ENACTING A COMMUNITY'S TRUTH:

THE PRAGMATICS OF LITERARY GOSSIP

by

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ABSTRACT

Gossip has been maligned for centuries as petty, frivolous, even evil, and as consistently as it has been criticised, gossip has been associated with women. Recently, several feminist critics have argued that gossip is often a source of empowerment for the disenfranchised, a way in which those with no official voice may be subversive. These arguments accept the association of gossip and women and attempt to view gossip as a positive activity. However, the assumption that it is primarily the disenfranchised who gossip and that the content of this gossip is largely subversive remains largely unexamined. Gossip, I argue, is most often conservative, enforcing unwritten gender codes. While the gossiping woman may be empowered as a speaking subject, the content of her gossip and its wider implications are likely to reinforce, rather than subvert, dominant ideologies. Furthermore, gossip's subversive powers seem limited, as its pressures are most acutely felt by the socially vulnerable.

An examination of four novels, Sinclair Ross's *Sawbones Memorial* (1974), Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* (1920), Joanna Wood's *The Untempered Wind* (1894), and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) by Anne Brontë, reveals the social and linguistic machinations of gossip. Michel Foucault's theory of panopticism is applied to the functions of gossip in the latter three texts; the fallen woman□s identity as deviant is created through gossip's dual surveillance system of watching and talking. As subjects of gossip, the disenfranchised members internalise society's dictates and become the principles of their own subjection. The creation and enactment of a community's truth through gossip can also be seen at the linguistic level. Using the analytical tools of linguistic-pragmatics, I identify the characteristic features of the speech genre of gossip -- modality, projection, vocatives, epithets, presupposition -- which often operate coercively, producing the community's truth and (re)enforcing gender codes through (re)articulation. A more detailed

analysis of the language in Ross's text illuminates the ways in which gossip can form, according to Judith Butler's theories of abjection, a constitutive outside to the subject; these abjected objects of gossip serve as the community's founding repudiation.

To Mom and Dad,
my first and finest teachers.

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Introduction

> Reflect how enormous is the weight of 'everyone says' and 'it is said' in public opinion, public rumor, gossip, slander and so forth. One must also consider the psychological importance in our lives of what others say about us, and the importance, for us, of understanding and interpreting these words of others.
>
> (M.M. Bakhtin *The Dialogic Imagination* 338)

Gossip surrounds us -- office gossip, celebrity gossip, neighbourhood gossip, family gossip. Anthropologist Max Gluckman declares that "every single day, and for a large part of each day, most of us are engaged in gossiping. I imagine that if we were to keep a record of how we use our waking-time, gossiping would come only after 'work' -- for some of us -- in the score" (308). In the twentieth century gossip has received the scholarly attention of anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, evolutionary biologists, philosophers, and literary critics. For gossip has definitely found its way into literature. It plays a prominent role in Iago's undermining Othello's faith in Desdemona; the story of the fallen woman, from Hawthorne to Hardy uses gossip as an essential component of the community's censure; certainly the domestic novel owes much of its plot and character development to gossip. Margaret Drabble and Homer Brown raise the possibility that the very nature of the novel itself owes much of its structure and themes to gossip: "Beyond their uses as form of validation, letters and gossip figure in many other novels as plot devices, themes, perhaps even emblems within the novel of its own nature, genesis, both its lie and its feared truth about itself" (Brown 574).

Despite, or perhaps because of, its wide folk understanding, scholars have difficultly

agreeing on a definition of gossip. It has been described as "conversational embroidery" (Thomas 47), and as "the talk of gossipers" (Taylor 36). For some researchers, the defining characteristic is context. Rosnow and Georgoudi report that "gossip is situated interpersonally and cannot be conceived apart from the relational context in which it arises" (59). In this sense, Rosnow and Fine argue, one can gossip about oneself: "Gossip can thus refer to news about the affairs of another, to one's own memoirs or confessions, or to any hearsay of a personal nature, be it positive or negative, spoken or in print"(87). To other researchers, the essential component of gossip is its content. This must be "conversation about other people's private lives" (de Sousa 26). Yet Margaret Holland argues that "without knowing the specific feature of a particular conversation (including the motives and roles of the speakers), one cannot judge whether or not the conversation is an instance of gossip" (198). For some feminist scholars, the definition of gossip is narrowed to include only female speech. In response to the centuries old association of women and gossip, Deborah Jones defines gossip as "a way of talking between women in their roles as women, intimate in style, personal and domestic in topic and setting, a female cultural event which springs from and perpetuates the restrictions of the female role, but also gives the comfort of validation" (243). For reasons which will be discussed later, I reject this accepting of gossip as a solely female discourse.

Gossip, then, involves both men and women engaged in utterance; one cannot gesture or illustrate gossip. This utterance, which may be an extended narrative or a short comment, must be about an absent person or persons. In defining absent, I follow sociologist J.R. Bergmann, in arguing that the subject of gossip can be physically present, but rendered a

"nonperson", "interactively absent" through actions of the gossipers: "having their bodies turned away from him [sic], lowering their voices, distancing themselves from him, avoidance of eye contact"(50).[1] Unlike Rosnow and Fine (87), I hold it to be impossible for one to gossip about oneself. The talk must be about the other(s). Constitutively, gossip must include speculation or judgement, either direct or implied, about the motivations, actions or speech of the absent person(s). Gossip can be about intimate acquaintances or total strangers, although the subject is generally known to both the speaker and the listener(s).[2] Gossip relies on the specific; talking about an unspecified, abstracted third person who is completely unknown to the listener, is not gossip. Although gossip usually deals with information of a personal nature, it need not be secret. The gossiper generally holds the information to be true, although it is not necessarily so for the listener or the community. Gossip is essentially an informal (although far from formless) discourse. Conversations involving professionals discussing an aspect of their profession as it relates to an absent person, for example, two social workers discussing a client's drinking problem, is not gossip.[3] It is important to note,

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[1]See Chapter Nine of Brontë's *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* for an excellent example of such a conversational absence in the midst of physical presence.

[2]The obvious exception to this is, of course, celebrity gossip. Although Diana, Princess of Wales, did not know billions of people, she was known to them, and so a frequent subject of gossip.

[3]The line between gossip and professional discourse is not always clear however. In Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, an excellent example of an ambiguous case is presented as Newland Archer, a lawyer, and his employer, Mr. Letterblair discuss the potential divorce of Countess Olenska, a case to which they have been assigned. However, the conversation turns to the effect the scandal will have on the Countess' family: "Mr. Archer, I don't understand you. Do you want to marry into a family with a scandalous divorce-suit hanging over it?" (64). The tone of the discourse shifts from a legal to a judgmental tone, making it seem to be more gossip than professional discourse.

that as Louise Collins points out, "gossip...is interwoven with other kinds of talk: advice-giving, teasing, talking about the weather" (106). Indeed, it is often interspersed with confession or self-disclosure. Aaron Ben-Ze'ev argues that gossip is a "prototypical category," one which "is determined by an item's degree of similarity to the best example in the category," in contrast to binary categories which provide clear criteria which are "all-or-nothing" (11). Certainly this is true, and must be kept in mind when considering any definition of this complicated and ubiquitous discourse.

In *Gossip*, Patricia Meyer Spacks includes oral narrative as a type of gossip. She argues that in the novels of Toni Morrison and Zora Neale Hurston, "gossip generates the drama of the black people" (247). In Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, the main characters' ancestors "turn out to provide rich material for gossip, legend, speculation" (247). Although these three types of oral discourse do share "the same verbal texture" (247), I would argue that it is a mistake to conflate gossip with oral storytelling. Although Spacks acknowledges that there are temporal differences between gossip and what she terms tradition (gossip dealing with the present, tradition with the past (248)), this feature alone does not allow for the significant differences between these two forms of discourse. Telling the story of one's family, as occurs in Morrison's work for example, is relating one's narrative inheritance, thereby speaking indirectly about oneself, which precludes it from being gossip. The story of his ancestors is indeed Milkman's story to both hear and tell.

Given this working definition of gossip, what are the effects of all this talk? For Spacks, gossip is a spectrum which runs from distilled malice (4) to that "accurately characterized as 'idle talk'" (5) to serious gossip "which exists only as a function of intimacy"

(5). Although I agree that gossip can be used by individuals for specific, self-interested, malicious purposes, and that it often has the function of creating intimacy,[4] gossip, I submit, is *never* idle talk. It is always working in the service of an ideology, whether or not the participants are aware of such effects. Gluckman was one of the first researchers to discuss the social effects of gossip: "gossip, and even scandal, have important positive virtues. Clearly they maintain the unity, morals and values of social groups" (308).[5] In contrast, Robert Paine argues that "gossip is, first, a genre of informal communication and, second, a device intended to forward and protect individual interests" (278). Between the split between individual and social functions of gossip comes a third theory about its effects. Several researchers, including Spacks and Ronald de Sousa, argue that "gossip is typically a subversive form of power: an attempt by the weak, and often, though far from exclusively, by women, to use the power of knowledge independently of those who wield more conventional power" (de Sousa 25).

For centuries gossip has been condemned, because, Spacks and others argue, it is such a potentially powerful weapon at the disposal of the disenfranchised. As social historian Edith Gelles points out, "underlying all this discourse [of gossip as "bad"] is the elementary understanding that language has power" (667). The Bible contains several edicts against talebearing, whispering, and tattling. For example, "Thou shalt not go up and down as a

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[4]Spacks holds this function to be almost entirely positive, yet intimacy through gossip is only created and sustained by building an inside and outside, us versus them, knowledge and/or judgement circle. While this can be positive for those on the inside, obviously it is not so for those who are excluded.

[5]Whether or not the maintenance of group values and morals is a *positive* feature of gossip will be discussed later.

talebearer among thy people" (*Leviticus* 19:16). People are also warned not to speak to gossips: "He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips" (*Proverbs* 20:19). And gossips are placed in the company of the depraved: "Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers" (*Romans* 1:29). Citing such diverse sources as Shakespeare and Heidegger, Spacks points out that "few activities so nearly universal have been the object of such sustained and passionate attack" (24).

As consistently as it has been attacked, gossip has been associated with women. The Bible warns that young widows may be dangerous for "and withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not" (*I Timothy* 5:13). The solution, of course, is to ensure that they get remarried and thus are kept busy. The word gossip comes from the word Godsib, "one who has contracted spiritual affinity with another by acting as a sponsor at a baptism"(*OED*). This word was applied equally to both sexes and denoted a close relationship. In "The Parson's Tale", Chaucer writes, "A womman may in no lasse synne assemblen with hire godsib, than with hire owene flesshly brother". Later the word gossip came to refer to "a woman's female friends invited to be present at a birth" (*OED*), thus beginning its exclusively female denotation. The word's most recent meaning is "a person, mostly a woman, of light and trifling character, esp. one who delights in idle talk; a newsmonger, a tattler" or "the conversation of such a person; idle talk; trifling or groundless rumour; tittle-tattle. Also, in a more favourable sense: Easy, unrestrained talk or writing, esp.

about persons or social incidents" (*OED*). Bergmann notes that "the association of gossip with women has become a part of so many figures of speech, anecdotes, proverbs, caricature, and other presentations that it even determines our picture of gossip where it is not explicitly mentioned" (59).

Detailing the history of gossip in the Middle Ages, Sylvia Schein explains that "gossiping became a topos of medieval misogyny," quoting "the architect of courtly love, Andreas Capellanus": "...woman is by nature a slanderer, because only slander can spring from envy and hate. It is not easy to find a woman whose tongue can ever spare anybody or who can keep from words of detraction" (148). Spacks points to three historical explanations given for the association of women and gossip, the first being the legacy of Eve, the first woman who brought sin into the world through her listening and speaking, the second being simply the long held idea that women's minds were naturally weak and so prone to idle chatter, the third, "more generous" explanation is the fact that upper-class women in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries simply had nothing better to do but talk (41).

