Schwind, 55, 58). While the prefixed "my" does acknowledge Jim's subjectivity, it allows him to lay claim to both the subject matter, the woman *Ántonia*, and to the act of writing itself. Thus the title, in effect, becomes "My text of *Ántonia*." Both the woman and the writing are, for the moment, seen as the province of man. So, in the framing narrative of *My Ántonia*, attention is drawn to the inner-narrative's status as a printed text, and the act of writing is also rendered as a gendered act. Writing, here, is male. But if so, what is left for the woman of the inner narrative, the woman whose story bears her name? Speaking remains. For, on one level, telling stories in this text is also a gendered act--gendered female.

Several theorists have noted the connection between women and storytelling in *My Ántonia* (Funda; Woolley; Wussow). I concur with these readings in their characterizations of *Ántonia* as an artist and in their emphasis on the importance of oral and folkloric forms to the text at large. But my analysis argues that the gendered associations of discourse--women with orality and men with print--represent a narrative strategy within the novel, an attempt to synthesize seemingly disparate ideologies and forms, rather than a strict equation of women with storytelling. I am also disturbed by a trend I perceive in these essays toward treating *Ántonia*'s stories as more authentic than Jim's writing, as Woolley indicates when

she argues that *Antonia* "tells stories without manipulating their meaning" (157-8). In my view, Jim's printedness is critiqued as prescriptive, but Cather undermines the gender implications of this act by taking his manuscript title as the title of the novel. Cather associates Jim with prescriptive print and *Antonia* with orality in order to unravel this very duality. I see this technique transforming the reader's role and agree with those who argue that a text of "our *Antonia*" is constructed by the reader in the act of reading (Funda, 209-213; Rosowski, *Approaches*, 66).

Jim's association with printedness is clearly established by repeated references to his books and reading. Jim reads *The Life of Jesse James* (7), *The Swiss Family Robinson* (44), *The Prince of the House of David*, read aloud for his grandmother (60), *Robinson Crusoe* (66), and *The Aeneid* (148) prior to his departure for college. Aside from indicating that Jim is a frequent reader, these texts provide specific information as to the literary traditions which inform his perspective. These works are all male-authored and focus on male experience, with the possible exception of *The Swiss Family Robinson*. Schwind has noted the influence of the "convention-bound...dime-novel western" on the novel as a whole, and on Jim in particular (59). Further, the references to these books parallel occurrences in Jim's own life-narrative, suggesting an intertextuality between Jim's experiences and the literary tradition which is used to frame and inform them.³ He reads *The Life of Jesse James* on the

train heading from Virginia to Nebraska. Thus, the reading of this Western outlaw adventure accompanies Jim's embarkation on his own Western travel adventure. This book also highlights Jim's outcast status, as an orphan who is presently without a rootedness in either place or family, until he subsequently reaches the Nebraska plain. He reads *The Swiss Family Robinson* aloud to his Grandmother while she is darning. This work highlights the family ties Jim has acquired by this point in the novel, as contrasted to his previous outlaw status. This emphasis on family is conveyed both by the novel's subject matter and the fact that the act of reading it is a shared one. However, this reading material also continues the themes of remoteness and regional adventure which were raised by the Jesse James reading, and which are indicated by Jim's own interpretation of his experiences: "I felt that the Swiss family had no advantages over us in the way of an adventurous life" (44). But when Jim's family leaves him alone in the house after the suicide of Mr. Shimerda, the family of Robinsons becomes a lone Robinson: *Robinson Crusoe*. Again, the reading material reflects Jim's actual life-state at the time, with Jim's isolation and reflection that "it was homesickness that had killed Mr. Shimerda" bringing to life the circumstances of the Defoe novel (66).⁴

Later, when Jim is in college, he mentions Dante's *Commedia* and uses it to structure his characterization of his professor (168). *The Aeneid* is also invoked on two separate

occasions, which interact with one another. The first occurs when Jim is preparing for college, studying the Latin text alone in his upstairs room, gazing out the window periodically (148). The second reference to *The Aeneid* occurs in the midst of Jim's reading of *The Georgics*, which he does alone in his room while gazing out at the landscape, this time recalling the beauty of the prairie which he had previously seen close up (170).⁵ This two-fold invocation of *The Aeneid* functions on several levels. It represents the idea that college is Jim's epic adventure, paralleling that of Aeneas. Since Lena Lingard enters as Jim is in the act of translation and distracts him from his work, she acts as the Dido to his Aeneas. This idea is played out more fully when Jim must leave town to avoid the love-lorn stupor, and thus distraction from his work, that Lena represents. Though Lena shows considerably more sense than the suicidal Dido, the characterization of Lena as a distraction from Jim's intellectual quest interplays clearly with the plot of *The Aeneid*.

In addition, the mentions of *The Aeneid* mark a change in the type of literary tradition which draws Jim and shapes his life. Jim's time on the prairie is framed by his reading of adventure stories, which are also stories of geographical interest, and tales of the delicate balance between community and isolation. Clearly, each of these themes is also woven into the story of Jim's life within *My Ántonia*. Yet by the time Jim reaches college, he has become the more traditional

Greek hero, the man who quests on his own with only passing thoughts for community and his place within it. The fact that Jim is staring out on the landscape during his Latin reading both prior to and at college suggests that Jim is feeling the pull of his home, but that he will resist that pull and leave home in his quest, rather than rewriting his story along less conventional/canonical lines, as a geographically specific domestic fiction of the *Swiss Family Robinson* variety.

There are two other implications to the use of *The Aeneid* as a parallel to Jim's life within this segment. First, it points to Jim's impulse to make himself the center, the protagonist, of *My Ántonia*. The section in which this last Virgil reference appears is the first and only section of the novel which focuses on Jim's life outside of Ántonia. While the rest of the novel seems clearly to be more about Ántonia than about Jim, this segment forms an exception to the narrative rule. The very segment which focuses on Jim's Latin reading also focuses on his attempt to become the epic hero of *My Ántonia*, by placing himself at the center of the narrative. As such, this segment serves as a reminder that Jim is the narrator of the inset story, but that he is not the author of the novel. By deftly calling our attention to Jim's maneuvering into the center of the narrative which bears Ántonia's name, Cather suggests that Jim is beginning to privilege his own experience over Ántonia's, and calls into question his narrative priorities.⁶ Accompanying this

shift is a second implication of Jim's reading: his values are changing. As Jim begins to cast himself as the epic hero, his tastes begin to align themselves with the academic environment in which he finds himself. He is now a reader and admirer of "high" culture, Latin epic poetry, as contrasted to his earlier love of "low" popular culture, in the form of Westerns and adventure stories.⁷ In effect, this segment, with its use of Dante and Virgil, suggests the possibility that Jim may turn into a snob, an elitist and self-centered male, if he continues to favor the classic Greek narrative as a frame for his life experience. The presence of Virgil's *Georgics*, which emphasizes rural experience, in the previous scene may suggest that there are other possibilities, possibilities of a fusion between the oral and written forms, between rural and urban values, and between the male and female as potentially equal partners in the creation of narrative. But these suggestions are undermined when Jim leaves for university and subsequently embraces urbanity and the male print tradition and foregoes the male/female, print/oral balance embodied by the Nebraska prairie women who befriend him.

Collectively, these depictions of Jim and his reading suggest not only Jim's engagement with print discourse on a personal level, but also that Jim's life is structured along printed lines. His life-narrative is shaped as the printed narrative is shaped--linearly, with a focus on quest and an emphasis on a solitary male protagonist--and his personal

values reflect the priority given to his classical literary training. This depiction forms a sharp contrast with that of *Ántonia Shimerda*, whose life story is shaped by her engagement with orality. Her story exists in fragments, fluidly, in mythic time, and in an atmosphere of cultural variety. Moreover, her story is shaped strongly by her geographical and cultural location and traditions, her ties to community, and her engagement with sound and its association with the language act. In each of these respects, the structural and aesthetic qualities of oral and printed narratives are intimately woven into the life tales presented in the novel. Jim's narrative is a printed one, framed and structured along the lines of the Western hero and the even more traditional Greek epic hero. *Ántonia's* narrative is an oral one, framed and structured as a story told and retold, constantly shifting in shape and meaning, and elusive to those who would try to fix a single, unified meaning upon it, as Jim, with his printed tradition, attempts to do. But as the novel demonstrates, his attempts ultimately fail. Yet the intertwining of Jim and *Ántonia's* stories with their varied forms within the novel suggests the possibility of coexistence, even compatibility, between the print and oral forms.

Given Jim Burden's overt association with print discourse, the impulse might be to read the language system in this novel as a gender dichotomy. As do her forerunners, Cather initially seems to associate printedness with maleness and

orality with femaleness, lending credence to this rift. But, as with Woolson and Jewett, Cather's very existence as the writer of the novel confounds this oversimplified gender analysis. Cather further confounds this framework by including a number of male characters who exhibit a significant engagement with orality in the novel. One group of these male characters is the drugstore men: a group of old men who gossip continually about the various affairs of Black Hawk. Jim states: "One could hang about the drugstore, and listen to the old men who sat there every evening, talking politics and telling raw stories" (139). Jim later fears becoming a source for this group's gossip, after his near-rape and beating by Wick Cutter, when he wonders "what the old men at the drugstore would do with such a theme" (159). This description could be read along gendered lines, as an overturning of the traditional association of idle gossip with women, a phenomenon addressed in Patricia Meyer Spacks' *Gossip*. But through the very presence of these gossiping men, Cather associates Jim Burden with print in a manner that goes beyond strict gender distinctions. For example, Antonia later derides this very drugstore group, telling Jim: "You're not going to sit around here and whittle store-boxes and tell stories all your life. You're going away to school and make something of yourself" (143). Even Antonia associates Jim with printed, rather than oral, language, and also with the educated, urban community "away" rather than with the oral-based, rural and

sub-urban communities in which they function. Jim is associated with city life, book-learning, and the printed tradition which embraces them. The drugstore men are part of a rural community that bases its knowledge in the spoken word. This idea that the print/oral distinction is not solely a gendered one, but also includes geography and class distinctions, is reinforced by the fact that Cather also includes a more prominent male figure in the novel, clearly and seriously associated with orality: Otto Fuchs.

When Otto Fuchs first appears in *My Ántonia*, Jim Burden places him within a printed context, noting that he "might have stepped out of the pages of *Jesse James*" (7), and continues to interpret Otto as a Western outlaw-hero within this print context throughout the remainder of the novel. Yet Otto is also clearly aligned to oral discourse, as his stories serve to acquaint Jim with a history of Fuchs himself and the region Jim has come to. These stories thus serve as a form of cultural initiation for Jim. As Jim describes: "Fuchs told me everything I wanted to know: how he had lost his ear in a Wyoming blizzard when he was a stage-driver, and how to throw a lasso" (11). So Otto, like Jim, is aligned with print discourse because his life is paralleled, even framed, by the Western novel narrative. Yet Otto is also clearly a storyteller, as is further evidenced by a later story relayed by Jim:

Sometimes I followed the sunflower-bordered roads.

Fuchs told me that the sunflowers were introduced

into that country by the Mormons; that at the time of the persecution, when they left Missouri and struck out into the wilderness to find a place where they could worship God in their own way, the members of the first exploring party, crossing the plains to Utah, scattered sunflower seed as they went. The next summer, when the long trains of wagons came through with all the women and children, they had the sunflower trail to follow. I believe botanists do not confirm Fuchs story, but insist the sunflower was native to those plains. Nevertheless, that legend has stuck in my mind, and sunflower-bordered roads always seem to me the roads to freedom. (21)

Fuchs' story acts as an oral history for the region, and gives Jim a means to identify himself with his regional surroundings. He sees the sunflower roads and conceives of himself within the history where "sunflower-bordered roads always seem to me the roads to freedom." And yet, even within this context, the narratorial Jim is intervening to modify Fuchs' oral tale with a printed refutation: "botanists do not confirm Fuchs's story." Thus, while Otto Fuchs hovers between print and orality, through his identification both with the Western novel and with oral tradition, Jim is still placed firmly within the context of book-learning. I read this dichotomization of Fuchs and Jim Burden as evidence that the gendered issues of orality are

complicated by distinctions within the gendered communities. Because Jim is a male who will be associated with University study and the city, he is identified with the print tradition.⁸ Because Otto is male he shares some of this identification with the print tradition, primarily through Jim's eyes. But because he belongs to the West and to the land, Otto is also aligned to the oral tradition which is more fully identified with *Ántonia Shimerda*. As such, Otto's presence in the novel serves as a reminder that while women may use orality to distinct ends, orality is also the history of the plains, belonging to both the men and the women who live there. The fact that Jim disputes this history with botany indicates that he is allied to a tradition outside of this oral one, a tradition which assumes its own dominance in the ability to render meaning. This reading is verified by the fact that Otto's tales do not, for the most part, appear in his own words. Rather they are filtered by Jim, who comments on their validity in the retelling.⁹ This assumption of interpretative dominance has implications in several realms, including class, region, and also gender, when Jim performs a similar act on *Ántonia's* tales.

Orality, as exercised by both Otto and *Ántonia*, is juxtaposed with the tradition of literature with which Jim is identified, and is offered as a contrast to the force of urban, "civilized" life which Jim comes to embrace over and above his youth on the prairie. Thus orality serves as a dominant rural force which serves to question, and ultimately

to transform, the print tradition which Jim embraces. In addition, the orality of the novel represents the wealth of cultural traditions in the immigrant community, a cultural variety which is undercut by the "civilizing," fashionable, and conformity-driven aspects of town life represented by both Jim and Lena Lingard.¹⁰ But though both Otto and Antonia function as storytellers, they use orality differently, and it is in this functional difference that the gender implications of orality come to the fore. So the oral presence in the novel revises any number of societal forces--maleness, urbanity, cultural uniformity--which are collectively associated with the world of print within the novel.

The most prominent examples of orality in the novel have Antonia Shimerda as their source. Her first storytelling moments in the novel are minor ones, and function primarily as Fuchs' did. They serve as a source for cultural information about Antonia, her family, their homeland, and by extension about the Bohemians who have peopled the plains. The first occurs when Antonia and Jim are in the prairie-dog field:

That afternoon she was telling me how highly esteemed our friend the badger was in her part of the world, and how men kept a special kind of dog, with very short legs, to hunt him. Those dogs, she said, went down into the hole after the badger and killed him there in a terrific struggle

underground; you could hear the barks and yelps outside. Then the dog dragged himself back, covered with bites and scratches, to be rewarded and petted by his master. She knew a dog who had a star on his collar for every badger he had killed.

(27)

Though this tale, like Otto's, is relayed in Jim's narratorial voice and not in Ántonia's own voice, there are several cues which mark this tale as an oral one. First, it is an animal tale, linking it with the oral tradition of using animal stories to tell parables or to explain natural phenomena. As such, the "terrific struggle underground" becomes emblematic of a larger struggle to protect the home and the homeland.¹¹ The story is also invested with sound in a way that Fuchs' tales were not. We are told that "you could hear the barks and yelps outside," and thus are encouraged to stand alongside the viewers to this event and listen to the sounds of the struggle. The tale is brought to life as much in sound as in visual imagery. Further, because this tale is not particular about time or location, identifying location and period only as "her part of the world," Ántonia's tale exists in mythic time, stretching outside the bounds of Jim's relaying of it, existing in place and time apart from the retelling and yet largely unidentified. In each of these aspects, Ántonia's tale takes on oral qualities distinct from Jim's written identifications. The same holds true for a tale which

immediately follows in the text, the tale of the cricket. *Ántonia* finds a cricket struggling in the grass, and picks it up to protect it, then proceeds to tell a story which is again relayed by Jim in his narratorial voice:

Tony made a warm nest for him [the cricket] in her hands; talked to him gaily and indulgently in Bohemian. Presently he began to sing for us--a thin, rusty little chirp. She held him close to her ear and laughed, but a moment afterward I saw there were tears in her eyes. She told me that in her village at home there was an old beggar woman who went about selling herbs and roots she had dug up in the forest. If you took her in and gave her a warm place by the fire, she sang old songs to the children in a cracked voice, like this. Old Hata, she was called, and the children loved to see her coming and saved their cakes and sweets for her.