More recently, the psychoanalyst C.F. Sulzberger (1953) proposed that "the greater capacity of women to divulge their most intimate secrets is directly connected with the effects of the castration complex" (quoted in Bergmann 59). For researchers L. Tiger and R. Fox (1971), there is a parallel between "the gossip of women and the incessant attempts of female primates to care for the newborn and young of other animals," thus making it a "typically female form of caretaking" (Bergmann 59). Bergmann argues that women do *not* in fact gossip more than men, but are accused of doing so because of the occupations they traditionally held:

> Because of the specific work that they performed washerwomen, maids, and servant girls found themselves in a situation where they constantly acquired information and news about the private affairs of others and thereby naturally became potential gossip producers for their neighbourhoods. (65)

Schein argues that medieval women did indeed gossip more than men, for the following reason:

> Faced with limited opportunities to exercise real power over their own or others' lives, barred from holding office and from direct lines of political influence, relegated to the domestic arena, medieval women, especially from the ranks of nobility, tried to procure a share of power by using such tools as kinship, gifts, and patronage and such weapons as intrigue, deceit, and gossip. (151)

While Spacks is careful to stipulate that she "do[es] not mean to imply a belief that only women gossip," (46) she argues that it is the special weapon of the subordinated classes because gossip "embodies an alternative discourse to that of public life, and a discourse potentially challenging to public assumptions; it provides language for an alternative culture" (46). As previously mentioned, Deborah Jones embraces the association between women and gossip, defining gossip as women's talk. Jennifer Coates applauds Jones' definition, arguing that "gossip is a term used almost exclusively of women's talk; it usually has pejorative connotations" and in accepting the term as describing women's talk, Jones "draws attention to the fact that the language women use when talking to each other has not traditionally been treated as serious linguistic data" (1986, 114-115). In her own research, Coates uses the term gossip to refer to all-woman conversation which she argues, "like most interaction between equals, has as its chief goal the maintenance of good social relationships" (1988, 98). Penelope Eckert's study on what she terms "girl talk," of which gossip is a component,

investigated the way in which groups of high school girls talk with each other. She claims that, although this talk is generally a conservative force, "girl talk can be seen as an agent of social change, as well as social control" (94). In "Gossip: A Feminist Defence," Louise Collins argues, not that gossip is an exclusively female domain, but that "the characteristic self-understanding that emerges in gossip -- the self as known in relation to other particular individuals and to an evaluative community -- and the characteristic kind of moral reasoning which is involved in gossip -- emphasizing concrete details and differences -- converge with what is typically female" (114). She goes on to call for a return to the word's early etymology, in which gossip would refer to talk "whereby we act as midwives to each other's moral development" (114).

However, other than reiterating long-standing traditions, Spacks, Jones and Collins offer no evidence for the assumption that women (or in Spacks' case, the subordinated in general) do in fact gossip more than men. They may in fact gossip at an equal rate, albeit about different topics. Gossip need not occur within a same sex group at all. Indeed, Gluckman has proposed that gossip works as a badge of membership and therefore, far from being the language of the disenfranchised, "the more exclusive the group, the greater will be the amount of gossip in it" (308). One can imagine vast amounts of gossip among male-dominated groups, highly powerful groups such as doctors, lawyers and politicians. Certainly literature is filled with gossiping men (and women). One may begin with the veritable poster boy for malicious slander and innuendo, *Othello*'s Iago. William Faulkner's novels are filled with male gossips, not the least of which is the travelling salesman Ratliff who narrates, through his gossip to other men, much of *The Hamlet.* In Edith Wharton's *Age of Innocence*,

the most illustrious gossip of the old New York society is Mr. Sillerton Jackson who "applied to the investigation of his friends' affairs the patience of a collector and the science of a naturalist" (21). And in Austen's *Emma*, although Miss Bates is remembered as the most voluminous *talker*, the character who does the most *gossiping* is surely Mr. Knightley.

Spacks, Jones and Collins, having accepted the traditional description of who gossips, have sought to make it in many respects a virtue rather than a vice,[6] to make it a source of power rather than something to be ridiculed and dismissed. While this approach may seem desirable, it is based on the erroneous assumption that it is the disenfranchised who gossip. Furthermore, it is based on the largely unexamined belief that the content of gossip is subversive. Although it certainly can be subversive, and certainly the gossiper achieves a measure of power through being a speaking, judging subject, the idea that gossip is a positive source of power for women needs to be reexamined. In their study of rumour,[7] Levin and Arluke found that the established gender roles and prejudices are likely to be asserted in this type of knowledge "transmission".

> "Two boys and two girls were fishing when the boat in which they were riding overturned. Only the girls knew how to swim; they grabbed hold of the boys and guided them back to shore. Both boys were very grateful."
>
> We have often given this story to our students as a demonstration of the distortion model of rumor. We ask our students to play telephone: to whisper the report to one another until it gets to the last student in the class, who writes it on a piece of paper and reads it to everyone else.

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[6]None of these researchers argue that *all* gossip is virtuous and empowering.

[7]The difference between rumour and gossip has been debated by many researchers (see especially Rosnow and Fine). Gossip depends on the personal; therefore, things such as stock market crashes and war plans can be the subject of rumour but not gossip. However, rumours about a neighbour's infidelity or a boss's drinking problem would also be gossip.

> The result often looks like this: "A boy and a girl are riding in a boat which overturns. Only the *boy* knows how to swim, so *he* saves the girl. *She* is very grateful". (Levin and Arluke 43 emphasis added)

For logistical and ethical reasons, few empirical studies of gossip have been carried out in western societies.[8] Researchers ethically cannot record gossip unbeknownst to the participants[9], yet due to the private and socially tabooed nature of gossip, gossipers who knew they were being studied would be unlikely to continue uninhibited. Possibly because of such difficulties, several researchers make specific reference to the social or domestic novel when discussing gossip. Despite his ultimate rejection of social novels as a basis of ethnographic study, Bergmann allows that they do provide "ethnographic details and insights" into the study of gossip (11). Indeed, both sociologist Robert Paine and anthropologist Max

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[8]There have been a number of anthropological studies about gossip in "other" cultures. However, these tend to contain unsubstantiated cultural assumptions and potentially dangerous generalizations (see Abrahams 1970, Almirol 1981, Besnier 1989). Jack Levine and Arnold Arluke carried out a study in which they "eavesdropped" on college students' gossip. They found that "contrary to popular beliefs...the gossip of men and women contained similarities as well as differences. The data revealed that women spent more time gossiping than men and that women were much more likely than men to gossip about close friends and family members [they do not say how this information was determined]. However, no significant sex differences were uncovered regarding the derogatory tone of gossip and men and women were found to gossip about many of the same topics" (281). Penelope Eckert's research with high school girls attempts to study "real" girl talk. Yet, the conversation she analyses is artificially created for her -- she invites the girls to get together -- and she directs the conversation at key moments, thus preventing it from being purely authentic gossip.

[9]Jennifer Coates bypasses ethical considerations by researching the "gossip" of a group to which she belongs, "surruptiously" recording her friends and later obtaining their approval. Her research concentrates on the features and functions of women's talk, which she argues "at one level deals with the experiences common to women: individuals come to terms with that experience, and participants in conversation actively support one another in that endeavour. At another level, the *way* women negotiate talk symbolises that mutual support and co-operation" (1988, 120).

Gluckman refer specifically to *Emma.*[10] The realist novel, then, may be considered "data" in a sense for investigating questions surrounding who gossips, why and to what effect.

Examining a variety of social novels reveals that the content of gossip does *not* always, or perhaps even most often, subvert tradition. Spacks claims that "gossip reflects moral assumptions different from those of the dominant culture," (46) but provides little evidence. The content of gossip, more typically, reinforces the dominant ideology, particularly with regard to gender roles. Women gossiping about who is going to marry whom (in *Emma* for example) assume, to such an ingrained degree that it need not even be mentioned, that women *must* marry.[11] In Henry James' *Daisy Miller*, a young woman walking alone in a public place causes gossiping scandal, attempting to restrict a woman's independent movement.[12] In Joanna Wood's novel *The Untempered Wind*, we are shown that it is through gossip in part that children learn gender norms. School children take up their parents' gossiping lead and ridicule the illegitimate son of the protagonist.

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[10]In an extended commentary, Gluckman uses a passage in which Mr. John Knightley mocks the gossip of the Highbury set. Gluckman analyses: "gossip was not idle, though the creatures were. In fact the more idle the creature, the less idle was the gossip. These were people living on land, rents and gilt-edged shares, marking themselves off from others by talking about one another. And talking about one another was what helped maintain them as a group -- an elite -- in the wider society in which they lived....Mrs. Elton, the Rector's bride from Bristol, was pert and impertinent when she joined in that gossip too freely and too quickly" (308). Paine, arguing that gossip is about the individual, not the group, states, "...if the talk was really *an exchange of news*, then Mr. Knightley could with justice protest that, as far as he was concerned, there was little basis for reciprocity.... Surely the point about the 'idle chatter' was that John Knightley no longer had a *use* for the information it contained" (280).

[11]Although Emma herself asserts several times that she is not going to marry, no one in the Highbury gossip circle takes this seriously.

[12]The title character's demise was used as an example for etiquette writers both in Europe and in the United States, preaching to young girls about the dangers of being independent.

Far from being the voice of the disenfranchised, gossip more frequently works to solidify the power of the powerful and further denigrate the already excluded. In communities, it is the ones without (male) relatives to defend their names, those who are ethnically or economically different from the norm, who are often the greatest targets of gossip. Although the disenfranchised do gossip about the powerful, it often has little effect. As Faulkner's Emily Grierson in "A Rose for Emily" does, those with enough money and social status can simply disregard virtually all of what is said about them. Furthermore, not everyone's gossip is equal in worth. One word from the powerful, wealthy and male Mr. Knightley is worth twenty from the relatively impoverished, socially reduced, female Miss Bates. Helen, the heroine of Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and Wood's fallen woman, Myron, are each encouraged by a man to allow him to defend her honour. His word is simply worth more than hers. Thus gossip is not, as Ronald de Sousa claims, "inherently democratic", but is rather filled with many of the assumptions of the dominant social order.

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This thesis investigates the social and linguistic machinations of gossip, attempting to illustrate that gossip is often highly problematic for women, imposing gender codes, creating abject zones of exclusion, and constructing community knowledge out of prejudices. Four realist novels, representing a range of historical periods, class concerns, nationalities and authorial genders are examined. These novels have been chosen both for being critically acclaimed by contemporary critics as having captured the voice of their respective

communities, and also for their reliance, both thematic and in terms of plot development, on gossip.

Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, first published in 1848, is an epistolary novel narrated by Gilbert Markham, a bachelor farmer living with his mother and sister. The arrival of a mysterious tenant prompts a cycle of gossip in the town which accuses the young widow of having an affair with both her landlord, Mr. Lawrence, and the narrator. Gilbert falls in love with Helen and attacks Lawrence in a blind rage, having believed the gossip that he was Helen's lover.

Through her diary, which takes up a third of the novel, we learn that Mrs. Graham is actually Helen Huntingdon, sister of Lawrence and wife of Arthur Huntingdon. She took her young son and left her alcoholic and abusive husband, making her living as a landscape painter. Yet, when her husband falls ill, Helen returns to nurse and forgive him, but refuses him access to their son. After his death, she inherits her uncle's estate and becomes an independently wealthy woman; Helen and Gilbert then marry. The entire novel is itself a piece of gossip, as Gilbert reveals his wife's most personal secrets and freely judges and speculates about those around him. In addition to this gossip form, Gilbert's account is filled with reports of town gossip -- primarily about Helen as she is subject to seemingly endless speculation and judgement.