(27)

Again, this tale takes on mythic qualities through *Ántonia's* rendering. The cricket becomes a symbol for Old Hata, a beggar woman who hearkens up the numerous beggar women of fairy tale origin.¹² Further, this tale is increasingly invested with sound-images. *Ántonia* speaks "gaily and indulgently in Bohemian," the cricket has a "thin, rusty little chirp"; the cricket "sings" and *Ántonia* "laughs"; and each of these sound-moments recalls the singing of Old Hata, "in a cracked voice." The textual moments intersect, as

Ántonia's Bohemian speech and the cricket's song seem to place both herself and the cricket in the Old World with Old Hata. This narrative technique suggests a collapsing of narrative levels, wherein the one telling the story is also part of the story, and the time and place of the story's occurrence are rendered ambiguous by Ántonia's seemingly simultaneous presence in both worlds. The story of Old Hata and the story of Ántonia and the cricket (told by Jim) are mutually referential, with the speech and song of one conflating into the speech and song of another, placing even Ántonia herself in mythic, storytelling time, and outside the textual rendering by Jim Burden.^{13 14} This concept of Ántonia's functioning as a participant in an oral tradition outside of Jim's printed one is reinforced by the fact that Ántonia retells the story again in a form that Jim cannot comprehend: "Her father put his hand on her hair, but she caught his wrist and lifted it away, talking to him rapidly. I heard the name of Old Hata. He untied the handkerchief, separated her hair with his fingers, and stood looking down at the green insect. When it began to chirp faintly, he listened as if it were a beautiful sound" (29). Ántonia's story, rendered in Bohemian, and the song of the cricket itself, are sufficient to transport Mr. Shimerda outside the time and place of the prairie. Thus the oral qualities of the tale function in a world outside the printed text, because the text has no knowledge of Bohemia, its language, or its people, as it is told through Jim's eyes. Jim's only

access to knowledge of these realms is through the oral tradition conveyed by Antonia, and thus the oral tradition which she represents and participates in functions outside its printed rendering.

Each of these themes--the use of orality as cultural history, orality's function outside linear time and printed text, and the use of sound to create a non-printed or extra-printed text within the printed text--is conveyed by one of the most prominent oral tales in the book, another animal tale: the wolf story. Though it is the story of Pavel and Peter, told by Pavel in Russian, it is through this tale that Antonia takes on an even greater significance as a storyteller, and that we begin to see the gendered implications of her power within the oral tradition.

In this scene, Mr. Shimerda has been summoned to the bedside of the dying Pavel. The children Antonia and Jim have accompanied him. The description as they enter Pavel's house is saturated with sound:

We entered softly...Pavel made a rasping sound when he breathed, and he kept moaning. We waited. The wind shook the doors and the windows impatiently, then swept on again, singing through the big spaces. Each gust, as it bore down, rattled the panes, and swelled off like the others....Presently, in one of those sobbing intervals between the blasts, the coyotes tuned up with their whining howl; one, two, three, then all

together--to tell us that winter was coming. This sound brought an answer from the bed--a long complaining cry--as if Pavel were having bad dreams or were waking to some old misery. Peter listened, but did not stir. He was sitting on the floor by the kitchen stove. The coyotes broke out again; yap, yap, yap--then the high whine. Pavel called for something and struggled up to his elbow. (36)

This sudden and heavy use of sound-imagery signals the transition from a printed world into an oral one. The sounds of the winds, the kitchen windows, the wolves, and Pavel's deathbed throes are described in minute detail, down to the very transcription of the wolves' voices: "yap, yap, yap." Moreover, Pavel's voice and the wolves form an interaction, with one calling and the other giving an "answer," which suggests another element of the oral mode: the call and response. By being drawn into conversation with the wolves, and by his dual existence as both narrator and subject of the tale, Pavel himself enters mythic time and mythic status. He interacts in the oral tradition through his role as the teller of a tale, shaped by his response to both human and wolf audiences. But he is also the subject of the tale, existing in an unspecified past time which was also occupied by howling wolves made present in Nebraska. Once again the oral tale shows an ability to collapse narrative levels through the intersection between the act of retelling and the tale itself, which both seem to exist outside linear time.

As such, this collapsing resists the linearity normally associated with the printed text, as well as the narrative authority traditionally associated with single-narrator writing. So in addition to the focus on sound, there is a focus on the tale as a product of interaction--interaction between Pavel and the wolves, between Pavel and Mr. Shimerda, between Pavel and Antonia-as-listener/Antonia-as-teller, and later, between Antonia and Jim, and Jim and the reader, in the acts of retelling. Accompanying this focus on interaction is a move to a different sense of time, where narrative and its retelling coexist simultaneously, appearing both spontaneous and eternal. These spontaneous, interactive qualities of the oral tale are further emphasized by the use of hyphens in the printed text. It is as though the printed text must hesitate, falter, in its efforts to convey the oral tale. Thus, on several levels, the wolf tale has been set up as a distinctly oral one, one that is sound-filled, existing outside linear time, and shaped by interaction in the retelling, rather than a printed one.

This reading is reinforced by the attention called to Pavel's speaking style, and also by the emphasis on the other characters, and thus the reader, as listeners to the tale. When Pavel speaks, he begins "scarcely above a whisper," but then "grew more and more excited" as he proceeds (37). Peter, also present in the scene, is cast as a listener, someone who "listened, but did not stir." Antonia is also described in the listening act: "She leaned forward and

strained her ears to hear him" (37). These references to the listening act signal the switch to an oral mode, and also suggest a new role for the reader, as one who listens rather than reading. Jim's role as listener is two-fold in this scene. He listens to Pavel speaking in a language he cannot understand. But he also listens to Antonia, who offers brief interpretative comments to Jim throughout Pavel's tirade. These facts suggest a new role for Jim as well, a role as listener rather than interpreter. Since up to this point in the novel events have been framed according to Jim's writerly perspective, this shift to the oral mode also marks a shift away from Jim's authority as a narrator. It is Antonia, instead, who offers the meaning of the scene, by explaining that Pavel is "scared of wolves" and that it is "awful, what he says!" (36-37). Even before Jim has heard the tale in a language that he can understand, he knows its meaning based on Antonia's interpretation of the tale's emotive content.

It is significant that Antonia acts as a translator of the tale's language, as well as an interpreter of its meaning.¹⁵ Up to this point in the novel, Jim has been teaching Antonia to speak English, and she has been his pupil. At this juncture, Jim is the pupil, and he is dependent upon Antonia's authority as a speaker of a Slavic language, as an interpreter of the tale's events, and as a participant in the oral circuit where Jim is excluded from such participation. So the shift into orality in this scene also marks a shift into the realm of Antonia's narrative authority, an act which

deprivileges the male, the printed, and the New-World urbanity, in favor of Antonia's female, rural, oral mode. This tale is, in a sense, pastoral, for its emphasis on the natural world, but also for its emphasis on both those elements: "past" and "oral."¹⁶ Though it is Pavel who conveys the tale, it is clearly Antonia who carries the narrative authority in this scene, for it is she who is lucid and who acts as the shaper of the tale's meaning. The content of the tale itself is not conveyed to the reader until after-the-fact. Jim, the narrator, offers the following comment on the textual version of the tale: "On the way home, when we were lying in the straw, under the jolting and rattling Antonia told me as much of the story as she could. What she did not tell me then, she told later; we talked of nothing else for days afterward" (38). Jim's commentary offers evidence of the oral process. The tale is told and retold, and more information is carried in each retelling. Thus the tale which follows in the text is truly a product of interaction between Pavel and Antonia in the initial telling, and between Antonia and Jim in the retelling. The reader has little concept of who "owns" or "controls" the tale as it is presented subsequently. However, the content of the tale bears the marks of a female narrative authority, shaped by Antonia as the source for the version which Jim subsequently offers. Also, the continued emphasis on sound throughout the tale, but sounds which are

not translated for the reader, suggests the tale's status as a bridge between the oral and the print.

The basic plot of the tale is the story of Pavel and Peter's reason for leaving their homeland. Pavel and Peter had been guests at a wedding, and drove the sledge carrying the bride and groom home from the wedding celebration. When the numerous sledges carrying the wedding guests are set upon by wolves, Pavel plans to throw the bride overboard to the wolves to lighten the sleigh and ensure their arrival in town. Pavel fights with the groom over his plan, knocking the groom overboard and throwing the bride after. Pavel and Peter are the only two wedding guests to survive the carnage and subsequently find themselves rejected by their mother, outcast from town, and exiled from every town where the story has been heard. The story itself hounds them as the wolves had hounded them, and eventually they come to America where bad luck, if not the story itself, continues to follow them.

This plot-based retelling fails to capture the oral qualities of the tale as retold in the text, however. Foremost among these qualities is the use of sound in the conveying of the tale. Before the wolf attack, the wedding party "set out with singing and the jingle of sleigh-bells." We are told of "the first wolf-cry" which then builds as "[t]he first howls were taken up and echoed with quickening repetitions" (38). The noise of the tale intensifies alongside the growing danger and suspense of the tale itself. So in each of these cases, the sound carries the mood of the

tale, and shapes the listener's response to it. After the first sledge is overturned, "shrieks...followed" (39). The word "followed" has a double meaning here, since the shrieks follow the attack, but the sound also trails after the retreating sledges, as if it pursues them as the wolves do. This sense of sound-as-pursuit relates closely to the fact that this tale has followed Pavel throughout Russia and led to his figurative exile in America. The fact that sound travels is, in part, responsible for his demise.

As the story proceeds the shrieking is heightened: "The screams of the horses were more terrible to hear than the cries of the men and women...the people who were falling behind shrieked as piteously as those who were already lost" (39). Then the final shrieks are those of the bride and groom: "Presently the groom screamed. He saw his father's sledge overturned, with his mother and sisters. He sprang up as if he meant to jump, but the girl shrieked and held him back" (39). As the story reaches its climax, "the shrieking behind them died away" and is replaced by "a new sound that broke into the clear air, louder than they had ever heard it before--the bell of the monastery of their own village, ringing for early prayers" (40). So as the sound in the story reflects the emotions of the teller, and shapes the emotions of the listener, the bells at its conclusion signal the arrival to safety but also toll the coming doom of the brothers for their actions. So, on this sound-level, this story is a significant oral moment in the text because it

uses sound to convey its meaning. It is a tale that exists as much in sound as in text, and the fact that it is relayed by several different characters within the novel points to its existence within the oral realm.

But in addition to existing as an oral tale within the Nebraskan rural community, this episode also offers insight into the functionings of oral storytelling as news, gossip, and history within the Russian community. For just as Peter and Pavel had been pursued by wolves, the story of their actions pursues them in their travels: "They went away to strange towns, but when people learned where they came from, they were always asked if they knew the two men who had fed the bride to the wolves. Wherever they went, the story followed them" (40). This sequence indicates another distinct quality to oral communication. It travels. While printed texts must be moved physically from place to place in order to communicate their message, oral texts are transferred through any human verbal interaction. Their ability to be constantly told and retold, and shaped with each retelling, is the source of their power, and *My Ántonia* usurps this power for itself by drawing the reader into the oral tradition. The reader is transformed into listener, potential teller, and thus potential shaper of the tale through this oral moment in the text.

The process is modeled by Jim and Ántonia's own response to the text, which is described thus: "For Ántonia and me, the story of the wedding party was never at an end. We did not

tell Pavel's secret to anyone, but guarded it jealously--as if the wolves of the Ukraine had gathered that night long ago, and the wedding party had been sacrificed, to give us a painful and peculiar pleasure. At night, before I went to sleep, I often found myself in a sledge drawn by three horses, dashing through a country that looked something like Nebraska and something like Virginia" (41). Jim uses the tale to his own ends, and transfers its setting to his own, as the readers are encouraged to make the tale their own through the retelling process that Jim and Antonia model. In so doing, Jim exemplifies the ability of the oral tale to exist outside daily time, because the wolf story is at once about Russia and about Nebraska, simultaneously featuring Pavel and Jim, being told around Russia in the time of Pavel's life and around Nebraska at the time of his death and around America through its conveyance in the novel form. Jim later describes hearing related stories from Otto Fuchs at his home: "as we sat around the old stove...we could hear coyotes howling down by the corrals, and their hungry, wintery cry used to remind the boys of wonderful animal stories; about grey wolves and bears in the Rockies, wildcats and panthers in the Virginia mountains" (45). Yet this moment of storytelling which occurs later in the text is not solely about the grey wolves of the Rockies or the wildcats of Virginia, but also refers listeners back to Russian wolves of which Jim has learned and the coyotes that howl outside their own Nebraska door. These "animal stories" recall the

stories of cricket and badger that *Ántonia* has told earlier in the narrative. Therefore, the oral moments within the text become mutually referential with one another, and collapse the experiences of individuals in varied times and places--Otto in the Rockies, Jake in Virginia, *Ántonia* in Bohemia, Pavel in the Russian Ukraine--into a single collection of "animal stories" existing in mythic time, in the oral form, and within the repertoire of each of the characters who hears them, as well as the reader-listener who reads them in the text of *My Ántonia*. Each of these stories connects with one another across the novel and connects to other stories outside the novel through their mutual referentiality.¹⁷ The print expression is a manifestation rather than a containment of the oral story. Thus the oral tale, as presented within the novel, exists beyond the novel's bounds as a story truly "never at an end."

This point is supported by the fact that Cather did not create the Russian wolf story for use in *My Ántonia*. It is a story which she herself obtained as a listener within the oral tradition and which exists in a variety of forms pre-dating Cather's use of it.¹⁸ These prior sources for Cather's tale also suggest the ways in which a female influence bears upon this tale which seems to be the province of men, primarily Pavel and Jim. For in the oral versions of the wolf tale, the story often focuses on the cruelty and selfishness of a mother, or a set of parents, who throw their children to the wolves and who are subsequently exiled or

executed for the crime (Scrach, 68). Yet in the *Ántonia*/Cather version, it has become a story about a man's willingness to sacrifice a woman to save himself. This refiguring of the oral tale changes its moral and its categorization. Rather than being a "bad mother" story, this tale has now become a story about the sufferings of women at the hands of men. This interpretation is reinforced by the fact that, when the story travels, people ask Peter and Pavel if they "knew the two men that fed the *bride* to the wolves" (40, emphasis added). Pavel's knocking the groom off the sledge has become a lesser issue in the story's retellings. It is the murder of the bride that now lends the story its significance for those who exile Peter and Pavel. Thus in the *My Ántonia* retelling, the story is reshaped to reflect the sufferings of women in a harsh landscape at the hands of harsh men. Thus this story bears the marks of Cather's, as well as *Ántonia*'s, influence as female interpreters and retellers of the wolf tale.¹⁹ Within this sequence, oral power serves a particular function for women. It allows them a voice within this hard landscape and among the male peers who might try to dominate them. Second, it allows them to use oral power to refocus attention on their own sufferings. The tale serves as a cautionary tale for men not to mistreat women lest they be exiled, as Pavel was. Thus the tale's female power has multiple layers: it gives women an authoritative voice through which to express their views; the content of the tales, and their ability to be reshaped,

allows women to shift the focus and message of the tale so that it encourages empathy for women and their gendered sufferings; and, finally, it carries an implicit threat, which is that the community may use this oral power to drive out the members who do not observe the cautions within the tale. Because the tale will follow the wrongdoer, the power of the oral expression, and in this case its particularly female authority, goes beyond the particular oral expression by suggesting the power of future expressions, as word spreads.²⁰

Several of these same themes are highlighted in the sequence surrounding Mr. Shimerda's suicide, including the ideas of reshaping through retelling and the use of female authority in the storytelling process. The Shimerda sequence also highlights a technique noted in the Fosdick-Todd sequence of *Country of the Pointed Firs*: the use of multiple characters interacting to produce the meaning of the story, and thus reenacting the oral process itself. But while Jewett used these techniques, in part, to bring the dead and exiled back into the community of the living, Cather appears more focused on the act of steeling the living against grief, and of bracing them for the difficult life they face. Her focus seems more to use the dead to bolster the living, rather than drawing the dead back to the living community.²¹ The Shimerda sequence also supports the notion that the orality within Cather's novel is based in an oral tradition which stretches outside the novel. As Grumbach notes, the

story of Shimerda's suicide was drawn from the immigrant community surrounding Cather's Nebraska home, based upon the actual story of Francis Sadilek (viii-ix). So Cather is conveying orality within her written narrative by creating an intertextuality with the oral tradition in which she also participates, as someone who seeks out her immigrant neighbors, from various cultural backgrounds, in order to become first the listener to and then the teller of their stories (Grumbach, viii). As such, Cather functions as a participant in her local oral tradition on two levels. The raw material of the Shimerda episode has its roots in orality formed outside the novel. Moreover, in the Shimerda scene in the novel, the power over the told tale is clearly marked as female power through the oral process.