Myron Holder, the hero of Joanna Wood's *The Untempered Wind* (1894) is also the subject of much verbal and visual scrutiny. This woman, who is "a mother, but not a wife," (6) lives in Jamestown, a fictional small town in pre-industrial southern Ontario. As the novel opens, we see Myron after the birth of her illegitimate son, My. She is desperately

poor, working as a domestic labourer for the formidable Mrs. Deans in order to support both her grandmother and her son. Myron is openly scorned as well as gossiped about, and her only friend is Homer Wilson, a young man who had left Jamestown but who was forced to return to help his parents financially. Eventually, Homer, in love with Myron, proposes marriage but is refused as Myron considers herself to be married to the father of her child, not because her sexual sin links her to this man, but because she believed herself to be married before the sexual act took place. Both Homer and My die, and Myron finally leaves Jamestown in order to become a nurse. While working at a hospital, Myron meets Dr. Henry Willis, the man who so cruelly used and deserted her. At his insistence, Myron marries Dr. Willis at her deathbed, on the condition that he posthumously give My a name. This he fails to do and the true identity of My's father remains hidden from Jamestown.

In *The Age of Innocence*, Edith Wharton's 1920 novel about New York high society during the 1870s, few secrets are kept from the gossiping community. Countess Ellen Olenska, a native New Yorker, is the central focus of gossip when she returns from Europe, having left her Polish husband. As the novel opens, the main character focalizer, Newland Archer, is newly engaged to May Welland, a cousin of Ellen's. The family initially defends Ellen and brings her into the social fold and she is talked out of pursuing a divorce. As Newland comes to know the "outcast" on the inside, he falls in love and considers leaving May to run away with Ellen. The community becomes convinced that the two are having an affair and rally around May to protect the marriage. Like Myron and Helen Graham, Ellen, the target of the community's most virulent gossip, is a woman without a man to defend her honour. Although Newland attempts to play that role, his efforts are thwarted at every turn.

Eventually, May tells Ellen she is pregnant, causing Ellen, after much social and financial pressure, to return to Europe and her husband.

If the reader, like the townspeople, is voyeur in these three novels, she becomes "auditeur" in Sinclair Ross' 1974 novel *Sawbones Memorial*, as the reader eavesdrops on the gossiping conversations of the citizens of fictional Upward, Saskatchewan, on April 20, 1948. This experimental novel takes place during a farewell celebration for the town's doctor of forty years, Doc Hunter, and consists entirely of direct quotation and interior monologues as the reader comes to hear the "secrets" of the town's lives. We learn that Doc is going to be replaced by Nick Miller, a former resident of Upward, known to most people as Nick the Hunky. Issues of racism, homophobia and sexism are played out in this gossiping novel.

These four novels are all recognized for having captured the voice of their particular communities. A contemporary review of Wood's novel praises its "subtle analysis of village life and its vivid and accurate portrayal of character" (*The Week* quoted in Wood, Intro. xv). It has since been called "some of the best early realistic and critical description of Canadian small-town life" (MacMillan 170) and its setting, fictional Jamestown, has been compared to Margaret Laurence's Manawaka (Wood, Intro. xxii). In her preface to the second edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (to be referred to hereafter as *The Tenant*), Anne Brontë tells her critical reviewers that she "wished to tell the truth" with her 1848 novel. Since then critics have discussed Brontë's "convincing social realism" (Langland 142). First published in 1920, Wharton's novel about the New York of her youth during the 1870s is considered to be impeccable in its detail of the time: "Wharton writes as if she has forgotten nothing. Social forms...are imprinted young and are impossible to erase" (Bell 20). Wharton, with her

"nearly scientific zeal" about "her enumeration and analysis of local customs" has been compared to a sociologist and a social historian (Lindberg 9). Sinclair Ross has been described as a writer whose "voice is a finely articulated reminder of who we have been as a community, morally, and psychologically"; one who writes with "uncanny authenticity" (Moss 2). These novels, with their vivid portrayals of communities, will be the focus for my study of gossip and its social and linguistic practices and effects.

Chapter One of this thesis relates Michel Foucault's theory of panopticism to the workings of gossip, looking specifically at its implications for gender norms:

> He [sic] who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. (202)

The Age of Innocence, *The Untempered Wind* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* are examined to reveal, as a staring point, how gossip can bring the public into the private. As many have noted, "gossip provides a bridge between the public and the private spheres" (Gelles 676). Bergmann states:

> *...the central theme of gossip lies precisely in this tense relationship between a revealed "first" and a concealed "second" world.* Gossip draws an essential part of its energy from the tension between what a person does publicly and what he or she seeks to keep secret as his or her private affair. (53)

Many have extolled this as a virtue, arguing that gossip destroys pretensions by having the private foibles of those in power made public (Spacks 99). Edith Gelles argues that gossip was an important means for young women and their families to gain access to information

about prospective husbands. Certainly gossip can play a useful role in such cases. Indeed, Brontë's Helen Lawrence ignores the gossip about Huntingdon and marries him despite bad reports at her extreme peril. But what has not been considered in any detail to date is the other side of the bridge. The focus on the benefits of gossip making the private public ignores the dangers of gossip making the public private, that is bringing social control, publicly sanctioned norms, to bear on every aspect of the private sphere.

The other side of the talking is the watching. Specular verbs and images abound in novels concerned with gossip. This passage from Sinclair Ross' *Sawbones Memorial* indicates the gossip pressures brought to bear on an "outsider":

> "I don't suppose we need tell you that when you first came a lot of people were watching."
> "Yes, I knew, and for a while I did tread rather warily -- traveller in a foreign land -- but now, even though I sometimes feel they're still watching, I'm daring to stand up and criticize, take sides". (78)

Thus, I argue, gossip is part of the larger system of surveillance which imposes social control on even the most private aspects of our lives. This system is made all the more effective by the phenomenon of internalization. For those who are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of gossip, its power may be internalized; they may go about their lives *as though* they were being watched, *as though* every move they make were going to be the subject of gossip. Women are taught to be women, are prevented from going "off course" in part because of the mechanisms of gossip. The unwritten gender codes are precisely that: they do not need to be written because they are so often discussed and presupposed.

Furthermore, through the panopticism of gossip, identities are created in these novels. Three women, Myron, Helen and Ellen, who have committed "sinful", "lawless" acts,

are transformed, largely through gossip, into deviants. The Fallen Woman is a construction of the disciplinary power of gossip, as the motivations, inner thoughts, and personal histories of these gossip subjects are constituted and re-constituted through the community's talk.

In many scholarly investigations of gossip, it is supposed to be a "lawless" discourse, one without an agenda or rules. It has been called "playful and anarchic in impulse," (Spacks 48) a discourse which "has no explicit formal rules governing who speaks when, the order of business and so on"(Collins 107). As such, it is said "to cheerfully elide evaluative and descriptive language" (Collins 107). Certainly gossip is informal communication; certainly gossipers need not consult a handbook of rules. However, Mikhail Bakhtin has informed us that:

> We speak only in definite speech genres, that is, all our utterances have definite and relatively stable typical *forms of construction of the whole*. Our repertoire of oral (and written) speech genres is rich. We use them confidently and skilfully *in practice*, and it is quite possible for us not even to suspect their existence *in theory*. (78)

In Chapter Two, I examine gossip as a speech genre, looking at its particular theme, style and compositional structure in the four novels' fictional communities which are historically and geographically disparate. At the sentence level, in addition to the generic and literary level, gossip reveals stable forms. The use of presupposition, modality, projection, vocatives, and epithets are constants in a wide variety of literary gossip. Using the tools of linguistic pragmatics, I examine the knowledge-making work of gossip at the sentence level to reveal that this power is encoded within the very wordings of gossip. After discussing this feature and its implications on a general level about all four novels, I proceed to examine *Sawbones Memorial* as a case study, drawing on Judith Butler's theories to discuss the creation of a

town's abjects -- the sexual Other, the deviant wife, the fallen woman, and the racial Other.

Using both a Foucauldian and a linguistic-pragmatics approach to the question of gossip, I hope to illustrate that far from being the discourse of the disenfranchised, gossip most often works to further entrench the disenfranchisement by constructing a deviant identity from a socially prohibited act, or a socially questionable position. While gossip has the possibility of being subversive, and frequently may be, its dominant theme seems to be the enforcement of the status quo.

Chapter One

> Mrs. Rachel Lynde lived just where the Avonlea main road dipped down into a little hollow, fringed with alders and ladies' eardrops and traversed by a brook that had its source away back in the woods of the old Cuthbert place; it was reputed to be an intricate, headlong brook in its earlier course through these woods, with dark secrets of pool and cascade; but by the time it reached Lynde's Hollow it was a quiet, well-conducted little stream, for not even a brook could run past Mrs. Rachel Lynde's door without due regard for decency and decorum; it probably was conscious that Mrs. Rachel was sitting at her window, keeping a sharp eye on everything that passed, from brooks and children up. (L.M Montgomery 1)

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Several critics have argued that gossip is the discourse of the disenfranchised, "an attempt by the weak, and often, though far from exclusively, by women, to use the power of knowledge independently of those who wield more conventional power" (de Sousa 25). Patricia Meyer Spacks believes that gossip "embodies an alternative discourse to that of public life, and a discourse potentially challenging to public assumptions; it provides a language for an alternative culture" (46). Certainly gossip can be individually empowering for the speaking, judging subject. However, there are wider implications of this speech. Deborah Jones points out that female gossip specifically "springs from and *perpetuates* the restrictions of the female role" (243 emphasis added). This follows a tradition of seeing gossip as an effective element of social control. Interestingly, the split between seeing gossip as a voice of resistance and seeing it as a means of enforcing the social order, does not coincide with the split between researchers praising and condemning gossip. For Gluckman, one of gossip's "positive virtues" is its ability to "maintain the unity, morals and values of social groups"

(308). Even in 1994, Aaron Ben-Ze'ev argued that "gossip may also have some positive by-products. It may help to sustain the moral values of a community where people fear becoming a target for gossip" (23). As Margaret Holland points out, such scholars who laud gossip for its inhibiting abilities "express no awareness of the need to examine the moral nature of the reinforced norms prior to granting such approval" (201). Gossip's role in social control must be examined by questioning the norms it is reinforcing and by examining which groups ultimately benefit from the proliferation of gossip within a community.

Many wildly connotative words have been associated with gossip, including "democratic" (de Sousa 25). It has been seen as a "great equalizer", one which works in "reinforcing social norms and holding those in high status to the same standards that govern those not so situated" (Schoeman 80). Gossip is thought to "puncture pretensions" (Spacks 99) by threatening to expose the secrets of those at the top of the social order. Yet I believe that Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic domination is more useful here. Intimidation through language forms "can only be exerted on a person predisposed (in his habitus) to feel it, whereas others will ignore it" (51). Thus of those whose speech differs from the legitimate language, only those within a certain social condition will feel this difference as a source of shame. Gossip works in much the same way. Those objects of gossip who have the economic, political or social means to ignore its dictates will do so.[13] Edith Wharton's *Age of*

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[13]Those who may have great economic power, but who are dependent upon the public's opinion for their political and/or social power are interesting cases. Britain's royal family, for example, is highly sensitive to gossip, both of the mass media and that of the "common" people. Gossip may have an effect on their social and political power, but not, ultimately, on their personal fortune, a contradiction which finds them at once extremely vulnerable to gossip and economically, at least, immune from its effects. Political figures, particularly in the United States, seem to be held to more stringent "community standards" than is the community itself.