The chain of orality, by which a tale is passed from person to person, is initiated by Jake Marpole and Otto Fuchs in the aftermath of the Shimerda suicide. No sooner is the tale released than the Grandmother offers her interpretation of Mr. Shimerda's actions: "He was always considerate and unwilling to give trouble. How could he forget himself and bring this on us!" (63). Soon after, others set forth their versions of the story, and there is some contestation over the cause of death. Otto Fuchs explains:

He done everything natural. You know he was always sort of fixy, and fixy he was to the last. He shaved after dinner, and washed hisself all over after the girls had done the dishes. Antonia

heated the water for him. Then he put on a clean shirt and clean socks, and after he was dressed he kissed her and the little one and took his gun and said he was going out to hunt rabbits. He must have gone right to the barn and done it then...When we found him, everything was decent...except what he couldn't nowise foresee. His coat was hung on a peg, and his boots was under the bed. He'd took off that silk neckcloth he always wore, and folded it smooth and stuck his pin through it. He turned back his shirt at the neck and rolled up his sleeves. (63)

By presenting the passage in dialogue, in the voice of Otto's speech rather than Jim's narration, Cather depicts the process of orality as well as its effects. The use of words like "fixy," "hissself," and "nowise" indicate Otto's distinct speaking style and mark the transition to oral, rather than print, authority. But though Otto initiates the oral cycle, it is Grandmother Burden who offers it its impetus. She sets forth the perspective on the events, as *Ántonia* did with Pavel's wolf tale. When Jake intervenes with an alternative view, suggesting that Shimerda may have been murdered rather than having committed suicide, Otto tries to refute him, but it is Grandmother Burden who quells the discussion: "See here Jake Marpole, don't you go trying to add murder to suicide. We're deep enough in trouble. Otto reads you too many of them detective stories" (64). Grandmother offers her

own interpretation of events in contrast to Jake Marpole's version, and wins this discursive battle. But in addition to disputing Jake's view, her version of events is also offered in contrast to the version of the printed fictions Jake and Otto have a clear familiarity with: "detective stories." Print is again rendered as a domain of male thought, while oral power belongs to the Grandmother in this scene. The grandmother puts the boys in their place, so to speak, by discounting their authority over the oral realm and recategorizing them as men influenced by print. As such, female orality triumphs.

When Grandmother Burden insists upon going to the Shimerdas, over and above the objections of her husband, she reasserts her views on the matter: "Well, I can take them some victuals, anyway, and say a word of comfort to them poor little girls. The oldest one was his darling, and was like a right hand to him. He might have thought of her. He's left her alone in a hard world" (64). In this verbal maneuver, Grandmother Burden not only wins her way and accompanies the men to the farm, but also shifts the terms of the tragedy. The focus now lies with the girls who must suffer as survivors of the suicide, rather than with the man who has committed the tragic act. Grandmother Burden, in effect, recasts this tale as one of women abandoned on the prairie and forced to survive alone, rather than as one of a man displaced. Furthermore, it is hinted that Grandmother Burden will take charge of dispensing this interpretation, as she

will "say a word of comfort to them poor little girls." As with the wolf story, the female interpretative power made possible through the oral process reshapes the tale to focus on the hardships of women rather than the torturous decision of the man. Moreover, just as it is hinted that Pavel's mother took part in his exile, the normally sympathetic Grandma Burden seems intent on passing on this tale as one of the girls' suffering, rather than the sufferings of the father. Here again, the women use their oral power to bond together and to create an interpretation of events which turns sympathy toward other women and away from the men involved.

There are several subsequent passages which indicate that the Burden family is in charge of dispensing the oral story of Mr. Shimerda to the eager neighbors:

At four o'clock Mr. Bushy, the postmaster, with another neighbor who lived east of us, stopped in to get warm. They were on their way to the Shimerdas'. The news of what had happened over there had somehow got abroad through the snow-blocked country. Grandmother gave the visitors sugar-cakes and hot coffee. Before these callers were gone, the brother of the Widow Steavens, who lived on the Black Hawk road, drew up at our door, and after him came the father of the German family, our nearest neighbors from the south....They were

all eager for any details about the suicide....

(72)

Though it is not indicated who among the Burden family is passing these tales to the neighbors, Grandmother Burden has already regulated the interpretations of Shimerda's death. She shapes the form of the tale as it will be passed on to others and places female suffering at its center. She uses orality for power in this scene, asserting her perceptions in the face of the men's counter-views. She sets the stage for the tale to be incorporated into community gossip, by seeking to comfort the suffering girls with her interpretation of events. And here again we see the power of dispensing the tale through multiple retellings, which reinforces the female authority associated with the initial telling, and interpreting, of the Shimerda story.

Speaking style is also highlighted in this sequence, heightening the oral sensibility: Fuchs "wrinkled his brow and hesitated" at the thought of the blood on the ceiling which he hesitates to mention (63); when Jake offers his counter opinion, the grandmother questions him "sharply" and Jake "spoke up impatiently" (64); grandmother then "broke in excitedly" to offer the ultimate word on the subject (64). When Grandfather Burden offers a coda to her comments, he does so "quietly" (64). These descriptions heighten the sense of the oral process in the text, because they give a sense of these characters not only as characters, but as tellers of tales themselves. Each character's speech is

presented to us as oral performance, with the accompanying qualities of volume, vocabulary, and inflection that form the oral text.²² Thus Cather's work has a multi-level engagement with oral discourse. It invokes oral tradition in its content, by using stories from an oral source, but also recreates the process of orality within its narrative through its use of speaking style, verbal interaction and negotiation in the act of tale-telling, and the suggestion that the oral chain will be continued as the news spreads by word-of-mouth through the snowbound region. The readers, too, are brought into this oral circuit by being permitted to hear the debates in action, and by having the tale passed to them in turn.

Though Grandmother Burden has her day as interpreter and storyteller in the wake of the Shimerda suicide, the adolescent *Ántonia* resumes her role as storyteller when she takes work in the Harling household of Black Hawk. One story in particular, the tramp/thresher sequence, reinforces the various types of orality evident in the earlier sequences, but offers an even more potent suggestion of the ways in which the oral story stretches beyond the bounds of the printed text.

Before the Harlings hire *Ántonia* Shimerda, they ask the Burdens to provide information on her. As might be expected, this information takes the form of oral history. Mr. Shimerda's death is raised as a significant element in this history, but only as it relates to *Ántonia*. Again, the impact of the death on *Ántonia* is the root of the story's

importance as Grandmother Burden relays it: "When she first come to this country...and had that genteel old man to watch over her, she was as pretty a girl as ever I saw. But, dear me, what a life she's led, out in the fields with those rough threshers! Things would have been very different with poor *Ántonia* if her father had lived" (100). Soon after, Jim states: "The Harlings begged us to tell them about Mr. Shimerda's death and the big snowstorm" (100). Though the Shimerda story is not retold for the reader at this point, the comments which Grandmother Burden offers indicate that her interpretation of the event has not changed. Even years later she focuses on the sufferings of the surviving girls rather than on the sufferings of the homesick man. With this comment, the woman-centered interpretation of events is available to Frances and Mrs. Harling as well.

The Harlings subsequently hire *Ántonia*, and she is quickly established as the storyteller to the children:

While we sat in the kitchen waiting for the cookies to bake or the taffy to cool, Nina used to coax *Ántonia* to tell her stories--about the calf that broke its leg, or how Yulka saved her little turkeys from drowning in the freshet, or about old Christmases and weddings in Bohemia. Nina interpreted the stories about the *crêche* fancifully, and in spite of our derision she cherished a belief that Christ was born in Bohemia a short time before the Shimerdas left that

country. We all liked Tony's stories. Her voice had a peculiarly engaging quality; it was deep, a little husky, and one always heard the breath vibrating behind it. Everything she said seemed to come right out of her heart. (113)

This sequence highlights several of the themes and functions of orality established in the earlier sequences. Orality is used as a means to convey the qualities of country life to these sub-urban children. The tales of calves, turkeys, and life in the old country indicate the intimate link between these oral stories and the oral history mode of the rural areas which produced them. The stories offer an introduction to *Ántonia's* homeland and family, and so also serve as a form of cultural initiation for the children. This sequence highlights the storytelling process, indicating that Nina's role as listener is also one of interpreter. This passage also suggests that Nina has the potential to pass these oral tales on, despite being mocked by the bookish Jim about the inaccurate Biblical content of her interpretation. This sequence further emphasizes *Ántonia's* speaking style, giving a quality of oral performance to *Ántonia's* storytelling, a quality which is heightened in the subsequent story told in *Ántonia's* voice.²³

Following this description, the text states: "One evening when we were picking out kernels for walnut taffy, Tony told us a new story." This story proceeds in *Ántonia's* voice, and it is the story of a tramp who wandered toward the Norwegian

threshers, with whom *Ántonia* was working, and struck up a conversation with *Ántonia*. *Ántonia* recounts both her voice and the man's in conversation, and Mrs. Harling intervenes to ask questions of *Ántonia*, thus shaping the story's content. In each of these respects, the oral qualities of the narrative are highlighted. But it is the content of, and reaction to, this particular story which carries the most significant meaning on the functions of oral tradition in Cather's work. For after offering to "cut bands" for the Norwegians, the tramp "waved his hand...and jumped head-first right into the threshing machine after the wheat" (115). The response to this story is an interesting one. Nina begins to cry, as she is wont to do at several points in the text, and Mrs. Harling reprimands her, "speaking up sternly": "Stop crying, Nina, or I'll always send you upstairs when *Ántonia* tells us about the country" (115). This response indicates several things within the oral context of the narrative. It indicates that orality belongs to the country, and that country life itself is often harsh. Clearly, Mrs. Harling associates Nina's crying with being told "about the country." In this respect, the story functions much like the Shimerda sequence, as a means to bolster the living with stories about death, and to reconcile the living to their hard life.²⁴ The fact that both of these stories are about suicides indicates that the living may retell these stories in order to make sense of this unexplainable act, but also to use the support of one another against the kind of despair which leads to

such actions. Thus, the storytelling also functions to cement the community of the living to one another through these tales about the deaths of others. The fact that Mrs. Harling reprimands Nina, rather than coddling her as she usually does during Nina's crying fits, is very telling in itself. It indicates that Mrs. Harling understands the importance of incorporating this knowledge of life's difficulties into their own perspective and of using the stories as a means to work out their views on the world. While it may be perfectly understandable that a child would cry at such a violent story, Mrs. Harling's response indicates the importance of the listening act, even when the content is disturbing. It also indicates the danger of ignoring or refusing to participate in such stories: If one indulges the crying response, one runs the risk of becoming too weak to survive in a difficult land. The alternative response is exemplified by Mrs. Harling and Antonia, who attempt to locate both a meaning for the death and a meaning for living through the story, by reasserting the beauty of the rural life alongside, and as part and parcel of, its difficulties. Antonia states: "Why would anyone want to kill themselves in summer for? In threshing time, too! It's nice everywhere, then" (115). Mrs. Harling responds "heartily": "So it is, Antonia...Maybe I'll go home and help you thresh next summer" (115). Mrs. Harling then changes the subject by inquiring as to whether the taffy is ready. These last comments indicate the importance of the mutual

interpretative act made possible by the oral storytelling. As with Mrs. Fosdick and Mrs. Todd in Jewett's work, *Antonia* and Mrs. Harling can verbally negotiate the meaning of the story and reassert their own love of life through the oral storytelling act.

Mrs. Harling's final comment also offers a lens as to how gender is functioning in this scene. The family is engaged in a particularly domestic activity, taffy making, when the storytelling occurs. Yet the story itself focuses on *Antonia*'s work as a farm hand, an act which has caused wide community concern because of its presumed masculine nature.²⁵ Mrs. Harling reinforces both of these roles, the thresher and the taffy maker, and even indicates a desire to be a thresher herself, through her comments. This act suggests that Mrs. Harling casts womanhood as a synthesis of domestic and physical labors, and of the associated qualities of gentleness and strength. Indeed, one of the ways Mrs. Harling shapes the thresher tale is by commenting on *Antonia*'s ability to do "heavy work" on her own, without male assistance (114). So in addition to using the tale to bond the family circle, and to reinforce the importance of farm life and of life itself, the negotiations surrounding the tale carry a message about the importance of female independence, and of the importance of maintaining both the nurturant and resilient qualities within the female experience. This idea of fusing qualities associated with different genders models the narrative process itself. By

fusing oral and print, Cather's text merges language modes that are ideologically associated with femaleness and maleness, and shows the appropriateness of both to the female experience.

By not subordinating the oral mode to the print mode, Cather's text also suggests that the rural and female experiences should not be subordinated to the urban male experience which is often taken as standard. One of the ways in which the oral text functions as an equal partner to the printed text is through the interconnection of the oral tales within *My Ántonia* and across several of Cather's novels. The intertextuality between these inset tales suggests an oral narrative which spans the printed narrative rather than being contained by it. This argument is supported by the fact that the tramp-thresher sequence bears similarity to several other oral tales which are conveyed in and outside the text of *My Ántonia*. Cather's use of orality thus bursts the bounds of printed matter and points a-linearly to a tradition outside of a single, written novel. For example, the episode where the tramp throws himself into the thresher in *My Ántonia* is reminiscent of the episode where the tramp throws himself into the town water supply in *The Song of the Lark* (119-121). In this latter sequence, a tramp is cast out by the town, and in an act of vengeance he hurls his typhus-infected body into the water tank by the train station, potentially infecting the entire town. This suicide-as-vengeance is not far removed from the tramp-thresher sequence, where the only

visible motive for the tramp's suicide is the fact that the Norwegians have no beer to give him. Certainly there are differences between the two sequences. In the tramp-watertower sequence, the town seems sufficiently to blame for the actions of the wanderer, though his vengeance may seem unduly cruel. In the tramp-thresher sequence, the tramp's actions remain largely inexplicable, and though he may have contaminated the wheat supply, his actions do not basically endanger those around him. But in both cases, the tramps' suicides offer a lens through which to interpret the actions of the townspeople. Both are, in effect, stories about community reaction to a drifter, and about that drifter's reaction to community, but with different motivations and morals emphasized. Through this type of intertextuality, we can see a single tale being shaped and reshaped, not in the course of a single novel, but across novels. The oral narrative created by the dialogue between these two tramp tales is not confined to either of the novels which present it. Therefore, this oral tale, the tramp suicide tale, is an example of the oral process because it stretches outside its particular manifestations, and is reshaped to fit each context in which it is retold.

The same process is illustrated by the Cutter murder sequence. Toward the novel's conclusion, the adult Jim Burden visits *Ántonia* who is now mother to a large family. When he stays to dinner with the family, the son Rudolph tells a tale of the local antics of the rich and bizarre

Cutter family, who have been introduced earlier in the novel. This tale-telling in some ways reenacts the tale-telling at the Harlings, but in this instance *Ántonia* has passed her oral power to her son and the audience of children are her own.

The Cutter story explains how a local man, Mr. Cutter, obsessed with the odious idea (to him) of his wife's family gaining his wealth after his death, goes so far as to murder his wife, shoot himself, and then signal to outsiders by shooting through the window so that they might enter and discover that he has survived his wife for the few minutes before he dies, thus ensuring that his wife's family won't receive their money after this grisly murder-suicide. Interestingly, the children's reaction to this story is quite disparate from Nina Harling's reaction to the previous one. When Rudolph proposes to tell the story, the children cry out, "'Hurrah! The murder!'", a response which may indicate children who are more used to hardship than the protected Nina Harling.²⁶ The post-tale meaning negotiation session which occurs is highly reminiscent of the episode surrounding the Shimerda suicide. *Ántonia* comments: "Now, would you have thought that man had such a cruel heart?...To go and do that poor woman out of any comfort she might have from his money after he was gone!" (233). As with Grandmother Burden, Mother *Ántonia* now acts as the interpreter rather than the teller of the tale, but it is again she who holds the authority in the oral process. *Ántonia* uses her

interpretative comment to shape the meaning of the tale. She turns the tale to one of a woman cheated of her due rather than a tale of a crazed man obsessed with money. The protagonist of the tale, the placement of sympathy, and indeed the very moral, shift through this emphasis on female suffering as the heart of the tale. While the men seem inclined to interpret the tale as one of a crazed and greedy man which conveys a lesson about greed, in Antonia's version it becomes a tale of the trials of a wife with a wicked husband and the lack of justice in her death.

With this interpretative act, the tale becomes connected to the Shimerda sequence. Though Mr. Shimerda remains a sympathetic figure, and his suicide is clearly a result of his own despair rather than an act of deliberate cruelty, the fact that the suicide of the man inflicts an unfair result on the women--a judgement made by the women who interpret the tales--connects the two tales across their dissimilarities and across the printed text. But the Cutter suicide tale is also a murder tale, and in this respect is thematically connected to the wolf sequence.²⁷ In both cases, the bride is sacrificed to a twisted sense of male justice accompanied by the men's insistence on their own survival above all else. These tales form an oral narrative both within and outside the text, and the text itself cues us toward this interpretation. For after the story concludes, Rudolph (the teller) asks Jim Burden: "Did you ever hear of anybody else that killed himself for spite...?" (233). While Jim insists

that he hasn't, the reader of *My Ántonia* is encouraged to recall other tales "heard" within the course of the text, like that of the tramp and the thresher. But this question cues even more powerfully a recollection of tales from Cather's other works, like that of the tramp and the water supply from *The Song of the Lark*, which is more clearly a case of spiteful suicide. Another inset tale from *The Song of the Lark* also fits this categorization of spiteful suicide stories: the inset tale of the jealous boyfriend who dances his girlfriend off a cliff to punish her flirtations. This tale hearkens to the Cutter sequence as a spiteful murder-suicide, but also hearkens to the wolf sequence as a tale where the woman suffers at the hands of the man's bizarre sense of justice. If Rudolph pressed the question to ask if we had heard of anyone who had been murdered for spite, additional stories from Cather texts leap to mind: the story of Emil and Marie from *O Pioneers!*; Mother Eve of *The Professor's House*, who has likely been murdered in the act of adultery (PG?); or even the death-by-social rejection of *Lucy Gayheart*. Through Rudolph's comment, each of these tales becomes a manifestation of a larger oral narrative evident in Cather's works. Moreover, the interpretation of these tales as tales of women's suffering is encouraged not only by the comments of women within the texts, but by the juxtaposition of these tales to one another. That is, when the tales are considered collectively, the common threads that unite them are the cruelty of men and/or the sufferings of women at

their hands.²⁸ Thus the individual tales serve as variations on a central theme, and that overarching oral narrative is visible through the collective lens of its variations.

The fact that some of these examples come from texts post-dating *My Ántonia* suggests that this Catherian oral narrative spans her works a-temporally. It is not limited by the bounds of any individual textual expression, nor by the bounds of linear time. The oral narrative does not begin or end with *My Ántonia*, but instead *My Ántonia* becomes one expression within the larger oral chain. This altering of linear time, by having the tales within *My Ántonia* reflect simultaneously back into past works and forward into future works, suggests the profound alteration of narrative structure made possible by the oral moment. The boundaries of time and printed matter are rendered fluid as the oral stories function both within and around them, blending and blurring distinctions of past/present/future and oral/print. This reading is reinforced by the fact that the various tales collapse the narrative hierarchy--some events happen to people who never appear in the novel outside of the inset tale, making them the subject of the characters' speculation. Yet some of the events happen to the characters themselves, making them the subject of one another's, and the reader's, speculation. As such, the inset tale and the frame tale, or the oral tale and the written tale, are placed on even ground by this textual act, collapsing the hierarchy of narrative which places tellers of tales above the characters

themselves.²⁹ Perhaps this is why some argue that Cather places herself in the frame narrative, making her position as author equal to that of the character, rather than privileged above it.

Through her utilization of these techniques, Cather's use of orality becomes far more encompassing than an interruption or disruption of the printed text. This orality exceeds the limitations of traditional written narrative by creating a continuity across the inset tales of several novels. This continuity conveys an alternate sense of time and narrative structure from that traditionally associated with written narrative. The fact that each of the aforementioned tales focuses on a suffering inflicted by a man, usually upon a woman or a community of women, suggests further that this orality allows women, in particular, to voice the wrongs which they survive, and to create a sense of power through the oral tale. By demonstrating this oral power within, across, and outside her written texts, Cather creates a body of work which is truly oral-print, and which has the capacity to burst the boundaries of discourse, gendered space, and gender itself. Coupled with the varied other uses of orality in the text--the sense of performance conveyed by the use of speaker's voices; the use of sound and the resultant placement of the reader as listener rather than solely reader; the referencing of cultural oral traditions outside the text, like those of Norway, Russia, and Sweden; the numerous examples of the way oral news "travels," and thus

becomes the history of a rural region--Cather's narrative demonstrates the full potential of the oral-print narrative form to reverse the privileging of print discourse, and its associated ideologies of maleness and urban experience, and to pave its own way into the print marketplace using a narrative form uniquely suited to its task.

In this context, any criticism of the novel which derides its supposedly fragmentary structure suggests the inability of the critic to read beyond the traditional printed narrative structure.³⁰ Further, it suggests the ways in which our theories of reading are themselves structured by an ideology which is gender, class and geographically biased, favoring the linear, the male, and the urban over the the spatial, female, and rural aspects of text which are all embodied by the oral narrative structure. Thus, Cather's work demonstrates the ideological gendering of discourse which names orality as female and print as male, while simultaneously demonstrating her text's ability to transgress these categorizations.

Theorists have more recently discussed Cather's "ambivalent" or "ambiguous" participation in print discourse, by noting her use of male printed forms alongside less conventional forms, like orality, which are used to reinforce female narrative authority. I am thinking in particular of Woolley, who argues that Cather, "who claimed to view storytelling and domesticity as art, nevertheless strove to fulfill the standards of Western high art in her own writing"

(160). It is also Woolley who states that Cather "presents Antonia and other artists ambiguously, portraying them mainly as inspiration for the white male writer" (175). Bennington McElhiney argues nearly the exact opposite, stating: "Cather clearly, if subtly, establishes her identification with women's (Antonia's) 'outsider,' immigrant experience, not with men's (Jim's) 'insider,' dominant-culture experience" (66). Giltrow and Stouck note Cather's "ambivalence about language" in their linguistic analysis of her work (100). Yet their examples language's limitation are drawn almost exclusively from characters who are affiliated with print discourse, while their examples of Cather's idealism about language are drawn from moments of oral storytelling (Giltrow and Stouck, 93-4, 91). I see this confusion based in the persistent attempt to affiliate Cather with either Jim and print or Antonia and orality, rather than acknowledging that both discourses presented in the novel, far from being "competing" or mutually exclusive, form a complex web of linguistic interaction which Cather portrays in order to expose the language-gender ideologies of her day, and to transform these very ideologies. As Rosowski notes, Cather "was intensely concerned with the ways in which ideologies are codified," (Endings, 84). I see Cather's work existing, as the title of one of her short stories indicates, "On the Divide," between print/oral and male/female. Within the oral-print context, Cather's use of these varied forms suggests not ambivalence, but a complex discursive narrative

project, whereby gendered distinctions in narrative form are exemplified by her protagonists, while simultaneously being transgressed by her minor characters and by Cather herself in the act of writing. In so doing, Cather shows the possibilities of the oral-print narrative form to transform the writing act along the alinear, atemporal, and female-informed lines of the oral tale, thus making her participation in the print marketplace a self-justifying act, and one which reforms the very discourses in which it participates.

NOTES

¹ Several theorists have linked Cather's fiction to specific cultural and folk traditions. For a discussion of Cather's use of Nordic mythology in her short stories, see Hall. For a discussion of Cather's use of Russian folk tales, particularly the wolf tale, see Scrach. For a discussion of Cather's popularity in Sweden and her links to a Swedish audience, see Pers. Grumbach also notes Cather's exposure to the oral stories of Bohemian, Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish immigrants through her childhood visits to neighbors (viii).

² My discussion of the novel's Introduction is based on the later, revised version, which is now the better known of the two. However, most of my observations also hold true for the 1918 version.

³ For additional readings on the influence of books and authors upon Jim Burden's perspective, see Funda 212; Schwind 59-60; Woolley 173-4. For more on print tradition's influence on the text as a whole, see Gelfant 68; Stouck, *Pastoral*; and Woolley 172-5.

⁴ Peterman has also noted the regional connection between these works, stating, "Nebraska is their Robinson Crusoe's island, their Swiss Family Robinson's jungle" (157).

⁵ For readings of the function of *The Georgics* in this latter episode, see Gelfant 68 and Schwind 59-60.

⁶ Gelfant is among the first theorists to note the subjectivity of Jim's narration, and the various other aspects of the novel that implicitly critique Jim's views. For more on the use of narrative structure and its critique of Jim, see Laird 247-249. For readings on the ways in which *Ántonia's*, and other characters', storytelling implicitly questions Jim's perspective, see Funda and Woolley. For readings on Cather's challenge to Jim's perspective, particularly through the framing narrative, see Rosowski, *Approaches*. For a reading of how the original illustrations to *My Ántonia* challenge Jim's perspective, see Schwind.

⁷ Woolley also notes Jim's shift from "low" to "high" culture materials, and discusses the use of both of these types of materials in the novel as a whole. See particularly 150-1, 160, 173-4.

⁸ Selzer points out the association of several other male characters, including Mr. Harling, Mr. Burden, and Mr. Shimerda, with both urbanness and formal education (51). I see Selzer's reading as supporting my own reading of print discourse as ideologically male, urban, and affiliated with the force of "civilization." This point is further reinforced by the association of Mr. Shimerda with Coronado, *My Ántonia* 155.

⁹ For another reading on the use of Jim's voice to relay the stories of others, particularly *Ántonia*, see Woolley 158-9.

¹⁰ For more on Jim's move toward conformity and "civilized" urban life, as well as a discussion of Jim's fear of immigrants and cultural miscegenation which I feel supports my reading, see Selzer 47-54. Selzer, however, does not see Lena as associated with conformity and city life.

¹¹ For more on the symbolism of the underground battle, see Shaw 528-9.

¹² For more on myth and fairy tale images in Cather's works, see Gelfant 70; Rosowski, *Approaches*, 68; and Rosowski, "Endings," 71-73. Rosowski argues that Cather's use of fairy tale conventions overturns linear, male historical scripts. Her argument that Cather's concepts of female-associated "myth" and "symbolism" are set against male-defined "history" corresponds loosely to my own discussion of "oral" and "print." For more on this aspect of Rosowski's argument, see "Endings." I find Rosowski's reading very compelling, but feel that she privileges the "mythic" part of the equation, whereas I see Cather as ultimately striving to balance the oral and the print and their gender associations.

¹³ This reading is reinforced by Woolley's reading of the same episode, wherein she points out that *Antonia's* stories "link her Bohemian past with the American prairie" (157). Woolley also points out that *Antonia's* English, like her stories, is a combination of her native language and English forms.

¹⁴ I am defining "mythic time" and "storytelling time" here as oral moments wherein the specificity and linearity of time are rendered ambiguous, thus creating a new sense of time in the listener/reader and

implicitly questioning the linear structure of time normally observed in the print tradition. Rosowski also notes how Cather, in various novels, used narrative structure to create an alternate sense of time which carries gendered meaning. See Rosowski, "Endings".

¹⁵ In a footnote, Scrach notes that Pavel's Russian and the Shimerda family's Czech may not be "mutually understandable" (77).

Interestingly, I have yet to encounter a theorist who suggests that *Ántonia* may indeed be making up the entire wolf tale within the novel. The only version Jim receives is through *Ántonia*, and though Pavel is telling something to Mr. Shimerda, neither Pavel nor Mr. Shimerda offer any clue as to what their conversation entails. Moreover, each of these characters dies shortly after this conversation, so there is no living person within the text who could refute *Ántonia*'s translation. I believe it is quite possible that *Ántonia* is making up this tale within the text, leading Jim by the nose, using the sounds of the surrounding wolves and Pavel's groans as the source material for her creation, and elaborating on her early versions in subsequent retellings. Though the balance of my analysis works with the premise that *Ántonia* has in fact overheard this tale, the possibility that she may have invented it reinforces both the oral dynamics I describe and the prevalence of female narrative authority in this scene.

¹⁶ For an in-depth reading on the use of pastoral conventions in *My Ántonia*, see Stouck, *Pastoral*. For a related reading on the use of Romantic conventions in *My Ántonia*, see Rosowski, *Approaches*.

¹⁷ Others have noted connections between some of the inset stories in *My Ántonia*, though none to my knowledge have suggested that these

correspondences point to a larger oral narrative within the work. Most commonly, Mr. Shimerda's suicide is connected to the tramp tale and to Wick Cutter's story as suicide tales. See Funda 179 and 212; Peterman, 160; Rosowski, *Approaches*, 50 and 69; Woolley 166-7 and 171; Wussow 53. Scrach mentions that Cather has used the wolf story motif in one of her short fictions (71), but does not argue any particular significance for this retelling, whereas I see the retellings as an integral part of Cather's oral framework.

¹⁸ For an in-depth discussion of possible literary and folkloric sources for the wolf tale, see Scrach 67-78. Scrach notes that Cather herself was probably told the tale by an immigrant neighbor (73). I therefore consider Cather's experience of the tale to be that of oral tradition, regardless of the various possible printed, as well as oral, sources for the tale.

¹⁹ Gelfant has noted the misogyny of this tale, arguing that it reflects a fear of sex and of women embodied by the various male characters of the novel (74-75). Woolley has also noted the prevalence of "death as a male desire" and the theme of "grisly acts that are selfish and hurt others" in several of the inset tales, including the wolf tale (166, 171). While I agree that the wolf tale is disturbing in content, both gendered and not, I depart from both Gelfant and Woolley in that I read this episode as evidence of the ways in which Cather's female characters themselves generate a female-centered reading of the inset tales. The possibility that Antonia is making up this story within the novel supports this reading, by suggesting that this female-centered reading of the tale is generated from within the text and forms

an important component of Cather's depiction.

²⁰ My discussion here is influenced by Spacks' treatment of the implicit public dangers of gossip and the gendered implications of this power. My use of "voice" within this passage is clearly not accidental, for I see the power of women within the novel to express themselves as intimately related to the spoken word. Woolley also notes stresses the importance of voice (154-5).

²¹ Monroe explores a similar function of story, the ability to "rehabilitate" living people, in his reading of *The Professor's House* (308).

²² These ideas on the qualities of oral performance are drawn from various essays in *The Pressures of the Text*, edited by Brown. See also Ong.

²³ Funda uses Jim's description of *Ántonia's* voice as the basis of her own analysis of *Ántonia* as a storyteller, the thrust of which is that *Ántonia* uses her stories to establish human contacts and reinforce community. See particularly 198. While I agree with Funda's emphasis on storytelling, voice, and the resultant transformation of the reader into a listener, I believe she overestimates *Ántonia's* sympathetic function, relying on conventionally gendered notions of "community" as a women's realm, rather than on the actual interpretive acts the women in the novel employ.

²⁴ Others have noted that the tramp tale expresses *Ántonia's* "commitment to life." See Peterman 161; and Woolley 169. Monroe has noted a similar function of storytelling in Cather's other novels, displaying that Cather is "committed to this world" (301).

²⁵ Others have noted the communal domesticity of this storytelling scene, though they read its effects differently. See Funda 205; and Woolley 158-9. Woolley also notes that both Mrs. Harling and *Ántonia* are characterized by a combination of independence and nurturance, though she sees these characterizations as linked to the role of the artist rather than to a reconceptualization of womanhood (159). For more on the town's resistance to *Ántonia*'s "masculine" activities, see Schwind 58-9.

²⁶ Peterman reads this same episode as an example of "this capacity in young people to entertain the gruesome" (159). While I concur with this reading, I think the episode also demonstrates the resilience of the Cuzak children as compared to the sheltered life of the Harlings.

²⁷ See again note 18 for other mentions of interconnections between the tales in *My Ántonia*.

²⁸ See again note 20 for more on this theme in the inset stories.

²⁹ Theorists have noted other instances where the narrative levels are conflated by Cather's narrative structure. Woolley, for example, notes how Jim's narrative authority is threatened by the fact that *Ántonia* makes him the subject of the tales she tells her children (152-3). Rosowski makes a similar argument about the conclusion to *Sapphira the Slave Girl* ("Endings," 86). Rosowski also offers the most persuasive reading of Cather as the frame narrator and some of the effects of this reading. See *Approaches*, 66.

³⁰ For an overview of theorists who have critiqued Cather's work for being "formless or episodic," see Selzer 59 and its accompanying footnote.