Innocence informs us that "money" and "position" can make people forget gossip, and that beauty is "a gift which, in the eyes of New York, justified every success, and excused a certain number of failings" (9). In Sinclair Ross' *Sawbones Memorial*, Doctor Hunter is clearly superior to every member of the town in terms of education, money and social standing, a position which gives him immunity: "Well, Doc's never been the man to worry about what other people say" (85). Gossip most frequently works in concert with other "official" forms of social control, effecting most severely those whose social and economic positions are in some way precarious.

Gossip, as Spacks illustrates in interesting detail, has long been the subject of attack; as de Sousa aptly comments, "Gossip has been the object of much malicious talk" (25). Some believe that this "outlaw" character of gossip negates its possible use as a form of social control. How can it be a weapon of the dominant social order if the very act of gossiping transgresses that order? Bergmann argues that "the gossipers themselves transgress a norm, namely, the proscription of gossip, and ... therefore their behaviour cannot simply be interpreted as an implicit confirmation of norms" (142). What Bergmann fails to address is the nature of the prohibition of gossip. How is such a norm enforced? Certainly not through the legal system: "Since the seventeenth century...the law of defamation has treated slander, defamation conveyed by oral conversation, much more leniently than libel, defamation conveyed by writing or broadcasting. Libel was crime; slander was not" (Post 67). Gossip is not a crime, but rather a transgression of a social norm, a norm which is enforced through --

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Democratic candidate Gary Hart, for example, was disgraced through media gossip (and a definitive photograph) about his marital infidelity, despite the fact that studies indicate that more than half of married American men have extramarital affairs.

gossip. Emma Woodhouse, perceived by many to be one of Jane Austen's consummate gossips, exclaims to Mr. Knightley: "Highbury gossips! -- Tiresome wretches!" (52). In Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, gossips are similarly denounced by gossips as Rose Markham tells her mother about the new tenant: "But you may believe it; for Jane Wilson has seen her. She went with her mother, who, of course, when she heard of a stranger being in the neighbourhood, would be on pins and needles till she had seen her and got all she could out of her" (14). After thus denouncing her source, Jane goes on to repeat every detail of information Mrs. Wilson has gossiped. In the gossiping letter which is the entire narrative, Gilbert denounces the same woman as "the widow of a substantial farmer, a narrow-minded, tattling old gossip, whose character is not worth describing" (20). Such righteous silencing of a gossip, *through* gossip, *after* her information has been re-told, is not unusual. In *The Untempered Wind*, the same motif occurs. After insinuating that Ann White was "sitting up" with Homer Wilson, the man suspected of being My Holder's illegitimate father, Mrs. Deans tells Mrs. White: "Well, I'm glad it's no worse,...only you'd better tell Ann to be careful, for people are so ready with their tongues" (127).

A compelling species of the genus "gossip against gossipers" is *male* gossip deriding gossip as a *female* activity. The gossiping, presumably male[14] narrator of Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" remarks that although the whole town went to Miss Emily's funeral, the men went "through a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument," while the women went "mostly

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[14]I am presuming the narrator is male based on "his" use of the phrase "the ladies said" (52), "the ladies all said" (55) as distinguished from "we saw", "we believed", "we said", when both genders are being included. Such a distinction implies a distancing from the female only grouping and an identification with the mixed gendered group.

out of curiosity to see the inside of her house" (49). In Ross' fictional Upward, Saskatchewan, one man accuses another of being a gossip: "damned old snooper, worse than the women" (90). Another man gossips about why it was difficult for Caroline Gillespie to come to Upward: "It's not easy, you know, coming a war-bride to a town like Upward with that accent and a lot of the women just lying in wait because she'd snapped up Dunc on them" (11). Brontë's narrator/gossip is particularly vicious in his condemnation of female gossips. Speaking to Helen about the women of the town, he says: "their shallow minds can hold no great ideas, and their light heads are carried away by trivialities, that would not move a better furnished skull; -- and their only alternative to such discourse, is to plunge over head and ears into the slough of scandal -- which is their chief delight" (85). Later, Gilbert openly speculates and condemns certain women as gossips, although, like a gossip, he admits to having no proof. Speaking to Lawrence, Gilbert declares:

> ...it is my belief that Eliza Millward and she [Jane Wilson], if not the very originators of the slanderous reports that have been propagated, were designedly the encouragers and chief disseminators of them. She was not desirous to mix up *your* name in the matter, of course, but her delight was, and still is, to blacken your sister's character to the utmost of her power without risking too greatly the exposure of her own malevolence! (417)

Gilbert, like the other gossipers about gossipers, manages to make this slanderous accusation without the slightest amount of irony, thus revealing the censure against gossip for what it is -- relatively mild and ineffective. Although the social order "officially" prohibits gossip, the norm against gossiping is upheld largely through gossip itself, thereby virtually negating gossip's status as a serious social transgression. Thus, contrary to Bergmann's assertion, gossip *is* often "an implicit confirmation of norms," (142) rather than a subversion of the

dominant order.

Thus, gossip, when combined with other factors, such as economic, social and political power, certainly does contribute to imposing the dominant social order upon the population. The way in which this is accomplished involves subject/object power relations. Yes, the gossiper, who may be a disenfranchised individual, gains a certain power from being a subject commanding the narrative of another, for "gossip gets its power by the illusion of mastery gained through taking imaginative possession of another's experience" (Spacks 22). Far from celebrating this agency, Margaret Holland compares the effect of gossip on the object to the criminal activities of a peeping tom:

> The following characteristics are shared by peeping and gossiping: they take as their objects persons rather than things, they occur behind the subject's back, they are not guided by concern for the subject, they would cease if the subject entered, they focus on personal features of the subject, and they are pleasurable for the agent. In both peeping and gossiping the person who is the subject of the activity is used to entertain or amuse the agent(s), and is not in a position to decline such use. (205)

Furthermore, the celebration of the gossiper as speaking agent ignores the fact that the gossiper is always a potential object for another's gossip. This is particularly true for the disenfranchised who most acutely feel the pressures attendant on being the object of the community's talk. It is this very potential which gives gossip its power as an enforcer of social norms.

More insidious than the injunction against women's gossip are the dictates imploring women not to become a subject of gossip. Such a feat involves, of course, not just an absence of deviation, but the absence of even the *appearance* of deviation. In a study about gossip in the Middle Ages, Sylvia Schein reports:

> ...they [women] were constantly instructed by courtesy books for women not to gossip, not to listen to gossip and not to *provoke* gossip and thus become a *subject* of gossip. The French troubadour Garin lo Brun (twelfth century) argued in his courtesy book for women that a lady should never be in an intimate situation with a man unless he is a relative, or she has known him for a long time. Otherwise people will gossip about her. (149-50 emphasis added)

This tradition continues in communities in which gossip continues[15] and raises disturbing issues about the relationship between privacy and gossip.

Gossip exists on the boundary between public and private. While the topics of gossip need not always probe into the "private" domain,[16] gossip "involves bothering with parts of another person's life that are characteristically none of our business" (Schoeman 72). In the past, the emphasis on gossip's liminal position has been on its ability to make the private public, however, as is inherently the nature of a boundary, the split works the other way. Gossip may extend the public realm, with all its values, norms and assumptions, into the most private aspects of our lives. In 1826, Thomas Starkie, wrote a treatise on American defamation law which alludes to this aspect of social control:

> The dread of public censure and disgrace is not only the most effectual, and therefore the most important, but in numberless instances the only security which society possesses for the preservation of decency and the performance of the private duties of life. (as quoted in Post 65)

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[15]In fact, as a teenager in the 1980's in small town(ship) Ontario, I was frequently warned by my mother about the irreplaceable value of having a "good reputation" and she admonished me to keep my reputation in tact.

[16]In this I differ from several researchers, in particular Bergmann who considers privacy to be a "constitutive feature" of gossip: "the central theme of gossip lies precisely in this tense relationship between a revealed 'first' and a concealed 'second' world" (53). While this tension is *often* an important component of gossip, it need not be. One need only think of gossiping about someone's new car, or house, or number of children etc., all things which are clearly not "private" in the sense of being "concealed".

The dread of being an object of gossip, the dread of becoming a character in another's narrative of deviance, causes the economially and socially vulnerable to conform to social norms in even the most private of circumstances.

Gossip, as Holland's comparison to peeping toms indicates, is as much about being silent as it is about speaking. Gossip is a system of surveillance, of observation, made powerful by its not always used, but always unpredictable ability to speak about what it sees. Studying Michel Foucault's analysis of power/knowledge, particularly his work about panopticism, illuminates the machinations of gossip as a form of social control. Power/knowledge is Foucault's term for the positive effects of power:

> We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained from him belong to this production. (195)

The Panopticon, a prison designed by Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), becomes, in Foucault's work, a powerful trope for the creation and use of knowledge as power with the advent of the "disciplines," institutionalized areas of power/knowledge, such as history, criminology, sociology, wherein knowledge of and about humanity is created. Physically, the Panopticon has

> at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the pericpheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. (200)

Functioning in such a system, the persons in the cells are constantly visible, constantly the (possible) objects of observation. For it is not even necessary that a person of authority be in the control tower, indeed, it is not necessary for anyone at all to be there; because the contained individuals can never know for certain whether or not they are being watched, they must always assume that they are. Private actions are impossible as the possibility of "public" intrusion, in the form of passive observation, is omnipresent. The Panopticon's most insidious effect then is "to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (201). Power does not have to be imposed from without, as the contained individuals assume the responsibility of their own imprisonment, and power "is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who 'do not have it'; it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them" (27).

As previously discussed, it is the people without access to economic or social power who are most vulnerable to the power of gossip. These people can be seen as "prisoners" of their own visibility. Without recourse to fight the talk, or the possibility of talk, which turns them into deviants, or at the very least, suspect individuals, these weaker members may absorb the power structure and monitor their own actions as though they were *always* being watched. Thus the social norms and values, which are often most confining and damaging to these disenfranchised individuals (women, for example) are internalized by them. They, as prisoners in the panopticon of gossip, become their own police.

Foucault argues that one of the most important functions of the disciplines is the creation of various identities in the place of individual autonomous acts. Through the power/knowledge workings of psychology, sociology, and criminology, for example,

"delinquent" becomes an identity. Whereas once a person who committed the act of stealing was punished for that specific act, with the rise of disciplines and the age of surveillance, the commitor of the act, not the act itself, becomes the subject of biographical investigation whereby "the observation of the delinquent 'should go back not only to the circumstances, but also to the causes of his crime; they must be sought in the story of his life, from the triple point of view of psychology, social position and upbringing, in order to discover the dangerous proclivities of the first, the harmful predispositions of the second and the bad antecedents of the third" (Foucault 252, quoting C. Lucas). Gossip works in much the same manner, as an observed and re-told "misdeed" by another is often the genesis for the creation of an entire identity, the fallen woman, the outcast, the mysterious person.

With disciplinary power comes the creation and imposition of the Norm, the standard. The system of articulation between the individual and the masses becomes reversed as the greatest individuality is reserved, not for royalty, but for the criminal, the madman, or in the case of Jamestown, Old New York and Linden-Car, the fallen woman.

> In a sense, the power of normalization imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another. (Foucault 184)

Foucault is speaking here of The Normal as it was established through the education and health systems, through institutionalized standards. This insight can be applied to the non-institutionalized but highly mechanized system of gossip. In a wide variety of literary works, characters fear being different, being individualised through talk. Gossip can be used to construct identities of deviance for serious social and legal transgressions, operating as a

pseudo-judicial system. Much more subtle norms may also be enforced through gossip, particularly gender codes, which remain unwritten, but which do not remain unspoken. Gossip's power here is attenuated; people, particularly those without means to recourse, fear being singled out through talk, and so conform to standard gender behaviours, striving for homogeneity with their society. As Wharton's Mrs. Mingott notes, "Not one of them wants to be different; they're as scared of it as the smallpox"(98).