CHAPTER 4

The Noise of Rebellion:

Orality and Social Change in *The Awakening*

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* uses several forms of orality previously discussed in this study. *The Awakening* uses oral storytelling to convey gendered ideas about authorship and women's public sphere activity. It utilizes the shift between the language systems of French and English, as previously evidenced in Woolson's "Jeannette." *The Awakening* also recasts the reader as a listener through its use of sound. However, the particular forms this use of sound takes in *The Awakening* mark a departure from the types of orality previously discussed. For while Jewett and Cather's works focus on local language and speaking style, *The Awakening* ventures outside the world of language altogether into the world of abstract sound, or noise. This non-linguistic, or extra-linguistic, use of sound functions as an oral mode within the text. Chopin's use of noise intermixes fluidly with her use of language, thus creating a sound-language in the course of the text. The components of this sound-language include the use of sound "images" within the text, like descriptions of buzzing bees in the background of a scene; alliteration and onomatopoeia, language modes which rely on sound for their effect; and also the use of noise words which acquire meaning primarily through sound, like

"bang" and "clatter." Collectively, these qualities form the sound-language of the text which informs the larger oral mode at work in the novel. Like the more clearly linguistic-based uses of orality, Chopin's sound-language serves to disrupt a linear, prescriptive discourse which is defined within the text as both printed and male. Sound-language also offers a form of expression to the female protagonist of the novel because it cannot be contained within the socio-linguistic system which confines her, a system associated with print discourse. This sound-language also functions as orality because it reshapes the structure of the text along oral lines, recasting the reader as a textual listener, and invoking an alternate sensory experience, an aural one, from the conventional written text. Thus, *The Awakening* utilizes an oral mode which reshapes our definitions of printed narrative form through its reformation of language and the writer-reader relationship, achieved through its use of story and sound.

This use of orality has implications for contemporary theories of language as well as for the nineteenth-century print marketplace. A number of theorists have noted the centrality of language issues within the text of *The Awakening*, as well as Edna's use of language to disrupt a social system which confines her.¹ Most theorists have defined this central language issue in one of two ways, either by seeing Edna as a character who vainly "quests" for a language which will free her from societal constraints or

as a character who embodies the French feminist notion of the semiotic, and thus is able to disrupt male discourse but not to reform it to her own ends.² While I agree with these assessments of language as a crucial issue in the text and as a crucial component of Edna's "awakening," I depart from them in two fundamental ways. I believe that Edna and the text itself do suggest an alternative language that is available to women as a resistance, and that this language is exemplified in the oral mode of the text. However, I see orality used within the text as a means to reshape the print form, which is identified as male within the text itself, and to create an alternative narrative form which synthesizes both language systems, oral-print. In this respect I depart from French feminist-influenced readings, which argue that language, as a form of the symbolic, is fundamentally male on a psychological and biological basis, and therefore cannot ever fully be reclaimed by the female subject, whose subjectivity relies on pre-verbal or extra-verbal forms.³ I resist this biologically-based reading of the oral mode of the text, arguing instead that the oral-print form serves a distinct ideological function in the nineteenth century print marketplace, acting as a narrative strategy for reclaiming print from its gendered associations. However, my readings of orality's ability to disrupt the linearity, prescriptiveness, and male-gender association of the print form, as well as my discussion of noise words as a distinct linguistic unit with a unique relationship to signification,

do bear some similarity to discussions of the semiotic's ability to disrupt the symbolic, and so concur with those readings on a socio-linguistic, if not physiological, basis.

The association of print with maleness, and with socially prescriptive behavior, is achieved in *The Awakening* much as it is in the novels of Woolson, Jewett, and Cather. Chopin overtly identifies her male characters with printed texts in *The Awakening*. Nearly every male character is cast as a reader within this work. Paula Treichler has noted that "[c]igars and newspapers are the props that Chopin sardonically furnishes for the male characters," verifying this association with print and symbolic masculinity in the novel (footnote, 247). Among these men associated with print is Mr. Pontellier, Edna Pontellier's husband, who is seen reading and/or carrying a newspaper at several points in the novel, and is also cast as a writer because he writes letters to Edna throughout the novel. Another male character associated with print is Robert Lebrun. Robert Lebrun is said to read to Mme Ratignolle while she sews (54), ostensibly tries to read while his mother is sewing (66), reads while waiting for Edna to wake up while on their day trip to the *Chênière Caminada* (85), reads aloud to Edna the morning before his departure to Mexico (89), and later tells Edna he has already read the book she is reading (164). While reading aloud, and reading to women, could be interpreted as acts of orality, specific examples indicate that these men use their reading to deny women the act of

reading for themselves, and thus to cement their own engagement with the print texts they read and interpret for the women in their lives. Robert also sends letters in the course of the narrative, casting him as a writer of texts read by women, particularly Edna.

Like Léonce Pontellier and Robert Lebrun, the other men in Edna's life are also associated with printedness. Edna, early in the novel, describes her childhood desire to escape social prescriptiveness through her habit of "running away from prayers, from the Presbyterian service, read in a spirit of gloom by my father that chills me yet to think of" (60). When the father briefly appears in the novel, his departure signals the following comment: "Edna was glad to be rid of her father when he finally took himself off with his wedding garments and his bridal gifts, his padded shoulders, his Bible reading, his 'toddlies' and ponderous oaths" (125). Reading is characterized as one of the Colonel's many annoying habits, but is also aligned with a series of symbols which point to oppressive systems at work in the novel: the gifts which mark the bonds of marriage from which Edna tries to free herself, the padded shoulders which mark her father's military background, and the religious tradition which condemns Edna's adulterous behavior. I do not find it coincidental that this mention of the Colonel's reading shortly precedes his offering of highly prescriptive marital advice to his son-in-law: "Authority, coercion are what is needed. Put your foot down good and hard; the only way to

manage a wife. Take my word for it" (125). The Colonel's "word" is clearly identified as oppressive by the narrative comment that "he had coerced his own wife into her grave" (125). His oppressive behavior is reinforced by the social systems with which he is associated--marriage, the military, religion, and language itself--as embodied in the "word" of the reading man.

Medicine is also identified as an oppressive social system, and it is in keeping with this depiction that Doctor Mandelet is identified as "a great reader" (117).⁴ The Doctor is in the act of reading when Léonce Pontellier first consults him with concerns over his wife's mental condition, caused by her sudden desire to be free from their marriage and its social constraints (117-8). Even Alcée Arobin, who facilitates Edna's departure from social codes through their affair, is eventually reinscribed in the print-associated social system when he begins to take a husbandly role toward her.⁵ When he "lit a cigar and read the evening paper, which he had in his pocket," and "read to her little bits of the newspaper" when they are alone for the evening, this act echoes the early description of Edna's husband, who "talked to her while he undressed, telling her anecdotes and bits of news and gossip that he had gathered during the day" (47). The "bits" of "news" mentioned in both scenes suggest the mens' association with the newspaper, their belief that the newspaper must be translated for Edna's comprehension, and the clear link between Arobin's behavior and the husband-role of Léonce

Pontellier. Arobin's move from lover to potential husband, which in the novel is marked as a move away from freedom and toward male ownership, is linked to the reading act here. Because this passage recalls the descriptions of Edna's husband early in the novel, it identifies Arobin as a part of, rather than a departure from, the gender system which Edna tries to escape and which is enacted in language.

There are exceptions to the gender-print dichotomy within the novel. Several of the women characters, including Mme Lebrun and Mme Ratignolle, refer to reading or to books, though they are seldom, if ever, seen reading in the course of the novel. One woman journalist appears in the novel, but she laments that she cannot paint instead of write, perhaps in a gesture of deference to Edna or to the visual arts generally (Thomas, 24). Edna is described writing letters, but, curiously, these descriptions occur after she has been "awakened," and thus has taken on a more autonomous role than the more traditional women in the novel. The pattern established is that men mark out print as their territory and forays into it by women are thwarted. For example, when Edna reads a racy novel early in her narrative, she does so in secret: "She felt moved to read the book in solitude, though none of the others had done so--to hide it from view at the sound of approaching footsteps" (53). Though the first impulse is to read Edna's secrecy as prompted by the novel's sexual content, the clear association of men with printedness in the novel creates the possibility that Edna hides her

reading because it is itself a dangerous act. This theme of women's "transgressive reading of texts" is also evident in Chopin's short fiction (Cutter, 28). By the narrative's conclusion, when Edna has declared her independence and is reading in the open, this act is promptly arrested by Robert Lebrun: "He looked at Edna's book, which he had read; and he told her the end, to save her the trouble of wading through it, he said" (166).

There are several important elements to this description. This is the first time in the novel that Edna is reading in public, at a café, suggesting that her move toward independence is also a move from secret and private reading into a public world of print discourse, a world the men already participate in through their association with the newspaper. The fact that Robert has already read the book that Edna is just beginning reinforces the association of men with print and with autonomy. Yet Robert, in effect, steals the reading act from Edna. By telling her the ending of the novel, he prevents her from discovering it for herself, thus punishing her for her transgression into a male-defined domain. Moreover, because Robert's stated motivation is to "save Edna the trouble," Robert is identified as a man who believes in the fragility of women's brains. This presentation accords with the depictions of Arobin and Pontellier, who read Edna the paper to keep her from having to do so herself. Each of these men attempts to deny Edna the experience of the printed text, and thus the experience

of independence. The narrator's coda to Robert's action, "he said," calls Robert's motives into question, verifying that Robert's actions are less benevolent than he himself acknowledges. In addition, the use of the phrase "wading through it" aligns Edna's reading act with her swimming, also an act of independence, and marks her desire to fuse the oral qualities later associated with femaleness and the ocean with the independence aligned with men and print within the novel.

A scene with Edna's husband reading the paper is particularly significant because it sets the gender-language pattern for the novel. The novel opens with Edna Pontellier's husband "unable to read his newspaper" because of the pet parrot and mocking-bird making noise nearby. This opening scene establishes several important patterns for the novel.⁶ First, it identifies the link between men and the linear, journalistic mode of print exemplified by the newspaper. Next, it demonstrates the fluidity with which language and noise function in the text, by transcribing the bird noises within the opening paragraphs:

"Allez vous-en! Allez vous-en! Sapristi!
That's all right!"

He could speak a little Spanish, and also a language which nobody understood, unless it was the mocking-bird that hung on the other side of the door, whistling his fluty notes out upon the breeze with maddening persistence. (43)

Several types of sound are utilized in this passage. There is the actual sound of the parrot's voice, and the "whistling" and "fluty notes" of the mocking bird, all which blend fluidly with the various languages in the passage. Further, this transcription makes the point that language itself is only noise to those who do not comprehend its words. Three known languages--English, French, and Spanish--are addressed in the opening paragraphs. By raising the possibility that any given reader, character, or listener will not understand all three languages, and by having these languages conveyed in an oral mode and characterized as "noise," Chopin wrests language from its standard signifying function and recasts language as pure sound.

The parrot is also described as "repeating over and over," a technique for disrupting the linearity of print which is commonly associated with Modernism and which is utilized by Chopin herself elsewhere in the novel (43). Through repetition each subsequent word seems further removed from its meaning, or as Treichler argues, repetition renders specific contextualization impossible (250-251). This sound-language has a physical function as well, as demonstrated by its power to drive Mr. Pontellier from the porch. Mr. Pontellier's reading act is disrupted by noise. Thus, the sound-language serves as both a means to disrupt the linearity of conventional reading and also acts as a form of control over the male with whom reading is associated. The fact that Mrs. Pontellier is later seen cutting up the

newspapers to make her dress patterns reinforces the gendered implications of this dismantling of print (52).⁷ The text's opening scene identifies the ideological association of men with print, linearity, and prescriptiveness. But it also offers the first suggestions of how this mode may be transgressed--through a sound-invested oral language that disrupts printed language and reshapes the male discourse to new ends.

The use of multiple languages in this early passage also points to a larger structural technique within the narrative. The narrative voice moves continuously back and forth between French and English, with the substantial part of the narrative offered in English but with frequent French words interspersed in the narration, as in the following passage:

Mrs. Pontellier was by that time thoroughly awake. She began to cry a little, and wiped her eyes on the sleeve of her *peignoir*. Blowing out the candle, which her husband had left burning, she slipped her bare feet into a pair of satin *mules* at the foot of the bed and went out on the porch, where she sat down in the wicker chair and began to rock gently to and fro. (48)

In part, this intermixing of French and English is a local color technique, a way of communicating the particular regional and cultural language mode of the Creole population Chopin depicts. Although the use of regional language in itself marks an oral technique because it incorporates the

local tongue into the text, this end would be accomplished even if only the narrative characters engaged in the use of a synthesized French-English language. In this passage, the narrative voice itself uses the combination of French and English which the characters also employ. By lifting local language out of the exclusive context of characterization and placing it in the realm of narration, the text achieves several things. The shift in language collapses the narrative levels, by suggesting that the narrator is both omniscient and yet a part of the community which the novel depicts.⁸ Thus Chopin blurs the distinctions between narrator and narrated, recasting her novel as an oral tale told to a local audience, despite (or alongside) its use of omniscient point-of-view. The tension between omniscience and locality places the narrative in an ambiguous structural ground between oral and print by rendering it unclear whether the novel is an omnisciently narrated print production or a first- or third-person, local, told tale. This same technique also recasts the reader as a listener within the text by having the narrative voice replicate the speaking style of the characters within the text, as is a common pattern in the fictions studied here.⁹ The narration itself modulates into the speech mode which the characters exemplify, and the reader is cast as a listener to both rather than a reader of one which contains the speech of the other. Thus, the speech moment bursts the printed bounds by

exceeding encapsulation in quotation marks and bounding over into the narrative style.

In addition to incorporating local language, collapsing narrative levels, and recasting the narrator partly as a speaker and the reader as a listener in the novel, this French-English technique has additional structural implications for the novel's larger oral-print context. One could argue that the frequent interspersing of French into the English text itself functions as a noise-moment within the text, as it did in the bird passage, thus infusing the entire novel with interspersed sound. The multilingual technique functions as a part of the larger sound-language of the novel, which stands in opposition to printed texts which are linear, prescriptive, and which lack engagement with orality. Yet this reading depends in part on the assumption that the reader does not speak French, or is unfamiliar with this particular local usage of it. While the use of French represents an oral moment regardless, because it embodies a local spoken language, it only represents a pure noise or sound-moment to those readers who do not speak the languages of the Creole community. As the previously quoted passage indicates, the use of French within the novel is marked off from the English text by the use of italics. The use of textual marker to distinguish the French words from the English words places the French words in the oral realm. It suggests that the French language goes beyond the bounds of print within this text, because it requires a distinct

typeface to communicate its meaning. In other words, the use of italics in these passages indicates that the French words operate beyond printed expression because they cannot be communicated, or contained, by standard print technique. Further, the use of distinct typefaces arrests the reading process just as the sound-language does. Whether or not the French is comprehensible to the reader, the shift in typeface serves as a reminder that this text is functioning in an oral mode. It forces the reader to become self-consciously aware of the reading process. The italics serve as a reminder that the text is conveying local language and an incomprehensible sound-moment to some readers, creating a two-fold engagement with orality by marking off the language as textually different from the standard printed English. In short, the use of French-English throughout the novel is also a use of oral-print and is marked as such by the printed text.

As in Woolson's short story "Jeannette," the blending of languages in *The Awakening* has implications for the social message, as well as the structural composition, of the novel. In Jeannette's story, Jeannette remains undefinable and uncategorizable to her antagonist because her language is constantly shifting and indefinable within any single language mode. Likewise, by constantly shifting between French and English, Chopin's text takes on a similarly undefinable quality. Rather than representing the fixedness and linearity of print, *The Awakening* represents the fluidity and indefinability of spoken language through its perpetually

shifting multilingualism. The novel's ability to express ideas simultaneously within and outside print replicates the social struggle of the novel's protagonist to simultaneously express herself within and outside the social structure which contains her. Therefore this structural technique has social implications both because it represents a departure from the standard printed text which is defined as both Anglo and male, and because it demonstrates the ability of orality to act as a social metaphor for larger struggles to resist the controlling culture represented by the print form.¹⁰

Another oral technique that demonstrates the process of disrupting the linearity of the printed text, and reshaping the text along oral lines, is the use of storytelling within the text. As in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and *My Ántonia*, both men and women engage in storytelling within *The Awakening*. The men's storytelling often attempts to reinscribe women's behavior into socially acceptable lines. The women in the novel are able to evade this social and linguistic act by using their own oral power to reassert their independence from these social codes and to critique the codes in the process. This result is achieved partly through the content of the stories told by the novel's women, partly by the ability of storytelling itself to disrupt the social codes by disrupting the printed codes which carry them, and partly through the use of non-linguistic noise to disrupt both the men's actual stories and the mindsets they represent.

Though storytelling is not a dominant mode in *The Awakening*, as it is in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and *My Ántonia*, there are several significant instances of storytelling which have implications for both the structural and social contexts of the novel. Moreover, these storytelling sequences connect thematically and linguistically across the novel, pointing to an overarching oral narrative like that which is more fully developed in Cather's *My Ántonia*. Not coincidentally, the topic involved in most of these stories is adultery. Thus the transgressing of social and marital codes, which adultery represents is intimately linked to the transgression of gender codes through language, and particularly through orality.