Certain forms of gossip then can be seen to work in the spirit of Foucault's disciplines. In the modern age, the human body, Foucault argues, becomes the site of the production of power/knowledge. The disciplines "partitioned an area that the laws had left empty; they defined and repressed a mass of behaviour that the relative indifference of the great systems of punishment had allowed to escape" (178). Obviously, gossip is not concomitant with disciplinary power/knowledge, for it existed long before disciplinary society was created in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is the machinations of the disciplines, particularly on three key points -- the system of continual surveillance, whereby the act of passive observation is charged with power through its ability to cause talk, the internalization of the power of surveillance, thereby ushering the public gaze into every living moment, and the creation of identities (delinquents) out of illegal acts, -- which illuminate the machinations of gossip. The analysis of three novels about the nineteenth century, one Canadian, one British and one American, dealing with lower class society, the landed gentry and the economic "aristocracy" respectively, will reveal how Foucault's theory of panopticism is useful in investigating the workings of gossip.

ii

Gossip is something more, perhaps, than a vulgar
propensity -- there is art in it, as in everything else. (Wood 96)

Joanna Wood's novel provides an intricate and compelling example of the panopticism of gossip. Although Myron is referred to several times as "this poor village outcast" (7), in many ways, while she is physically and socially shunned, she is far from an outcast. Myron becomes the centre of the town's attention for "the whole village forgot its private quarrels to point the finger at its common victim" (16). As the town constructs Myron as a fallen woman and speculates endlessly about the identity of her lover, she is reduced to Object, a prisoner in the panopticon. As such, she is repeatedly seen through the gaze of other characters. Each day, Myron dreads the "ordeal of walking up the path, under these scathing eyes" of the Jamestown women (21). Henry Deans watches Myron "as closely as he could...like a malevolent lizard lying in wait for flies" (120). Homer fantasizes about Myron, reconstructing her physicality in his own terms: "dark eyes and...pale, sorrowful lips, and a chin which told of strength to endure, yet pleaded most eloquently against a test; and then came patient shoulders and the bosom of a mother" (135). Myron is a text to be deciphered: she "turned to her questioners an indecipherable page -- writ large with characters of shame and sorrow, but telling naught else" (17). As one caught in the panopticon, her "visibility assures the hold of the power that is being exercised over" Myron (Foucault 187). As the fallen woman, Myron's worth in the social economy is predicated upon her presence; she must always be visible. Ironically, the proof of her fallenness, her

child, must be kept absent according to the dictates of this gossiping community. Mrs. Holder, appropriately, "never hung a garment of the child's outside" in the realm of the visible (76) and she refuses to walk down the street "with My flaunting the family shame" (80).

As Myron's refusal to name the father continues to frustrate the town, the boundary between her private and public selves becomes increasingly tenuous. In an image encapsulating this erasure, the fence around Myron's cottage is slowly being destroyed: "that fence in which the gaps grew greater and greater as old Mrs. Holder used the pickets for kindling-wood" (138). The separation between the inside and the outside world is ultimately completely negated as the public comes to peep in her windows. As the object of the town's most energetic and sustained gossip, Myron is stripped of even a theoretical right to privacy. Mrs. Deans gossips to Mrs. Wilson, sharing information obtained by *spying* with no sense of shame:

> Why, Mrs. Warner told me that the other Sunday, when she went to Holder's well for a pail of water, that the house being very quiet, she went in and looked in the windows, knowing old Mrs. Holder was out to Disney's for milk. She couldn't see nothing in the front room nor the kitchen, but in the bedroom there she seen Myron Holder with the boy. The boy was asleep, and she was kneeling by the bed, talking away to the sleeping child! -'s good's praying to it, Mrs. Warner said. (41)

The act of spying needs only be justified by the fact that the only possible object was Myron; her grandmother was not so inconvenienced. The fact that this was indeed a calculated surveillance mission is not covered up as Mrs. Warner's gaze is followed through the various rooms of the cottage, searching for its object. Myron comes to live "in a veritable glass house, pierced by day and night by relentless eyes" (214) as "the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen...maintains the disciplined individual in his [her] subjection"

(Foucault 187).

Within the family unit, the panopticon of gossip continues to function. According to Ferdinand Schoeman, "there is ample historical evidence that families have functioned and still do function largely as social control mechanisms rather than as refuges from social control" (75). Such a role is clearly illustrated in Wood's novel, for Mrs. Wilson comes to believe in, and even take part in, the town's construction of her own son as the father of Myron's baby. When Homer publicly gives Myron a ride in his carriage, thereby flinging "down the gauntlet to the gossips," (180) he notices "clustered heads in the window of the Warner house [which] showed how their return had been waited for; Homer discerned the white muslin rose in his mother's black bonnet" (180). Mrs. Wilson later comes to circulate private information about her son within the public gossip economy in a way which condemns him to this false identity:

> Afterwards, when Mrs. Wilson thought over all the days and doings of her son, she thought of this [that Myron refuses to marry Homer] also, and told the conversation to her neighbours, and they all then looked upon Myron Holder as one who, having gotten a man's soul, would not let him assoil himself by marrying her. (224)

Myron has been created as an Agent through the *content* of the talk, even as she is reduced to Object through the *act* of talk, while Homer, whose privacy is similarly forsaken, is created as a helpless accomplice caught by a temptress. Both individuals are caught in the visual trap of panopticism. Even acts performed in public become subject to the machinations of the panopticon as they are reinterpreted through gossip. At My's funeral, Myron twice answers the public demand of Mrs. Wilson, "Is that child my grandson?", saying, "*He is not*!...He belongs to none of you; he is mine -- my own baby -- my own child -- My -- My!" (253). In

this plea for autonomy, for separation from the communal world of public ownership of all her actions, Myron asserts her claim on her child. This public disavowal of the town's control is transformed as "for long after, Jamestown women told how Myron Holder perjured herself with her hand on her dead child's coffin" (255). The specular power of the gossipers knows no bounds as they definitively locate her motivations and beliefs. Like Foucault's prisoner who becomes subject to psychological, sociological and criminological analysis, Myron's inner being, as well as her outer actions, are subject to surveillance as her identity as the fallen woman is created.

Interestingly, the text locates the genesis of Myron's subjection to panopticism in her commission of what should have been a public act in private. The narrator tells us:

> When under no more sacred canopy than the topaz of a summer sky -- with no other bridal hymn than the choral of the wind among the tress -- in obedience to no law but the voice of nature -- and the pleading of loved lips -- with no other security than the *unwitnessed* oath of a man -- a woman gives herself utterly, then she is doubtless lost. (7 emphasis added)

Myron believes herself to be married, in spite of the privacy in which the union took place. For her failure to conform to norms about the public sanctioning of private acts, Myron is subjected to the surveillance of gossip. Myron's construction as a deviant begins when she refuses to respect the public control over her sexuality, and takes private control over her own "honour," something which is "a commodity that had to be protected, either by provisions in the Criminal Code or by a 'high standard of morality', in order to be exchanged as part of a socially sanctioned and legally recognized marriage contract" (Wood, Intro. xii).

By making the machinations of surveillance and gossip visible, Wood's novel exposes the fallen woman as a social construct. "Idle" talk is the creator and perpetrator of this social

identity which would not otherwise exist. Myron's sin is not sexual, but rather legal and social. Female sexuality which is not legally contained and thereby publicly sanctioned is the real issue. In *Courtship, Love and Marriage in 19th Century English Canada*, historian Peter Ward discusses the incidence of pre-marital sex in Myron's time:

> The extent of pre-marital pregnancy and illegitimacy in 19th century English Canada is hard to know. The only estimates of the former we have suggest that a significant portion of women were pregnant when they married -- the known range varied from one in twelve to one in five...Illegitimacy was comparatively uncommon. Best estimates suggest that illegitimate births probably ranged between 2 and 4% of all births in English Canada throughout the century. (33)

Wood plays with this reality in her novel, a reality which was likely a very personal one for many of her contemporary readers. Mrs. Holder, a relative newcomer to Jamestown, "had managed to glean pretty accurate data about the Jamestown people, and she knew that Mrs. Weaver's mother had 'tript in her time'" (21). Such a sin was a topic of gossip, but did not warrant gossip creating a complete identity for this woman. Later in the novel, the narrator tells us that "such faults as hers [Myron's] were not uncommon there" and goes on to reveal what her true fault was:

> Besides, there had always been some "goings on" and some "talk" indicative of the affair. In Myron Holder's case, the Jamestown people had been caught napping. In such cases a marriage and reinstatement into public favor was the usual sequel, arrived at after much exhilarating and spicy gossip, much enjoyable speculation, much mediation upon the part of the matrons, and much congratulation that all had ended so well. (93)

This passage indicates not only that Myron's sexual sin is clearly subordinate to her legal one, but also the role played by the panopticon of gossip in the deconstruction of this act as sin in the case of a quick marriage or the construction of a deviant identity if the woman's sexual act remains outside publicly sanctioned boundaries.

Myron's life is retraced by the villagers and is reconstructed as the life of a deviant. Mrs. Weaver states it baldly, finding fault with Myron's very existence: "It did seem as if bad was born in some people" (20). She comes to embody Vice and the narrator tells us, "would scarce have been responsible for any deed, however evil" (21). Mrs. Deans declares her to be "bad clean through", a fact which is "easy enough seen" in the fuss she makes over her son (41). Although Myron was born in Jamestown, through her fallen woman identity, she is also constructed as an outsider, someone who has "inherited" an English accent from her foreign mother (56). It is also implied that Myron inherited her "bad blood" from her mother: "Like mother, like child" Mrs. Deans pronounces (68), reconstructing, not only Myron's past, but her family's as well. Myron, as a figure who has compounded a deviant act (premarital sex) with another (refusal to marry/name the father) is a figure who must be controlled. The identity of fallen woman, a deviant identity encompassing her very essence, prevents her acts from being political or principled.

Myron will not marry Homer or anyone else because she considers herself to be already married. As such, for most of the novel, she resists gossip's identity through her silence. When the reader is first introduced to Myron, the narrator reports that "no one spoke to her, and she addressed no one" (6). As the gossip about her intensifies, Myron is referred to as "mute", and "deaf" (17). This silent woman has not internalized gossip's construction of her as fallen woman. After Homer begs her to marry him, Myron refuses, asking,

> 'Would you ask Sue Weaver to marry you, or Jenny Church, or Eliza Disney?'
> 'Why Myron, they're married already,' said he, in a maze.
> 'So am I,' said Myron....I believed we were married as sacredly as though Mr. Prew had married us. Believing that, I gave myself to him. (188-9)

Myron constructs herself as an abandoned wife rather than a fallen woman, although she does take responsibility for her "sin" (67). In the end, the narrative does not permit Myron to maintain a self-identity separate from the one constructed for her. Upon leaving Jamestown, she, a new Christian, vows to perpetuate the gossip about herself, to take up the town's gossiping construction wherever she goes and "say to each man and woman with whom [she] has more than the most brief association, 'Lo, I am one who has sinned; I have been a mother but not a wife' " (292). The text circles around itself as Myron finally comes to internalize the identity created for her by the gossiping community in the opening pages of the novel: "She was Myron Holder -- a mother, but not a wife" (6). Once Myron becomes the principle of her own subjugation, all that remains is for her to marry the father of her child in a state and religiously sanctioned public ceremony and then to die. Gossip never touches the most economically and socially secure character, Dr. Willis, for his identity as a "fallen man" (even thinking about the possibility of such an identity seems ridiculous), as the father of My, remains unknown.

iii

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall has been said to "rewrite the story of the Fallen Woman as a story of female excellence" (Langland 119). This novel, like Wood's, highlights the role gossip plays in the "writing" of identity, as Helen Graham/Huntingdon is successively constructed as a mysterious stranger, an illicit lover, a runaway wife and an heiress through

gossip. The entire text is, based on the definition outlined earlier, itself a piece of gossip,[17] a fact not often discussed in criticism about the work. Indeed, Jan B. Gordon holds that "Gilbert Markham is relatively immune from gossip" (727), either in believing it or in spreading it. However, while Markham, as a first-born son with economic and social security, is almost completely immune from being subjected to the constraints of gossip's normalizing gaze,[18] he certainly contributes to the surveillance of others, particularly, of course, of Helen. In writing his letter to Halford, who we later discover is his brother-in-law, Markham takes control, as a gossip, of the narratives of others. Sitting with Helen, before he knows about her marriage, he longs for "the permission to regard her thenceforth as my own, and the right and the power to defend her from the calumnies of malicious tongues" (102).[19] He takes this power, without Helen's permission, as he writes his letter, including over two hundred pages of her journal which she entrusted to him saying, "don't breathe a word of what it tells you to any living being -- I trust your honour" (129).