Though not all of the stories told are told by women, gender nonetheless plays a distinct role in the oral dynamic of the novel. For example, one of the first inset tales of the novel is told by Robert. It is the tale of the Gulf spirit who rises from the waves to seek a mortal companion, and Robert uses the tale to speculate as to whether Mrs. Pontellier might become the spirit's "worthy" mortal mate. As is his pattern, Robert plays at transgression by hinting at adultery in this tale, though he substitutes the Gulf spirit for himself as Edna Pontellier's temptor. But his version of the tale is clearly a male one. The Gulf spirit is both male and the initiator of sexual/romantic contact, as Robert envisions himself to be.¹¹ Victor Lebrun, too, tells stories of a sexual nature in the novel; these stories are

not transcribed in the text, but mark Victor as someone who, in his own eyes at least, is a lead actor in sexual dramas (91, 111-2). What the Lebrun men have not yet realized is that when it comes time for Mrs. Pontellier to speak and act independently, it is she who will make herself the center of the story and who will be the actor rather than the acted upon.

This Gulf spirit story represents the first of several adultery stories that are retold within the text of *The Awakening*. Since *The Awakening* itself could be categorized as an adultery story, its use of these inset tales functions metafictionally, asking the reader to reflect on the novel at large with each inset tale that mirrors its content. Moreover, this use of the inset adultery tale also collapses the distinction between "inset" stories and the novel which appears to contain them. By linking each adultery story with the larger novel, Chopin casts the novel itself as yet another in a series of oral tales focusing on the same theme. Thus each of these tales becomes a variant of the central adultery tale, and the novel itself is read in this context as a variant rather than a definitive version of a central adultery story. In this strategy alone, the novel uses the oral mode of storytelling to question its own status as a print expression, and to transform the print expression itself into a single manifestation of a larger oral tale. But this use of orality is also significant because it is

intimately linked to the social transgressions of the novel's protagonist.

The intertwining of the print/oral project and woman's struggle for social independence becomes more apparent in a storytelling sequence that occurs shortly after the Gulf spirit episode. Robert and Edna are sailing to the *Chênière Caminada* accompanied by two locals, Beaudalet and Marequita. Marequita has the first adultery story in the sequence. She inquires of Robert whether Edna Pontellier is his sweetheart, and he replies that Edna is married with two children. Marequita states: "Oh! well! Francisco ran away with Sylvano's wife, who had four children. They took all his money and one of the children and stole his boat" (81). Robert's instant irritation at Marequita's gossip-story stems from his own entrenchment in the social codes, despite appearances to the contrary. Though he claims to love Mrs. Pontellier, he never seriously entertains the notion of running off with her, which would suggest a contempt for the institution of marriage which he does not feel. This reading of Robert is verified by a concluding scene in the novel where he is again repelled by the suggestion that he pursue a romance with Edna outside the boundaries of marriage. When, in the later scene, Edna states, "I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose. If he were to say, 'Here, Robert, take her and be happy; she is yours,' I should laugh at you both," Robert cannot even comprehend her meaning, so removed is he

from the idea of actual physical adultery (167). So here again, storytelling is used to transgress social, as well as literary, codes. Marequita hints at the possibility of an actual adulterous affair between Edna and Robert, and so her use of orality is both verbally and socially transgressive of the social system. The orality of the novel's women mirrors Chopin's own project, using the orality of her text to transform printed narrative structure and by extension challenging the circumscribed ideologies surrounding women's writing.

The interconnection between social defiance and oral discourse, the language of women's rebellion in the novel, is furthered by the next story in the sequence. Turning his attention away from Marequita and toward Edna, Robert and Edna Pontellier collectively weave a story of their own possible adventures on Grand Terre. Their story involves hill climbing, visiting the fort, and sailing to discover pirate gold. The Gulf spirit figures again in this story. The story also involves a married woman and a younger man stealing away in a boat, since Robert suggests "I'll take you away some night in the pirogue when the moon shines," linking this tale to Marequita's story as well as the Gulf spirit story (82). Thus, implicitly, the Grand Terre story is also an adultery story, though it is not baldly stated as such in the fashion of Marequita's.

The sexual imagery of the story supports this claim. Robert suggests that after they climb the hill, they can

"look at the little wriggling gold snakes and watch the lizards sun themselves" (82). Edna then reflects that "she would like to be alone there with Robert, in the sun, listening to the ocean's roar and watching the slimy lizards writhe in and out among the ruins..." (82). As the sexual content, and thus the socially transgressive content, of the tale increases, so does its engagement with sound-language. In this instance, sound-language is defined by alliteration and sound-repetition, two linguistic constructs that require an aural sensibility for their effect.¹² The repetition of the fricative "s" sound, and its variants in the "z" and soft "c," infuses the passage with sound and marks the oral moment in the novel. The transition to the oral mode is also a transgression, because it accentuates the sensual content of the passage, highlighting the words, "sun," "ocean," "slimy," "lizard," "ruins," and perhaps most importantly, "listening." The repetition of the "s" is countered by repetitions of "l" and "g," as in "little," "wriggling," "gold," "watching," "among," and again, "listening." Because the "s" sound is introduced in the context of a discussion of lizards and snakes, it has a two-fold effect. The "s" sound replicates the hissing sound of the snakes being discussed, thus creating a distinct relationship to the signification process. Because the sound of the entire passage replicates the sound of the animals being discussed, the gap between signifier and signified collapses, and a single phoneme encloses both sound and sense. Wyatt has noted that this is

a common effect of onomatopoeia, to "devolve [words] from their function as signifiers and begin to approach the thing signified" (72).¹³ I see the use of sound-language functioning, on one level, to remove language from its signification, as in the bird scene, to make the reader self-consciously aware of the ways language, sound, and noise function within a signifying system. Rather than dwelling in a world of a-signification, however, the sound-language attempts to recuperate the signification process through the use of sound, the use of a language which embodies the world it describes. Thus, the creation of oral-print simultaneously questions the signification process inherent in print discourse and attempts to introduce a new language less bound by these dilemmas by infusing this new language with orality.

In this particular passage, because the subject is snakes, there is a thematic message in the sound-language as well, heightening the connection between linguistic and social transgression. The snake references carry the Biblical suggestion that the female acquisition of knowledge is accompanied by the certainty of mortal death, a suggestion that foreshadows the novel's conclusion. Because the repetition of these sounds begins in Robert's speech and is carried over into the transcription of Edna's thoughts, it represents an intertwining of their language styles, an act which itself heightens the sexual implications of the passage. Because the sexual content of the tale, the sexual

import of the imagery, and the sexual metaphor of their intertwining language and shared storytelling are all rendered in the sound-language, the transgressiveness of the sexual act and the transgressiveness of oral language in the print world are as thoroughly intertwined as Robert and Edna's language. Once again we see the power of the spoken word to transform both writing and social codes, and Chopin claims this power to speak in the nineteenth-century print context, just as Edna does within the novel.

Earlier in the narrative, Mme Ratignolle has warned Robert against flirting with Edna Pontellier. She cautions Robert that Edna will take him "seriously" rather than as the "gentleman" he is, someone who would never "seriously" consider adultery (64-5). This earlier passage suggests that Edna is open to actual social transgression in a way that Robert is not. As Cynthia Wolff describes the relationship, Edna "wants a new paradigm; he [Robert] merely wants to rearrange the actors of the old one..." (17). This pattern is reinforced by their storytelling. For while Robert is toying with the idea of adultery, Edna is in the process of placing herself at the center of the very adultery stories conveyed on the boat to *Chênière Caminada*. When Edna *awakens* from a nap on the island, she interprets her surroundings in the context of the previous story of adultery, noting the colors of "gold" and "copper" as the "sun dipped lower" and the shadows which resemble "stealthy, grotesque monsters," all of which recall the descriptions of

gold snakes and lizards "sunning themselves" on Grand Terre (86; 82). Edna is now perceiving her reality through the lens of the story. While Robert uses story as a substitute for physical transgression, Edna uses story as a catalyst for her behavior, a mark of one gender difference in storytelling's function within the novel. Edna is using the story as both a motivator and justification for her transgression, whereas Robert creates tales in lieu of transgression. In this act, Edna is making herself the center of the tale.

The idea that storytelling is increasingly becoming a source of female power is heightened when Madame Antoine appears in this scene, a local woman who engages in storytelling for Edna and Robert's benefit (87). She is described as follows: "And what stories she told them!...All her years she had squatted and waddled there upon the island, gathering legends of the Baratarians and the sea. The night came on, with the moon to lighten it. Edna could hear the whispering voices of dead men and the click of muffled gold" (87). Again, the orality of the moment is heightened by the "whispering voices" and "click of muffled gold," which serve as sound-moments and images which connect to Edna's own Grand Terre tale. Yet though the stories are being told to "them," it is specifically Edna who hears these sounds, as in "Edna could hear..." (87). This description heightens the sense of orality as Edna's, and women's, domain, because the interaction is characterized as a sound-communication between

Mme Antoine and Edna.¹⁴ Further, as they depart there are "misty spirit forms...prowling in the shadows and among the reeds, and upon the water were phantom ships, speeding to cover," suggesting that Mme Antoine has shaped reality through her storytelling and that her world is visible to Edna as a woman who shares oral power (87).

The use of storytelling, a transgression and disruption of print codes, acts as both a precursor and a reinforcer of Edna's social transgression. This strategy becomes more apparent in a later storytelling sequence, a sequence which also highlights the gender differences at work in the storytelling mode. In the next storytelling sequence, Doctor Mandelet and Edna's father have joined the Pontelliers for dinner during Edna's father's visit. Doctor Mandelet is present, in part, to investigate Mrs. Pontellier's "peculiar" psychology, as he and Mr. Pontellier have previously, and secretly, arranged (119). Prior to the actual storytelling, two points mark off this sequence as an oral moment in the novel. Edna is described as a speaker, seen through Dr. Mandelet's eyes:

He observed his hostess attentively from under his shaggy brows, and noted a subtle change which had transformed her from the listless woman he had known into a being who, for the moment, seemed palpitant with the forces of life. Her speech was warm and energetic. There was no repression in her glance or gesture. She reminded him of some

beautiful, sleek animal waking up in the sun.

(123)

Edna's speaking style is described in some detail, setting the groundwork for interpreting Edna as a storyteller in the subsequent scene. Her speaking style is tied to her newfound independence in this description, because her more animated speaking style is an indication that she is no longer "listless," and because the novel's title is referenced by the Doctor's description of her "waking." In addition to setting Edna up as a storyteller and linking this oral ability to her independence and vibrance, this passage recalls the earlier descriptions of Grand Terre. The similarity is communicated stylistically, through the repetition of the "s" sound in "she," "some", "sleek," and "sun." The narrative voice also picks up the repetition of the "g" sound seen in the Grand Terre passage through the words "shaggy," "energetic," "glance," and "gesture." The Grand Terre story reference is also communicated symbolically, with the image of the animal waking in the sun recalling the images of lizards who "sun themselves" and Edna's desire to "be alone there with Robert, in the sun" (85). This later passage also introduces a new repetitive sound in the "k" of "sleek" and "waking." Collectively, these uses of alliteration act as they have previously, to intensify the oral moment and to reform the signification process. Each of these aspects of the dinner party description serves to heighten the sense of Edna as a

storyteller, to mark the moment as an oral moment within the written text, and to link this description in imagery and style to the stories about Grand Terre. As such, the storytelling which follows at the dinner party forms a component of a story sequence initiated by the Grand Terre episode.

The story sequence begins when Mr. Pontellier tells "some amusing plantation experiences" and offers a series of reminiscences of his Southern childhood. Edna's father counters with a set of war stories, not transcribed in the text, in which "he had acted a conspicuous part and always formed a central figure" (123). Again, the pattern emerges whereby men's stories are consistently stories of themselves in which they are the protagonists and the sole actors, and the narrative comment calls the reader's attention to this status. The Doctor, however, does not tell a story about himself. Instead, he tells a story which attempts to reinscribe Edna's behavior along conventional lines: "he told the old, ever new and curious story of the waning of a woman's love, seeking strange, new channels, only to return to its legitimate source after days of fierce unrest" (123). The Doctor, in effect, tries to use his story as a means to control Edna's social behavior.¹⁵ His prescriptiveness--heightened by his status as a Doctor, as one who prescribes--is specifically linked to the printed word, even though it is conveyed orally. For the narration indicates that this story "was one of the many little human documents which had been

unfolded to him during his long career as a physician" (123). Dr. Mandelet turns humans and their lives into "little" "documents." Through this narrative comment and the Doctor's story, the doctor becomes a figure of social control, particularly of women, exercised both through his status as a physician and his association with printed language. He attempts to reinterpret Edna's awakening as a passing phase which is easily dismissed. He also labels what human actions are "legitimate" and which are not, placing Edna's independence in the latter category. Finally, he attempts to write Edna's story for her, determining an ending which has not yet been determined. Just as Robert later steals Edna's reading act, Dr. Mandelet attempts to steal her speaking act. Dr. Mandelet, in each of these respects, represents the linearity, prescriptiveness, and gendered social control which is linked to the printed word in this passage and in this novel. Yet Edna, who has already been established as storyteller, is able to use orality to overturn the Doctor's prescription.

The narration indicates that the Doctor's story does "not seem especially to impress Edna" (123). With her newfound independence, she is able to dismiss his story as he attempted to preempt hers. This idea is verified by the narration, which confirms that Edna has a story "of her own to tell" (123). Edna's rebellion has been both catalyzed and reinforced by her verbal power. She uses orality to gain entrance to the world. Once arrived, she has "her own

story," which confirms her participation in that world. Not coincidentally, the topic of this story is of one woman's adultery, of "a woman who paddled away with her lover one night in a pirogue and never came back. They were lost amid the Baratarian Islands, and no one ever heard from them or found trace of them from that day to this" (123-4). The use of the word "pirogue," the exact conveyance Robert and Edna had planned to take to Grand Terre, as well as the lovers' journey among islands, collectively link this tale to the Grand Terre tales, as well as to Edna and Robert's actual experiences at the *Chênière Caminada*. Edna has collapsed narrative levels as well as levels of reality, by taking events of her life and recreating them as an inset fiction. In turn, this collapsing of the narrative levels functions metafictionally, asking the reader to reflect on the fictional novel as a whole and its possible correspondence to real life. The various levels of storytelling--the Gulf spirit story, Victor's conquest stories, stories of Grand Terre, events that take place on the *Chênière Caminada*, Marequita's adultery story, Doctor Mandelet's adultery story, Edna's adultery story, and the novel itself as an adultery story--are conflated and each reflects upon the others like sun on shattered glass. This conflation and mutual reference defies the linearity of the written text by interfusing the text's events and the orally conveyed stories in an a-temporal, non-hierarchical manner. The concepts of fixed, linear time and fixed reality are called into question

through this use of story and its disruption of the linear, printed text.

This conflation of fiction/reality, linear/circular time, and print/oral text is heightened when the narrative voice describes Edna's response to her own story: "It was a pure invention. She said that Madame Antoine had related it to her. That, also, was an invention. Perhaps it was a dream that she had had. But every glowing word seemed real to those who listened" (124). The tension between what is "a dream" and what is "real"; the ambiguity regarding what is "real" and what is "pure invention"; the simultaneous reference toward an oral chain initiated in *Chênnière Caminada* and denial of that influence; each of these descriptive components points toward the fluidity of the oral text as opposed to the written text, and to the possibilities of the oral text as a form of resistance to those who would prescribe a linear, fixed, and socially "legitimate" form of reality through the printed text.¹⁶

Importantly, Edna converts the others to her interpretation, and she does so in a manner that is particularly oral. There is a description of Edna's guests in the listening act, which indicates:

But every glowing word seemed real to those who listened. They could feel the hot breath of the Southern night; they could hear the long sweep of the pirogue through the glistening moonlit water, the beating of the birds' wings, rising startled

from among the reeds in the salt-water pools; they could see the faces of the lovers, pale, close together, rapt in oblivious forgetfulness, drifting into the unknown. (124)

This passage uses sound-language in the same manner as the previous passages, through repetition and alliteration. But it introduces another level of sound-language as well, by creating images that are based in sound, and that require sound for their effect. These aural "images" include "the long sweep of the pirogue" and "the beating of the birds' wings." In addition, the audience for Edna's tale is described specifically as "those who listened" and the narration as what "they could hear." This use of sound-language intensifies the oral effects of the tale, and reinforces the idea that Edna's independence is gained, in part, through her skilled use of orality. Likewise, because the novel itself invokes the same techniques that Edna's storytelling invokes, and because it links Edna's stories across the spanning text, *The Awakening* itself invokes the very oral, female power which it attributes to its protagonist.

The novel utilizes yet another form of sound-language, one which is even more removed from the signifying function of language and aligned with pure sound. This technique is the use of noise within the novel. The use of noise transforms the linearity and prescriptiveness of the printed text, reshaping language to better express its practitioners'

needs. Like Edna's use of storytelling, the use of noise is affiliated with the novels' women, and functions as a means for these women to disrupt the linguistic and social systems in which they feel confined. In one of the most potent noise scenes in the novel, Robert has gone to discuss something with his mother. Not surprisingly, the scene opens with Robert holding a book and purporting to read: "He took a book from his pocket and began energetically to read it, judging by the precision and frequency with which he turned the leaves" (66). Robert's reading does more than confirm his alliance to print discourse. His reading expresses his agitated state, as exemplified by the "frequency with which he turned the leaves" and the "energetic" posture of his reading. As such, Robert uses the print to express himself. Moreover, Robert may be attempting to use his reading to draw his mother's attention. Because she is engrossed in sewing, Robert may use the expressions of his agitation, achieved through the reading pose, in the hope that this disturbance will prompt his mother to inquire about him. But just as Robert uses print to try to make himself the center of discussion, Mme Lebrun, his mother, uses non-linguistic noise to disrupt Robert's self-centered conversation and turn the conversation in the directions she desires, as Edna did with her storytelling.

The source of Mme Lebrun's orality is not storytelling, but is the noise of her sewing machine which "made a resounding clatter in the room" (66). This sewing machine noise

functions as an expression of orality within the scene because it uses sound to disrupt Robert's linear, male-centered discourse, and also permits Mme Lebrun the discursive space with which to express herself and her views. Moreover, the sound generated by the sewing machine is incorporated into Mme Lebrun's speech, thus making it yet another component of the sound-language utilized by the women of the novel.

The conversation between Robert and his mother is structured by short sentences of conversation from each, interspersed with the "clatter, clatter, bang" of the sewing machine. The prevalence of sound in the scene marks this sequence as an oral moment in the narrative, with the "clatter, clatter" extending the use of alliteration and onomatopoeia, whereby the primary meaning of these words is derived from their sound. But these sound-words serve a particular function with regard to Mme Lebrun's conversation with her son. For example, in the early part of their conversation, the "clatter, clatter, bang" follows Mme Lebrun's statements, as in: "'I promised to lend her the Goncourt. Don't forget to take it down when you go; it's there on the bookshelf over the small table.' Clatter, clatter, clatter, bang! for the next five or eight minutes" (66). Mme Lebrun's noise forestalls Robert's participation in the conversation. It extends each of her comments beyond the bounds of language, but also leaves Robert waiting in silence indefinitely, until the noise concludes. In this

fashion, Mme Lebrun's sewing machine noise gives her control over their conversation. She decides who will speak and when, and the use of noise is her tool of control. Because the noise is linked to her speech, it cements the relationship between women's language and sound. This point is reinforced by the fact that sewing, traditionally a woman's occupation, is the source of the noise. Just as women both within and without the novel use the gender dichotomy of oral-female, print-male to reform the very structures that reinforce this ideology, so Mme Lebrun uses a traditionally female occupation to assert her dominance in conversation with Robert.¹⁷

As the exchange proceeds, the gendered significance of the noise becomes even more prominent. The effect is achieved partly through the ways in which the noise structures the conversation between Mme Lebrun and her son. For example, when the noise interrupts a statement by Mme Lebrun, she continues her speech where the "clatter" leaves off. Her speech runs fluidly with the noise, and the noise does not prevent her from speaking further. By contrast, when the noise interrupts Robert's speech, Mme Lebrun then intervenes and picks up the conversation, preventing Robert from continuing.¹⁸ Thus the noise serves women's orality on two levels. It acts as an extension of women's language which stretches beyond the bounds of print and extends the duration of women's speech, leaving the male audience at bay and giving the woman control of the exchange. But it also

disrupts the male, print-informed, linear speech pattern and permits the woman to insert her oral-informed speech in its stead. This reading is confirmed by a later portion of the conversation:

"He says to tell you he will be in Vera Cruz the beginning of next month"--clatter, clatter!--"and if you still have the intention of joining him"--bang! clatter, clatter bang!

"Why didn't you tell me so before, mother? You know I wanted--" Clatter, clatter, clatter!

"Do you see Mrs. Pontellier starting back with the children...?" (67)

The noise runs fluidly with Mme Lebrun's speech, but it halts Robert's, permitting Mme Lebrun to step in and redirect the conversation. But the noise itself is not the only significant element in this episode. The punctuation is also significant in this passage.

When Mme Lebrun speaks, the dashes appear outside the quotation marks. Rather than being interrupted, it is as though her natural pauses are filled with the noise of the machine. The noise is an extension, a natural outgrowth, of Mme Lebrun's speech, indicating its inclusiveness in the framework of female orality. With Robert, the dashes appear within the quotation marks, emphasizing that his comment has been stifled by the noise. Whereas noise is a continuation of Mme Lebrun's language, it halts Robert's. The noise could even be read as an accompaniment to Mme Lebrun's language,

linking it to the music of Mmlle Reisz. In either reading, the punctuation supports the idea that noise is congruent with women's discourse and disruptive to men's. The dashes serve additional functions in this passage as well, because they serve to disrupt the linearity of the printed text. The dashes arrest the reading process just as they arrest Robert's speech, forcing the reader to become self-consciously aware of the reading act and thus linking women's sound-language with the reformation of print discourse, as well as with the reformation of Robert's male-centered conversation.¹⁹ The dashes indicate that the noise is uncontainable within standard print discourse, and that print must be modified in order to convey ideas that are carried in sound. Likewise, the passage indicates, reading and speaking habits need to be modified as well, to accommodate this female-centered, oral-based form of discourse.

The use of capitalization and sentence structure with regard to the noise serves a similar function in the passage. The noise words have terminal punctuation--usually exclamation points--as though they were sentences in themselves. However, the noise-sentences are only capitalized as sentences when they intervene in Robert's discourse. The use of the lower case initial letter, as in the Vera Cruz phrase, makes the noise an integral part of Mme Lebrun's conversation, meshing with the punctuation and capitalization of her statements so as to mark the noise as continuation, rather than interruption, of her speech

pattern. In Robert's speech, the use of the initial capital letter to mark off the noise-phrase accents the interruption. Like the use of the dash, the capital letter highlights the noise as a disrupter of, rather than a fluid continuation of, Robert's discourse. In so doing, the gender dynamics of orality are brought to the fore. Sound-language serves one function in regard to women and a very different one in regard to men in the novel. The sound-language acts as a tool for both power and expression for Mme Lebrun, but acts as a disruption of Robert's print-informed, male-defined speech pattern. Like the dashes, the capitalization pattern serves to reshape the reading process, because it indicates that noise functions as a language within the text. By capitalizing and punctuating the noise words as language, the text reforms conventional print to accommodate the sound-language of its female protagonists, as well as its female author. Like the shift in italics with the use of French, the use of distinct punctuation and capitalization patterns in the use of the noise-words marks the ways in which orality both works within and exceeds the print text which expresses it. Finally, the words themselves, "clatter" and "bang," are words defined solely by their relation to sound. The idea of a "clatter" or a "bang" has no meaning in a world that has no sound. This passage utilizes orality on several levels and in each instance links this orality to the reformation of print discourse, defined as both linear and male, along ideologically female and structurally oral lines.

Noise not only permits Mme Lebrun, and Chopin herself, to modify the structure of conversation/text along female-centered lines, but alters the content of conversation along similar lines. In the previously quoted passage, Robert begins to chide his mother, placing himself and his needs at the center of the conversation with the phrase "I wanted--" (67). This statement of Robert's desires, and his centrality, is sharply cut off by the noise. Mme Lebrun promptly takes over the conversation and just as sharply turns its direction after this noise intervention. As such, the noise serves as her method to turn the conversation away from Robert and his needs and toward another woman, Edna Pontellier. Thus Mme Lebrun's orality indicates not only a shift in the structure of their conversation, and of the printed text which accompanies it, but marks a shift in content and focus as well. As noise becomes a more prominent factor in both the conversation and the text, the importance of women takes an increasingly dominant position within the exchange. Men's centrality and wants are de-emphasized and replaced by a conversation which centers on women, as emphasized by Mme Lebrun's statement. Women's independence and self-expression are viable subjects for discourse, Chopin demonstrates, and are intimately linked to the oral mode and its increasing presence within the printed text.

This reformation of the printed form along oral, and ideologically female, lines has implications for the narrative's conceptions of space and time as well as its

structure. Just as linear, male-centered narrative modes are called into question and altered through the use of orality, so too are linear, male-centered conceptions of the universe. When Mme Lebrun's conversation is extended through the use of noise, it takes on implications in the spatial and temporal realms. For example, her dominance of the conversation means that her discourse takes up more physical space on the printed page than her male counterpart's. As well as being an expression of her oral power, then, this use of noise becomes an issue of narrative space, indicating that orality alters gendered conceptions of space and time. Mme Lebrun's noise extends her power into the spatial, as well as conversational, realm. She takes up more space by being more powerfully oral. Likewise, her noise, the "resounding clatter in the room," extends into the physical space of the room she occupies with her son, relegating him to the margins of the room, just as the noise of the birds controlled the movements of Mr. Pontellier at the novel's opening.²⁰ These occurrences reform accepted notions of physical space because through these actions, noise has become tangible. That is, noise functions as a physical, substantial entity with a power to take up and control physical spaces, while yet remaining invisible and intangible. This ambiguity between noise's physical dimensions, as evidenced in this scene, and its distinct lack of physical dimensions in the scientific sense, indicates that orality has the power to alter our

conceptions of space and its properties, as well as of narrative.

Accompanying the reformation of space and of narrative is an associated reformation of concepts of time. For example, the first instance of noise mentioned in this passage intersects with Mme Lebrun's speech as follows: "'...it's there on the bookshelf over the small table.' Clatter, clatter, clatter, bang! for the next five or eight minutes" (66). In this sequence, Mme Lebrun's discourse has become multidimensional. As already noted, it controls time because it prevents Robert from responding regardless of its indeterminate duration. The fact that the time interval is unspecified, "five or eight minutes," loosens the idea of time from its quantifiable, fixed precepts, rendering it vague and fluid. This reformation of time is achieved through the use of the sewing machine noise. This description also indicates that sound observes a non-linear progression. That is, the choice "five or eight minutes," rather than "five or six minutes," indicates that time is unfixed from its linear, numerical progression by Mme Lebrun's sound. Quantities like "five" and "eight" are wrested from their numerical sequencing and juxtaposed in a manner which does not observe standard linear progression. As such, the use of sound alters accepted perceptions of time and space as linear, quantifiable, sequential, and perhaps also male-centered, and recasts these entities in a new structure in accordance with the goals of the woman and her

sound-language. The sewing machine sequence anticipates the timelessness and fluidity of the ocean in the novel's final scene, drawing together these disparate examples of orality and femaleness. Thus not only narrative but its associated concepts of space and time are fundamentally altered by the use of orality. The power of sound to subvert male dominance is not limited to linguistic or narrative realms, but is extended into realms of space, time, and social structure through the reformation of the text along oral and female lines.

The reformation of narrative, space, and time is also accomplished through the function of the narrator in this scene. Though the narrative voice is on some level omniscient, the narrator is presented as part of the interplay between Mme Lebrun and Robert, rather than being removed from the action. This shift collapses the narrative hierarchies once again, as in the use of French-English, placing the omniscient narrator on the same narrative plane as the narrated characters, and aligning this narrator subjectively with the female-associated oral-based ideology a select few of them represent.

In the previously quoted sentence about the bookshelf, the narrator's comments form a sentence with the noise-phrase. The sentence, rather than beginning with narratorial comment, opens with the noise. The noise acts as a precursor to the narrative commentary that follows. Just as with Mme Lebrun, the noise functions fluidly with the narrator's speech,

rather than stifling it. This aligns the narrator with Mme Lebrun in the episode and also makes the narrator part of the action, as an additional passage verifies:

"What do you hear from Montel?" Montel was a middle aged gentleman whose vain ambition and desire for the past twenty years had been to fill the void which Monsier Lebrun's taking off had left in the Lebrun household. Clatter, clatter, bang, clatter! (67)

In this instance, the noise appears within the commentary of the narrator. The narrator's voice is being conveyed as though the narrator were present in the room with the sewing machine. Yet it is clear that the commentary is meant for the reader because Montel's identity need not be explained to anyone else. Hence the noise within this speech serves to place the narrator simultaneously within the novellic world and outside of it. It collapses the distinction between the omniscient and the local narrator through this action, creating in effect a participant-omniscient view. Once again, this effect is achieved through the use of sound-language, showing orality's ability to collapse the hierarchical narrative levels assumed by print discourse. But in addition to placing the narrator within the action, the noise also aligns the narrator with Mme Lebrun and against the male print tradition which Robert represents. This is achieved partly by the simple presence of the noise itself--the narrator is using the same disruptive technique

that Mme Lebrun demonstrates. Moreover, the noise blends with the narrative comment just as it did with Mme Lebrun. Because the noise is punctuated and capitalized so that it is part of, rather than an interruption of, the narrator's comments, it functions as an exclamation, a reinforcer of the narrator's comments rather than a squelcher of them.

The content of this passage is also significant, because it deals with the "vanity" of men who project their "desire" onto women in an attempt to fill a presumed "void" in women's lives. So accompanying the shift toward the oral mode in both the characters' speech and the narration is an increased emphasis on the impositions men make upon women. Again, the oral project, and its reformation of print, is clearly aligned with women's struggle against oppressive social systems in the novel. The novel also points, albeit in passing, to other oppressive social systems which are at work in addition to gender, and for which sound-language also acts as a form of resistance. For the narrative mentions that "a little black girl sat on the floor, and with her hands worked the treadle of the machine" (66). It is indicated that she does so because there is danger of being injured in this action, and this danger is inflicted on the girl to spare Mme Lebrun a similar risk. This girl then, the most marginalized of the women in the novel, is the direct source of the noise associated with Mme Lebrun's sewing. This description points to the racial oppressions evident in the novel's society, and links the oppressed girl to the use of sound-language as a

form of resistance and a means toward reform. Noise is power to those who have been denied power in the novel, and this power disrupts male control of time, space, and discourse, reclaiming each of these entities for women.

While this clatter-bang sequence carries various significances for the oral context of the novel, it takes on an even greater import because it is not an isolated example of the use of noise in the novel. Rather, there are several sequences which invoke the same "clatter" heard here. In each subsequent case, the "clatter" is intimately linked to Edna's growing independence and her increasing resistance to societal structures. Like the inset tales in Cather's work, these noise-moments connect in sound and theme across the novel, creating an overarching sound-narrative which in turn reshapes the novel's structure alinearly.

In one such episode, Edna has a "scene" with her husband over a "scorched" dinner (101-2). He leaves the house and Edna returns to her room to look out the window. Sounds come to her from outside the window: "...the voices were not soothing that came from the darkness...They jeered and sounded mournful notes without promise, devoid even of hope" (103). Here, sound is used to awaken Edna to the state of her life, to heighten her desire for independence. Though the sound is disturbing to Edna, it also prompts her to action. She begins by throwing her wedding ring on the carpet. Then, "...she seized a glass vase from the table and flung it upon the tiles of the hearth. She wanted to destroy

something. The crash and clatter were what she wanted to hear" (103). Edna answers the noise with her own noise. And what she "destroys" are the symbols of her life as a male possession, as one of the things that Léonce "greatly valued...chiefly because they were his" (99). The noise is both the instigator and the realization of her resistance. But this is not just any noise--this is the same noise from the sequence with Mme Lebrun and Robert. The use of the word "clatter" links this scene to the sewing machine scene in both sound and theme. All of the implications carried by the use of this sound-word in the sewing scene are now brought to bear in understanding Edna's struggle against societal forces which confine her. The potential of noise to disrupt space, time, language, narrative structure, and social systems is actualized in this scene, and this act restructures the narrative as well as Edna's life by connecting two disparate episodes in the novel through their use of common noise. Edna has taken up the language of rebellion here, and it is a language filled with sound.

It has been argued that Edna's efforts at independence are thwarted because this scene ends in a return to domesticity, as her ring is restored to her and the glass is cleaned up (Yaeger, 212). But just one chapter later the narration indicates that Edna "was visited by no more outbursts....She began to do as she liked and to feel as she liked" (107). Edna's "outburst" is an essential precursor to her newfound independence. Even the word used to describe it, "outburst,"

is a word which uses its sound to convey part of its meaning, linking sound-language to the act of rebellion. Edna utilizes noise to disrupt the social system around her, and then attempts to find a new system for experience and communication. She can now seek a "passionate and intersubjective speech" enabling her "to revise and rearticulate her relations to her own desire and the social reality that thwarts this desire" (Yaeger, 204). The answer offered within the novel is the use of orality, a discourse which simultaneously resists and expresses, which has the power to reform printed narrative and to offer Edna a language of her own.