Helen's construction as a mysterious stranger begins almost immediately after she arrives at Wildfell Hall. This estate becomes her panoptic cell as her every move, or lack

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[17]Although Markham is telling the story of his wife, I do not believe this qualifies as a narrative heritage for presumably, she is capable, given the desire to speak and the opportunity to be heard, of telling her own story to Markham's narratee.

[18]Markham does express passing concern about being "the talk of the parish"(77) with regard to his rejection of Eliza Millward, although apart from planning to "let her down easy"(77), this fear does not seem to impinge upon his actions.

[19]This statement is startlingly similar to Homer's plea to Myron that she become his wife: "Marry me...and let me hear man or woman say one word against it!....I will compel them to respect you" (Wood 190). Clearly, both of these men's words carry more weight in the gossip economy than those of their female subordinates.

thereof, is noted and speculated about. We learn about her existence through "an important piece of news" that Rose tells her family, having heard it from Eliza Millward -- a single lady is living in Wildfell Hall. Rose exclaims, "But isn't it *strange* mamma?", to which Mrs. Markham replies, "*Strange!* I can hardly believe it" (14 emphasis added). All that is known and unknown about this stranger is then related:

> She is called Mrs. Graham, and she is in mourning -- not widow's weeds, but slightish mourning -- and she is quite young, they say -- not above five or six and twenty, -- but *so* reserved! They tried all they could to find out who she was, and where she came from, and all about her, but neither Mrs. Wilson with her pertinacious and impertinent home thrusts, nor Miss Wilson, with her skilful manoeuvring, could manage to elicit a single satisfactory answer, or even a casual remark, or chance expression calculated to allay their curiosity, or throw the faintest ray of light upon her history, circumstances, or connections. Moreover, she was barely civil to them, and evidently better pleased to say "goodbye," than "how do you do." (14)

This extensive passage is illuminating on several fronts, not the least of which is the mocking of other gossips through gossip; even as Rose is enjoying and passing on Jane and Mrs. Wilson's information, she is ridiculing them. We see the beginning of the community's construction of Helen as conclusions are drawn based on her dress (she is in "slightish mourning"), her appearance (her age is estimated) and a negative judgement is imposed upon her manners. Helen's unwillingness to provide the information perceived to be the community's right -- where she comes from, who she is (a loaded question certainly) and who her family is -- is interpreted as "uncivil". She is not cooperating within the dictates of society and thus her identity as an outsider must be formed. Rose goes on to note that Helen did not make "her appearance at church on Sunday," (14) a statement which presupposes such a performance. Her appearance is an act which exists, *proforma*, whether or not Helen

attends church. Thus, her appearance at church is marked by her nonappearance. Near the conclusion of this initial gossip session about the newcomer, Mrs. Markham makes an important leap in the panoptic surveillance of Helen, stating, "how lonely she must feel!" (14). Although this statement is modalized[20], it nonetheless indicates the community's assumption of Helen's inner thoughts and motivations. What they can see (her physical appearance), what they can not see (her absence at church) and what cannot be seen (her inner being) are all constructed through gossip.

Thus Helen becomes the mysterious stranger, referred to by the chief narrator/gossip as "the fair recluse," (15) "the strange lady," (17) "the fair unknown" (16). As such, she is figured as the agent of her own surveillance. Markham's brother Fergus complains, "You all had a peep at this wonderful stranger" (59). While he is being somewhat facetious, Fergus's comment encapsulates much of this dynamic. Because Helen is a wonderful stranger, she is somehow provoking this peeping. But the fact that she is rendered wonderful through the act of peeping is not fully erased in this comment. The descriptor "wonderful" contains traces of the peeping agent. In whom does she induce wonder? What makes Helen wonderful is in fact the act of surveillance; she is not inherently so. When Helen does make her appearance at church, "all who were not attending to their prayer-books, were attending to the strange lady" (17) and this person is reduced to "the object of general attraction" (18). Markham later recalls this event, again refiguring Helen as the agent of her own surveillance: "she suddenly assumed again that proud, chilly look that had so unspeakably *roused* my corruption at church" (25 emphasis added). Like Myron Holder, Helen is the subject of continual

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[20]Presupposition and modality are more fully explained in Chapter Two.

surveillance, including spying: Markham goes to "see what changes had been wrought in it [the mansion] by its new inhabitant. I did not like to go quite to the front and stare in at the gate; but I paused beside the garden wall, and looked..." (23). For Helen, as for Myron, as for Foucault's panoptic prisoner, "Visibility is a trap" (Foucault 200). In her diary, Helen realizes that her visibility is continual, that invisibility is not an option:

> Alas! my kind neighbours will not let me alone. By some means they have ferreted me out....their curiosity annoys and alarms me: if I gratify it, it may lead to the ruin of my son, and if I am too mysterious, it will only excite their suspicions, invite conjecture, and rouse them to greater exertions - and perhaps be the means of spreading my fame from parish to parish, till it reaches the ears of someone who will carry it to the lord of Grassdale Manor. (395)

Helen is caught in the panoptic prison, internalizing the normalizing gaze of the gossipers, trying to minimize her construction as a deviant.

Helen's own efforts (she does go to church and returns some social calls) are ineffective. Building on the community's decision that Mrs. Graham is "barely civil", she is transformed into a deviant woman, first as an ineffective housekeeper, then as an unfit mother and finally as a sexually deviant woman. After paying a visit to the mysterious stranger, Mrs. Markham reports that she "betrayed a lamentable ignorance on certain points, and had not even the sense to be ashamed of it" (15). Helen-the-degenerate-housekeeper is ignorant "on household matters, and all the little niceties of cookery, and such things, that every lady ought to be familiar with" gossips Mrs. Markham (15). The (barely) coded message is that this woman is *not* a lady. Although she does not appreciate Mr. Millward's input into her own raising of her sons ("I wish to goodness he had a son himself! He wouldn't be so ready with his advice to other people then" (19)), Mrs. Markham gossips to

Mr. Millward about Mrs. Graham's unorthodox child rearing practices, begging him to interfere. Helen's refusal to allow her son to drink alcohol or attend school is labelled "criminal" (42) by the vicar. Not only is she disrupting gender norms in her own person with bad housekeeping, she is endangering little Arthur's ability to follow gender norms, threatening to "make a mere Miss Nancy" (33) of her son. In escalating importance of a woman's proper duties then, Helen is next figured as sexually improper; through gossip she becomes the fallen woman. Gordon argues that "the first ten chapters of the novel are really nothing more than the attempt of gossip to come to terms with meaning" (722). Rather, I believe, this important beginning is gossip's successful attempt to create meaning, to create successive identities for Helen.

Jane Wilson reports that "the lady's character is considered scarcely respectable" (80), encoding the community's involvement in Helen's construction as deviant. Rumours circulate about the resemblance between Lawrence and little Arthur as Helen and Lawrence are constructed as lovers. Just as Myron Holder's entire past is verbally reconstructed in light of her deviance, so is Helen subjected to a complete revision. Mrs. Markham maintains, as Helen is being established as a fallen woman, that she "always thought there was something odd about her" (89). And again, the agency for this surveillance and reconstruction is placed firmly on Helen's always visible shoulders: "You see what it is for women to affect to be different to other people" (89). Whether or not there is truth to these rumours, Helen deserves such an identity for the crime of being different. When Helen is contemplating leaving her husband, a choice which prefigures her construction as both the mysterious stranger and the illicit lover, she is also threatened with gossip. Hargrave tires to entice

Helen into leaving with him, holding out as a final threat the fact that Grimsby has witnessed their intimate talk:

> He will report what he has seen to Huntingdon and all the rest, with such embellishments as he thinks proper...He will give such a version of this story as will leave no doubt at all, about your character, in the minds of those who hear it. Your fair fame is gone; and nothing that I or you can say can ever retrieve it. (357)

Since she will be gossiped about as an adulterous wife, she might as well become one. Gordon argues that this scene, indicating as it does that "characters can effect, even initiate, gossip by manipulating proxemics," is evidence for his position that "gossip in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* threatens cultural values" (724). However, far from threatening cultural values, Helen's threatened construction as Hargrave's lover, which prefigures her identity as Lawrence's lover, *enforces* cultural values. Langland notes that Helen, who is "a better hermeneutician than Hargrave, knows that interpretations can be changed," (125) quoting the subsequent scene in which Helen demands that Hargrave tell the men that she did not 'yield to his solicitations'. Yet Helen's interpretation of events cannot be allowed to stand, as gossip constructs her as a compromised woman just as Hargrave predicted. For deeply embedded in this culture's values is the principle that a woman cannot be allowed to exist without a man.[21] If she is not a virgin or a widow, defined by the absence of a man, she must either be a wife or a lover defined by a man's presence. The fact that this is a vital cultural value is made clear when the community continues to censure Helen's decision to leave Huntingdon even

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[21]In this instance, gossip mirrors the tenants put forth by the law. N. M. Jacobs states that "the laws of the Victorian age classified married women or underage unmarried women such as Helen Huntingdon...as "femmes couvertes"; their legal identities were "covered" by and subsumed into that of the husband or father" (207).

after Markham has entered the "facts" of her case in the court of public opinion. The formidable Reverend Millward declares, again through gossip (presented in free indirect discourse through Markham's narration), that Helen "had done wrong to leave her husband; it was a violation of her sacred duties as a wife, and a tempting of Providence by laying herself open to temptation; and nothing short of bodily ill-usage (and that of no trifling nature) could excuse such a step -- nor even that, for in such a case she ought to appeal to the laws for protection" (459).

Brontë's novel does discuss a possible benefit to the surveillance system of gossip -- that of providing information about prospective marriage partners. Historian Edith Gelles argues, using a specific case example, that gossip may function "as an informal, though compelling, influence" on courtship (688). By gossiping about Jane Wilson in a very direct manner to Lawrence, who is thought to be interested in her, Markham warns Lawrence about her character: "she is selfish, cold-hearted, ambitious, artful, shallow-minded" and furthermore, "Miss Wilson hates your sister" (417). While Lawrence refuses to countenance this gossip, saying he cannot believe it, Markham informs us that "his visit to the Wilsons was not repeated," and surmises that he "eagerly though covertly sought information respecting the fair lady from other quarters, secretly compared my character of her with what he had himself observed and what he heard from others" (418) and so decides not to marry Jane. Such a successful[22] use of gossip in choosing a wife is in direct contrast to Helen's disastrous experience.

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[22]Of course, we have only Markham's opinion of Jane and so cannot be certain that Jane would not have made Lawrence happy. However, within the constraints of a first person narration, Markham's assertions about Jane may be considered biassed, yet credible.

Before their engagement, Helen is repeatedly made aware, through gossip, of Huntingdon's many flaws. Three women-- her aunt, her friend Millicent, and her maid Rachel-- each attempt to warn Helen. However, in contrast to the male to male gossip of Markham and Lawrence, this information is coded. Immediately after meeting Huntingdon, Helen's aunt tells her,

> 'I have heard your uncle speak of young Mr. Huntingdon. I've heard him say, "He's a fine lad, that young Huntingdon, but a bit wildish I fancy." So I'd have you beware.'
> 'What does "a bit wildish" mean?' I enquired. (135)

Helen indicates her inability to comprehend this code; she is too naive to understand gossip's warning. Later, Helen hears about Huntingdon's "intrigue with a married lady" (149), but replies "I know nothing positive respecting his character. I only know that I have heard nothing definitive against it," (149) mirroring Markham's initial reaction to negative gossip about Helen's character. Significantly, Helen's inability to believe gossip's truth about Huntingdon has far greater negative and irreparable consequences than does Markham's inability to discount gossip's false account of Helen. Millicent's attempt to warn Helen is based on her own personal reaction to Huntingdon: "there's something so bold -- and reckless about him -- so, I don't know how -- but I always feel a wish to get out of his way" (181). This fear of Huntingdon is ironic in that Millicent marries a man who has also been the subject of negative gossip. Rachel's warning to Helen is highly coded, as she ends her conversation with the platitude, "I do believe a young lady can't be too careful who she marries" (200). Thus Helen's access to information about Huntingdon through gossip comes from her only female relative, her only female friend and her own maid. However, Helen's

socialization as self-sacrificing and naive, as well as her own belief in her power to save Huntingdon, cause her to ignore this often coded information. The role of extreme passivity to which she has been trained is outlined by her aunt who tells Helen, "It is not, indeed, to be supposed that you would *wish* to marry *any* one, till you were asked: a girl's affections should never be won unsought" (131).

Once Helen becomes an heiress, inheriting her uncle's estate, she has the economic and social power (she is now properly a widow) to step out of the panopticon of gossip. While she remains the object of talk, she need not internalize its power and follow its dictates. Markham learns about Helen's new position through the gossip of his fellow passengers in a public coach as he rides to visit her:

> 'She's a widow, but quite young yet, and uncommon handsome -- a fortune of her own, besides, and only one child -- and she's nursing a fine estate for him in -- There'll be lots to speak for her! -- 'fraid there's no chance for us... -- ha, ha, ha! No offence, sir, I hope?'...'Ahem! -- I should think she'll marry none but a nobleman, myself. (473)

This passage echoes that of our introduction to Helen the mysterious stranger. Her position and age are discussed. Yet now that she is wealthy, she is also figured as attractive. Helen does not, of course, marry a nobleman; she does not need to, she may marry any man she wishes. Although, significantly, this microcosm of the gossiping community once again does not consider the possibility that she remain without a man. Maria Frawley argues that in *The Tenant* "Brontë works...with the idea that a woman can unwittingly compromise her attempt to establish autonomy by absorbing and accommodating the identity that others believe her to have" (118). Caught within the panopticism of gossip, a series of identities are created for Helen, none of which she is fully capable of rejecting.

iv

Like Helen, Ellen Olenska in Edith Wharton's *Age of Innocence* cannot be allowed to exist as a socially and economically independent woman. The novel chronicles gossip's creation of an identity for the countess which is male-defined. As the novel opens, Ellen has committed an *act*; she has left her husband. Through a "whole set of assessing, diagnostic, prognostic, normative judgements" (Foucault 19) carried out largely through gossip, this act is transmuted into an *identity* -- Ellen is a sexually deviant woman who must therefore be banished. We witness her transformation from an independent woman, a potential divorcee, to an adulterous lover in the eyes of the community. In Foucauldian terms, Ellen is transformed from a person who commits an illegal act to a delinquent. Delinquency is "an open illegality, irreducible at a certain level and secretly useful, at once refractory and docile; it isolates, outlines, brings out a form of illegality that seems to sum up symbolically all the others, but which makes it possible to leave in the shade those that one wishes to -- or must -- tolerate" (277). The society of Old New York acts in many ways like a juridical system; Ellen is surveyed, tried and sent to prison in the form of a return to Europe. As such, like the juridical system, this society does not succeed in eliminating offenses, but does succeed extremely well "in producing delinquency, a specific type, a politically or economically less dangerous -- and, on occasion, usable -- form of illegality" (277). Ellen's story is the story of the production of a delinquent, her act and her desire to remain independent being extremely politically and economically dangerous. *The Age of Innocence* is not "the story of how society deals with" Ellen (Werhoven 78), but rather how it creates her.

Elizabeth Ammons argues that "the free expression of female sexuality represents a profound threat to patriarchal power and is assiduously guarded against" (143). In its startling illegality, Ellen's existence as a "sophisticated, sexually exciting woman" (Ammons 143) is indeed a threat. However, this threat is not guarded against, but rather developed, given a history and an explanation so that it may be categorized, and ultimately used. For, "the prison, and no doubt punishment in general, is not intended to eliminate offences, but rather to distinguish them, to distribute them, to use them" (Foucault 272). As an "illegal" independent woman, Ellen is dangerous; as a categorized adulterous wife, she is useful. All closed societies, societies of privilege, must have "outsiders" against which they may define themselves. The existence of delinquents, such as Ellen, is essential to the very existence of this community.

Concurrent with her return to New York, the society, through gossip, establishes the "fact" that although her husband was "an awful brute," Ellen's running away must not be condoned, because she had an affair with the count's secretary. At her first appearance at the opera, "the August tribunal before which...her case was being tried," (12) the men gossip about this woman's threatening act:

> 'After all,...just *what* happened?'
> 'Well -- she left him; nobody attempts to deny that.'
> 'He's an awful brute, isn't he?' continued the young enquirer, a candid Thorley, who was evidently preparing to enter the lists as the lady's champion.
> 'The very worst; I knew him at Nice,' said Lawrence Lefferts with authority. 'A half-paralysed white sneering fellow -- rather handsome head, but eyes with a lot of lashes. Well, I'll tell you the sort: when he wasn't with women he was collecting china. Paying any price for both, I understand.'
> There was a general laugh, and the young champion said: 'Well, then?'
> 'Well, then she bolted with his secretary.'
> 'Oh, I see.' The champion's face fell. (11)

This opening salvo of gossip is an important one as it establishes several principles to be followed throughout the text and introduces the power of gossip in this community. Thorley, "the young champion" is brought into the fold; after briefly holding opinions different from those of the community, he is "taught" to think better. This is, in many respects, a *mis-en-abyme* for the greater narrative event of Newland's reaction to Ellen. He is at first her ardent champion, refusing to believe that Ellen has anything to be ashamed of. He tells his mother, sister and Mr. Sillterton Jackson, "she had the bad luck to make a wretched marriage; but I don't see that that's a reason for hiding her head as if she were the culprit" (26). Later, in a session of male-only gossip, Mr. Jackson informs Newland that he is mistaken: "You say the secretary merely helped her to get away...Well, he was still helping her a year later, then; for somebody met 'em living at Lausanne together" (27). Newland, while crediting this unsubstantiated report, does not fully believe Ellen has transgressed until months later, when he is convinced she is an adulterer because she does not respond to his highly coded question, based largely on the tenor of the community's gossip about her. He explains that "our legislation favours divorce -- our social customs don't....not if the woman, however injured, however irreproachable, has appearances in the least degree against her, has exposed herself by any unconventional actions to -- to offensive insinuations" (71). Here again is the language of panopticism -- "appearances", "exposed", as well as the assumed agency of the object of surveillance -- "if the woman...has exposed herself". The role that gossip plays in deciding this "legal" issue is made clear. As in the case of Helen Graham, when we later learn that the gossip about Ellen and the secretary is unfounded, it is irrelevant. Her construction as a sexually deviant woman, the beginning of her construction as a delinquent,

denies her the opportunity to commit the "illegal" act of living independently, as Newland concludes that "the charge in the letter was true, and that she hoped to marry the partner of her guilt" (72). As Kathy Miller Hadley notes, "[f]or Newland, apparently, Ellen's freedom *does* mean nothing; he assumes that she would only want to be free from one man in order to marry (i.e., relinquish her freedom to) another" (266). Again the role of gossip in this construction is made explicit as Newland assures Ellen that she could gain nothing from a divorce that "would compensate for the possibility -- the certainty -- of a lot of beastly talk" (72).

Like Foucault's criminal, Ellen becomes the subject of sociological and anthropological investigation as the gossiping community looks into her past. Ellen protests that she wants "to become just like everybody else here" (69). This cannot be permitted. Instead, she is reconstructed as a deviant from the beginning of her life. The narrator recalls that when Medora and a young Ellen stepped off the steamer "her family were scandalised to see...little Ellen was in crimson merino and amber beads, like a gypsy foundling," (38) instead of the proper mourning clothes dictated by the recent death of her parents. This description, focalized through the scandalized and, presumably, gossiping family, prefigures Ellen's construction as a crimson/scarlet woman, as well as her identity as a distasteful foreign/gypsy outsider. When she is a teenager, the tenor of Ellen's transgression is reversed as she is differentiated for *wearing*, rather than not wearing, black. Mrs. Archer remarks, "we must always bear in mind what an eccentric bring-up Medora Manson gave her. What can you expect of a girl who was allowed to wear black satin at her coming-out ball?" (26). Mr. Jackson rejoins, "'Poor girl!' in the tone of one who, while enjoying the memory, had fully

understood at the time what the sight portended" (26). Ellen's dress, even as a child, is retroactively inscribed, through gossip, as a sign of her deviance.

The relationship between Newland and Ellen, like that between Ellen and her husband's secretary, comes to have an illicit existence through the community's talk. Gary Lindberg notes that the family's appointment of Newland as Ellen's legal advisor "illustrates the characteristic means by which the collective order attempts to control this relationship, not immediately by destroying it, but by sanctioning it in an official form recast from potentially illicit materials" (80). Indeed, the community seems to encourage their relationship; May asks Newland to look after cousin Ellen while she is away, Newland is sent to pick up Ellen after Mrs. Mingott's stroke, he is sent to discuss her personal affairs with her. Many critics have argued that once the community assumes that Ellen and Newland are having an affair, "they use all their collective machinery to stop it," (Lindberg 81) a battle which is "fought with finesse and subtlety" (Wershoven 88). Yet, Newland comes to realize that "for *months*", he was "the centre of countless silently observing eyes and patiently listening ears" (211 emphasis added). For months, the community assumes something illicit is taking place between Ellen and Newland. Thus, the question must be asked -- if this community so highly prizes the sanctity of marriage, why did New York society not *prevent* the affair?

We are not privy to the gossip which created an adulterer of Newland, for the novel is focalized through him. He is so consumed by Ellen as the object of gossip, he is incapable of conceiving himself as object. Shortly after their wedding, May speculates with Newland, wondering "if she [Ellen] wouldn't be happier with her husband'" (137). Later, when he

realizes the full extent to which he has been "excluded from a share" in the negotiations about Ellen, "and even from the knowledge that they were on foot," (159) he comes to recognize May's "idle" speculation as a test -- one which he failed. For "[h]e saw in a flash that if the family had ceased to consult him it was because some deep tribal instinct warned them that he was no longer on their side" (159). The family has used gossip to establish who will be privy to what information/gossip. Once Newland is outside the gossip circle, so is the reader. Thus the construction of Newland as an adulterer goes on behind our back.