The realization of this resistance comes when Edna moves out of her husband's house and into her own. This, too, is characterized within a clatter sequence. When Edna visits her children, who are staying indefinitely with her mother-in-law, they ask about the houses and their status. The reconstruction of the old house, a pretense created by Mr. Pontellier to conceal Edna Pontellier's desire for separate dwellings, is described to the children: "They listened, breathless, when she told them the house in Esplanade Street was crowded with work-men, hammering, nailing, sawing, and filling the place with clatter" (151-2). On initial reading, this noise seems to be male noise, generated by the workmen and prompted by Mr. Pontellier's ruse to disguise his wife's departure. But this scene with the children is perhaps the only one in the novel in which Edna considers returning to

her old life before moving ahead with her new one. She does not return to her old life, indicating that her "clatter" has dismantled her old life as thoroughly as it has dismantled her old house. The clatter of the reformed house *is* the clatter of Edna's rebellion, because it reflects the reshaping of a symbol of her confinement and the necessity for her own space and her own language. Has Edna used the master's tools to literally dismantle the master's house? Yes and no, because the novel utilizes the method of print discourse to convey this theme, but sufficiently reforms that discourse to reflect female concerns. This scene also indicates that, despite her reservations regarding the children, Edna has taken on the sound-language that marks her independence. The repetition of the "ing" sound, "hammering, nailing, sawing, and filling," indicates a phraseology that relies on sound for its effect. While repetition may not be an oral quality in itself, the repeated sounds act as a musical refrain, or as an intensifier of the oral qualities of the language through their perpetual ringing noise. When she departs, the narration states: "It was with a wrench and a pang that Edna left her children" (152). This association of sound words, "wrench" and "pang," as representative of Edna's emotions seals the links between female independence and sound-language. As with the previous words "clatter" and "bang," "wrench" and particularly "pang" are words which carry no meaning in a silent world, but gain their meaning through the sounds they express. It is with a "clatter" and

a "bang" that Edna resists her society and forges her own identity, and it is with a "wrench" and "pang" that she leaves her former identity behind forever.

Several forms of orality are utilized within *The Awakening*. The novel depicts local language and its ability to disrupt the linearity of the printed text; it uses non-linguistic noise in the same manner, showing its ability to disrupt print and the male prescriptions which accompany it; it depicts storytelling and its ability to overturn male strictures on female behavior; finally, it uses a sound-rich language to convert the reader into a listener and to mark the independence of the female characters who take on this language. Each of these uses of orality serves to transform the reading act and to restructure the printed text along oral-print lines. Moreover, the novel argues that this restructuring of print has social implications, that resistance against one oppressive system leads to resistance of another. This social implication of the print form is achieved primarily through the actions of protagonist Edna Pontellier, as she takes a stance toward personal freedom and embraces a sound-language in the process. However, the ability of the sound-language to ultimately overturn social structures is cast into doubt by the novel's conclusion with Edna's suicide. Edna's dilemma is presented as not unlike that of the birds at the opening of the novel: "....they had the right to make all the noise they wished. Mr. Pontellier had the privilege of quitting their society when they ceased

to be entertaining" (43). She, like the birds, has discovered her right to voice her rebellion and to claim sound-language as her own. She, like Chopin herself, has also succeeded in disrupting the men's print-associated discourse and turning the discourse to her own ends. But in Edna Pontellier's case, it is not so much a matter of Mr. Pontellier quitting her society, as her being forced to quit his society. Edna's problem is not that society will not permit her to live an independent life. The very existence of Mlle Reisz, the cranky and independent recluse, within the novel verifies this.²¹ Neither is her problem "an incessant need for some other register of language," because she has discovered sound-language to fill this need (Yaeger, 219). The protagonist's dilemma is that she longs to retain her independent life and language and still participate in conventional society, and it is this dilemma that the novel marks as irreconcilable even with the acquisition of sound-language. As Treichler puts it: "...Edna's 'problem' is never simply one of achieving the freedom to make sexuality possible or to forsake paternalistic conventions; it is rather a question of how a woman who has achieved a self--has become an 'I'--can live in the world" (249). It is the ability to be simultaneously independent and social which Edna's society grants to men and denies to women.

Yet, as many have argued, the novel's ending is not wholly a defeat.²² One way to read optimism into an otherwise terminal ending is to note the prevalence of sound-language

in the final passages of the novel. Chopin's use of language seems to argue that though Edna dies, sound-language survives and remains a viable form of resistance beyond the life of one practitioner. When Edna goes to the beach at the novel's conclusion, the narration states that a "bird with a broken wing was beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water (175). Though the image is foreboding, the description of the wounded bird is written in sound-language. The words "reeling, fluttering, circling" are onomatopoeic, describing in essence the bird's descent, with its wings resisting the wind. Further, this description echoes the repetition of the "ing" sound heard in the housebuilding description, linking this episode to earlier examples of sound-language stretching across the intervening text. The repetition can also be read as a precursor to the Modernist technique of using repetition to divorce words from signification to create a pure sound effect, in turn recuperating print discourse through this use of orality. In addition to using repetition and onomatopoeia as sound-language, the phrase describing the "bird with the broken wing" is also alliterative, repeating the "b" sound in its opening and the "d" sound at the end. These muffled stops, "b" and "d," may imitate sound heard under water, signaling Edna's coming death. But they also indicate, through the various sound techniques in the description, that the sea is a place where sound is dominant, where women's sound-language is spoken, where wounded souls go to rest. This

interpretation is confirmed by the description of the sea itself: "The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in the abysses of solitude" (175). Numerous aspects of sound-language--repetition, alliteration, onomatopoeia--are distilled in this description of the sea. Words capture their concepts aurally, as in "whispering" and "murmuring." The repetition of the "s" sound may suggest the wind on the surface of the sea, or the sea sloshing against itself. The sea is cast as Edna's counterpart, the "clamor" to her "clatter." The sea here has a "voice," and that voice speaks in sound-language. Thus Edna's death is cast, more optimistically, as an act of being encompassed by sound, and of having her experience echoed back to her in a shared language.

The fact that the conclusion of the novel is an instance of orality is confirmed by the description of Edna's final moments. They are saturated in sound. Edna hears "her father's voice and her sister Margaret's," "the barking of an old dog," "the spurs of the cavalry officer" and "the hum of bees" (176). Each of these sound-images is an experience from Edna's pre-awakened self that has been translated into the language of sound. Her memories return, not as visual images, but as noises. The use of sound recreates her past in new form and reshapes it to reflect her awakening and her chosen ending, by enclosing all of these entities in sound. Through these sound-images, Edna's past is merged with her

present and future, again collapsing the notion of linear time, and offering the suggestion that sound-language is eternal. This theme is also carried in the sentence's structure, because the use of the subject disappears and "[s]ense impressions and memories float in space" by the phrase's conclusion (Treichler, 256).²³ In this sound-centered world, images from the male-structured world are transformed into pure sensory impression. Sound-discourse gave Edna a tool for rebellion and a means to reclaim language as her own, on her own, oral terms. In the end, the recurrence of this sound-language suggests that the reclamation of language has not been fruitless, despite Edna's demise. The sea preserves the oral language mode. Even the text itself serves as a lasting document of the sound-language it describes. This is, perhaps, the greatest benefit of the oral-print form. Orality permits the printed text to evade linearity, prescriptiveness, one-dimensional expression, and a gendered male ideology. Print permits the oral moment to last beyond its ephemeral sound expression. Edna finds her linguistic comfort and the novel finds its structural metaphor in the sea, at once sound-filled and enduring. For as we know, sound travels in waves.

NOTES

¹ Studies which focus on language/discourse in *The Awakening* include Bauer and Lakritz, Buckman, George, Treichler, Wolff, Wyatt, and Yaeger.

See also Boren for substantial discussion of language as related to narrative structure and style. For discussions of language/discourse in Chopin's short fiction, see Cutter, and Peel. Cutter's identification of a "voice couvert" in Chopin's short fiction, a "voice which attempts to undermine patriarchal discourse...from within its own structures" bears similarity to my discussion of the oral-print form, though I see the oral-print form as a more overt strategy than Cutter's term suggests (17).

² Studies which discuss Edna's failure to find an adequate language include Buckman; Wolff; and Yaeger. For readings which focus on French feminist theory as applied to *The Awakening*, see Buckman; and Wyatt.

³ For examples of this type of argument, see Buckman 55-8; and Wyatt 64-5.

⁴ For elaborations on the connection between medicine and social oppression in *The Awakening*, see Bauer and Lakritz 49; and Wolff 6-8 and 14.

⁵ Yaeger argues that the adultery represented in the novel is not transgressive at all, but is rather a facet of a larger system of sexual and social regulation (197-200). Whether one finds the adultery in the novel transgressive or not, both Arobin and Lebrun take on husbandly roles with regard to Edna, placing them clearly within, rather than outside, the social code.

⁶ For other readings of this scene and its significance to the novel's language themes see Boren 184-5, Wolff 3, and Yaeger 202-3. Boren notes the use of repetition in this scene, as I do, and its significance for the creation of a sound-scheme in the novel. Yaeger's

reading is perhaps the most detailed and compelling of the three, and I concur with her idea that the parrot's "polyvocal discourse" points toward "a more extraordinary speech world" and to "a potential lack of meaning in words themselves," and also her contrasting this use of language with Mr. Pontellier's language and its "linguistic constraints" (203-4). However, I depart from Yaeger in that I see the parrot precursing a *successful* mode of resistance in its oral discourse. I also depart from Yaeger in that, while I see the parrot as using noise-words which question the signification process, I do not see the entirety of the parrot's speech as "incomprehensible" (203). Indeed, both Wolff and Yaeger focus on the parrot's speaking "a language which nobody understood," without emphasizing that Chopin's text mentions that language as one of several languages the parrot speaks, not as a descriptor of its language system as a whole.

⁷ Yaeger elaborates on Mr. Pontellier's association with print by noting that the newspaper he carries is from the previous day and thus links "his propriety with the backward tug of words which are 'a day old'..." (203). Yaeger also sees Edna Pontellier as affiliated with this print framework because Edna works with old papers in her sewing (footnote 9, 203). I see this same image as an indication of Edna's willingness to dismantle/cut apart print to rework it for her own particular use, serving as a metaphor for the novel's linguistic framework as a whole.

⁸ This ambiguity of the narrator's status is reflected, through rarely directly addressed, in critical responses to the novel. Bauer and Lakritz argue that the "narrator sees no more than a third-person

narrator might be expected to see" and later state that there are instances when "the narrator seems to know more about Edna's thoughts and feelings than another person can properly claim to know" (50). Treichler speaks of the novel having a "more or less...objective narrator," embodying a similar ambiguity (241). Wolff mentions critics' praise for the narrator's "strict emotional and moral neutrality" (3), yet in my reading this narrator aligns herself/himself with particular characters through the use of language. Wyatt does note the "dissolution of all the fixed positions of narrative discourse--narrator, character, reader..." in the ending of the novel (81).

⁹ Boren, in a compelling reading of sound and music in the text, also notes that the reader is transformed into a listener within the novel (180).

¹⁰ Others who note the relationship between various types of oppression in Chopin's works--linguistic, social, marital, narrative, etc.--and thus her writings' critique of a larger social system through its discussion of particular oppressions, include Bauer and Lakritz, Cutter, George, Peel, Treichler, Wolff, and Yaeger. This interconnectedness of oppressions is also implicit in the French feminist-influenced readings offered by Buckman, and Wyatt.

¹¹ Yaeger also reads this storytelling instance as male-centered and as part of Robert's attempt to convert Edna to a male-centered brand of romantic thought (201). Yaeger, however, sees Robert's attempt as successful.

¹² Others who suggest that sound may be a distinct language in *The Awakening*, thus constituting an experimental form of writing, include

Boren (esp. 186), and George (esp. 59).

¹³ For additional readings on the uses of repetition and of alliteration in the novel, see Buckman, particularly 61-4 and 67; Treichler 250-4; and Wyatt 71-72.

¹⁴ My reading correlates to Wyatt, who has called Mme Antoine a "chief storyteller of an island oral tradition" and notes that "Edna also takes Madame Antoine's sensual language as a model," and that the sounds of this passage form a part of that sensual language (67). Buckman also notes that in the *Chênière Caminada* scene Edna becomes increasingly aware of herself as independent and as a sexual subject apart from Robert and that this act relies on and reforms fairy-tale conventions invoked in the scene (60-1). This reading reinforces my notion that Edna's independence corresponds with her ability to place herself at the center of the oral tale. Yaeger also notes the collaborative telling of the Grand Terre tale and the invocation of fairy-tale references in *Chênière Caminada* scene, though she reads Edna as trapped within the romantic conventions Robert represents in these sequences (201-2).

¹⁵ Others who note Dr. Mandelet's attempt to control Edna and dismiss her independence in this scene, and in some cases Edna's resistance through her story, include Buckman, Yaeger, and Wyatt. These theorists disagree, however, as to whether Edna's awakening is fundamentally sexual, linguistic, or both. See specifically Buckman 68, Wyatt 66-8, and Yaeger 199.

¹⁶ Both Treichler and Buckman (whose reading is informed by Treichler) deal at length with how word repetition, particularly words

surrounding sleeping, waking, dream, and reality, recreates the contextualization/signification process, thus questioning both linear narrative form and the very concepts of dream and reality themselves. See Buckman 58-63 and especially Treichler 250-254. Wyatt also notes the importance of Edna attributing the tale to Mme Antoine, arguing that it "emphasizes Edna's refusal of patriarchal precedents" (67). Roscher also notes the "circularity" of *The Awakening* and its link to experimental writing (297-8). Cutter has noted Chopin's treatment of non-linear narrative form as a resistance to patriarchal strictures on writing in her short fiction, see particularly 29-30.

¹⁷ My reading of this scene has been informed by the suggestions of audiences at the Michigan Academy conference and the Michigan State University Arts and Letters Colloquium, who particularly noted the domestic imagery of the sewing machine. Boren reads this image differently, reading Mme Lebrun and her sewing machine as representative of "the self-reliant commercial woman," in the larger scheme of women's roles in the novel (182).

¹⁸ Yaeger also notes that this scene gives Mme Lebrun the "power of interruption," though she does not link this power to women's successful resistance in the novel (212).

¹⁹ Buckman has analyzed the use of dashes elsewhere in the novel, arguing dashes "indicate not only that we are in the realm of the unspeakable, but also that an abyss has opened up between discursive systems," and also that the dash "signals the reader's responsibility to enter the spaces between words and make Edna's conflict speak" (59).

²⁰ There is also a plot-driven reason for Robert to sit at the edge

of the room: He is looking for Mrs. Pontellier through the window. Likewise, it is debatable whether his eventual departure is prompted by the noisy machine or by his mother's suggestion that Edna might be in her room preparing for luncheon (67-8). However, I think the use of noise in this sequence suggests the possibility that noise has the power to control the surrounding space, and thus the males within it, though this message may lie beneath the surface of the clearer demands of the plot. For others who have noted the spatial/geographical mobility of the men in the novel as compared to the women see George 56, and Treichler 247. Wyatt also notes that the use of female sexuality in the novel functions "both spatially and discursively," highlighting the interconnectedness of language and space issues (65).

²¹ Mmlle Reisz is also a practitioner of sound-language in her capacity as a musician. She creates non-linguistic sound which communicates with Edna, producing a powerful empathic reaction in the protagonist. Mmlle Reisz also employs orality through her frequent use of monosyllabic words like "Bah!" which function as seemingly asignifying sound-words within her speech pattern yet serve to dismiss the characters (usually men) around her. For more on the musical themes of the novel see Boren, though I do not agree with Boren's negative reading of Mmlle Reisz.

²² For examples in the recent criticism, see Buckman, Roscher, Treichler, and Wyatt. Buckman, Treichler, and Wyatt all focus their readings on the optimism offered by union with the sea, often through the alliteration, onomatopoeia, repetition, and linguistic fluidity suggested by the "voice of the sea" passage which also appears earlier

in the novel, techniques also noted by Boren. See specifically Boren 181, Buckman 67-72, Treichler 254-6, and Wyatt 72 and 80-1.

²³ Wyatt makes a similar observation to Treichler's, noting that the "existence of an image without a context, or a thought without a mind to think it, throws into doubt a novel reader's fundamental assumption that a particular character thinks thoughts, smells flowers, hears dogs" (81).

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