Newland's role in Ellen's fatal construction is not ultimately harmful to him. The novel makes it clear that "indiscretion" on the part of men is not only tolerated but expected. Carol Wershoven believes that "Lefferts's adultery is tolerated by New York because it is hidden, and unlike the activities of the more open Ellen, does not threaten to disrupt the pleasurable life. It is therefore not marital fidelity that is a value in New York, but rather the appearance of it" (91). But rather, it is *female* fidelity that is valued, demanded, and male *infidelity* which is secretly heralded. Beaufort's liaisons are anything but discreet, yet he is not the target of ostracism until his financial dishonour. In addition to Beaufort and Lefferts, Newland himself, before Ellen arrived, had an affair with a married woman. Far from being merely tolerated because of his secrecy, Newland's "silly business with Mrs. Rushworth" (24) is known about, presumably through gossip, by his mother, his sister and his fiancé. As his mother's comments indicate, the affair which "had once seemed to Newland a tragedy of which his soul would always bear the scar" (24) is trivialised to fit the norm of male promiscuity. Similarly, after Ellen is banished, Newland the presumed adulterer goes on to be "what was called a faithful husband" (219). Thus Newland can be seen as a catalyst, one

whose core constituency remains unchanged, in gossip's construction of Ellen as an adulterous delinquent.

So, in answer to the question, why did the community not prevent the affair between Newland and Ellen -- it needed this event to finish its construction of Ellen as a delinquent. Although she was seen with Beaufort, and Newland himself suspected something illicit between them, Ellen as an independent woman was too powerful to be dismissed as another of Beaufort's mistresses, a petty delinquency at best. Seducing Newland, stealing him away from her own cousin; that is a seriously deviant person, someone with "wicked blood," (99) someone who, once categorized, can be a powerful sign. May's farewell party for Ellen, seen in Foucauldian terms, is like a public execution, or torture, or the work of a chain gang -- it is a spectacle, valuable for the signs it creates. Like the Roman punch, which Mrs. Archer remarks "made all the difference; not in itself but by its manifold implications -- since it *signified* either canvasbacks or terrapin..." (207 emphasis added), Ellen as delinquent makes all the difference by what she signifies. Having reconstructed her past and present, at this party Ellen is a "foreign visitor" and "the fact of Madame Olenska's 'foreignness' could hardly have been more adroitly emphasised than by this farewell tribute" (211). Indeed, part of its purpose it to emphasis this very "fact". Newland sees "himself and the pale woman on his right [Ellen] as the centre of their conspiracy" (211); Ellen, not really a foreigner, or even an intruder, is the very centre of this society, on the eve of her eternal banishment. Newland recognizes the sign of Ellen's construction and banishment: "'It's to show me,' he thought, 'what would happen to *me* -- ' and a deathly sense of the superiority of implication and analogy over direct action, and of silence over rash words, closed in on him like the doors of

the family vault" (212). Ellen is a sign, for Newland, for every member of that closed society, of what happens to deviants. Foucault explains that "the guilty person is only one of the targets of punishment. For punishment is directed above all others, at all the potentially guilty" (108). Properly classified, Ellen is useful as an exemplar of deviance. She becomes the way in which the community defines itself; they are everything she is not. Her banishment is a created opportunity for this society to impose its order in a spectacular way. Her containment and subsequent expulsion are proof of the strength of this social order. One of the benefits of delinquency is that its existence "makes acceptable the system of judicial and police supervisions that partition society; it recounts from day to day a sort of an internal battle against the faceless enemy" (Foucault 286). The existence of Ellen as delinquent justifies the gossiping vigilance of the community with its rules and values -- justifies the community to itself. Thus, through the panopticon of gossip, Ellen is transformed from a woman who committed a deviant act, to a dangerous delinquent, whose existence and banishment, presence and absence, is a powerful sign for the gossiping community.

v

Thus, in these three novels, Foucault's imperative that power exists in positive, rather than negative terms, is richly realized. Through the combined powers of surveillance and gossip, spying and talk, information is garnered, values are assumed, "normal" is defined and enforced, and identities are created. Gossip can be seen in these novels as a disciplinary power.

> 'Discipline' may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a 'physics' or an 'anatomy' or power, a technology. And it may be taken over either by 'specialized' institutions...or by institutions that use it as an essential instrument for a particular end (schools, hospitals), or by pre-existing authorities that find in it a means of reinforcing or reorganizing their internal mechanisms of power (one day we should show how intra-familial relations, essentially in the parents-children cells, have become disciplined, absorbing since the classical age external schemata, first educational and military, then medical, psychiatric, psychological, which have made the family the privileged locus of emergence for the disciplinary question of the normal and the abnormal) (Foucault 216)

I have attempted to show how community relations, largely through the panopticon of gossip, serve as a disciplinary power, first posing and then creating answers for the question of the normal and the abnormal. In these novels, the answer to the question of the abnormal is created in the form of a woman, a sexual delinquent, who is constructed, according to the positive abilities of power/knowledge, complete with a deviant past and a psychological profile. Significantly, each woman, once a member of the community, becomes an outsider, only after being the centre of gossiping attention. They are then constructed as intrinsically, irrevocably bad:[23] Ellen has "wicked blood," (99) Myron makes it "seem as if bad was born in some people" (20) and Helen is not only contaminated, but contaminating, as the villagers vow to keep their daughters from consorting with her (98). In each novel, there is a male figure who may consort with these deviants with relative impunity to the constructions of gossip. Gossip is *not* the voice of the disenfranchised in these novels, nor is it democratic. The already marginal and economically vulnerable (both Helen and Myron make a

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[23]Helen's identity as a deviant is subsequently revoked when she becomes wealthy. Given the community's repulsion at her having left her husband, it is likely that she would have remained a deviant had she not become an heiress.

subsistence living for themselves and their children; Ellen's husband has control of her money)[24] are the ones most vulnerable to the disciplinary power of gossip. Furthermore, the panopticon of gossip is an important way in which gender norms are perpetuated and enforced. While the speaking gossipers, Mrs. Deans, or Mrs. Archer for example, do garner some personal power in being able to categorize and construct others as beneath them, ultimately they are contributing to the existence of a surveillance community, one which surveys them as well. These gossipers internalize the power of this normalizing gaze and play a part in their own subjection in following the code of gender norms. The brook in the passage quoted at the beginning of the chapter subdues its course because it knows it is under a normalizing gaze exacting "decency and decorum"; people living within a gossiping community conform to community norms because they are "in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power" (Foucault 217).

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[24]Helen, Myron and Ellen, as the narrative focuses of their respective novels, have been the focus of this discussion of gossip as a disciplinary power. However, it is important to note that in each novel a full community of gossip is explored, complete with bit characters and side plots as well as significant themes apart from the gender issues raised here. Other characters are subject to the pressures of gossip's normalizing gaze, including male characters.

Chapter Two

> But this vague conviction of indeterminable guilt, which was enough to keep up much head-shaking and biting innuendo even among substantial professional seniors, had for the general mind all the superior power of mystery over fact. Everybody liked better to conjecture how the thing was, than simply to know it; for conjecture soon became more confident than knowledge, and had a more liberal allowance for the incompatible.
>
> (George Eliot 660)

i

Gossip is commonly acknowledged to be a means of communicating knowledge. Many self-confessed gossipers would admit that judgement and speculation are part of the package, but would argue that "real" information is also conveyed. In "Knowledge through the Grapevine", for example, Maryann Ayim defines gossip as a form of inquiry designed to elicit information (Ben-Ze'ev 85) and as such compares it to the scientific method. Yet, what occurs during gossip can be more accurately characterised as the production rather than the mere transmission of knowledge. As illustrated in the previous chapter, gossip can create identities for individuals; the fallen woman can be constructed through talk. Other forms of knowledge are similarly created through gossip, as contested social values are articulated and re-articulated through the talk of small groups of individuals. Eve Sedgwick states that gossip has "to do not even so much with the transmission of necessary news as with the

refinement of necessary skills for making, testing, and using unrationalized and provisional hypotheses about what *kinds of people* there are to be found in one's world" (23). Yet I would argue that gossip at once creates categories and places individuals within them, thereby actually creating the *kinds of people* there are in one's world. Having discussed the knowledge-making machinations of gossip on the large, sociological plane, I will now turn to an investigation of how gossip's linguistic features construct a community's truth.

Gossip is held by many to be essentially anarchic (see Spacks, Collins), with few or no rules about form or content. However, gossipers, like all speakers, "speak only in definite speech genres, that is, all our utterances have definite and relatively stable typical *forms of construction of the whole*" (Bakhtin 1986, 78). Bakhtin asserts:

> Even in the most free, the most unconstrained conversation, we cast our speech in definite generic forms, sometimes rigid and trite ones, sometimes more flexible, plastic, and creative ones....Speech genres organize our speech in almost the same way as grammatical (syntactical) forms do. We learn to cast our speech in generic forms and, when hearing others' speech, we guess its genre from the very first words. (1986, 79)

Gossip, with its constant theme, style and compositional structure, I argue, constitutes a speech genre. How do we recognize this speech genre? What makes gossip gossip on the linguistic level? As Collins points out, "in practice, gossip...is interwoven with other kinds of talk: advice-giving, teasing, talking about the weather, speculating about the love lives of movie stars and soap-opera characters" (106). But content is not the only mark we have to let us know (most often tacitly) that what we are hearing is indeed gossip. Bakhtin argues that familiar and intimate genres, the category in which gossip must be placed, "reveal extremely clearly the dependence of style on a certain sense and understanding of the addressee (the

addressee of the utterance) on the part of the speaker, and on the addressee's actively responsive understanding that is anticipated by the speaker" (97). Studying gossip as a speech genre reveals how utterances, instances of gossip, are indexed for reception. The speaker can be seen to be constructing her utterance for her immediate listeners, judging how much they already know, what they are likely to believe, what existing community-held assumptions will shape their reception and response.

Linguistic-pragmatics, a method of investigation which analyses how meaning is constructed, addressing both the language and its context, provides a useful approach to the question of gossip as a speech genre. Linguistic-pragmatics, with its emphasis on the social situation of language use, seems inherently compatible with Bakhtin's notion of utterances being shaped by the speaker in accordance with her audience's anticipated response. Furthermore, "any speaker is himself a respondent to a greater or lesser degree...he presupposes not only the existence of the language system he is using, but also the existence of preceding utterances -- his own and others' -- with which his given utterance enters into one kind of relation or another" (69). Thus, a linguistic-pragmatic analysis of gossip illustrates much about the knowledge and values of the community of the speaker and addressee, and reveals gossip to be a speech genre in which knowledge is more commonly produced than merely transmitted. Gossip's emphasis on the specific rather than the abstract implicates its listeners and speakers on a very personal level. Thus, the knowledge-constructing properties of this speech genre can be particularly coercive and therefore effective. Public values are actively created on this very private plane.

A linguistic-pragmatic analysis of the gossip portrayed in four novels, Anne Brontë's

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, Joanna Wood's *The Untempered Wind*, Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, and Sinclair Ross' *Sawbones Memorial,* representing a range of historical periods, national literatures and thematic concerns, reveals consistent, characteristic linguistic features. These features, which are present in significant proportion in the gossip of each novel, are most notably modality, presupposition, projection, epithets and vocatives -- all features related to the addressee's reception of the utterance. The tension between attenuation and proclamation, between modalized and/or projected statements and declared propositions, inscribes the reader of novelistic gossip as witness to the act of knowledge creation. The passages selected for analysis are those containing a relatively extended gossip "session"[25] with minimal narratorial comment. Analysis is restricted to conversations between characters reported as direct speech rather than gossip reported indirectly or as gist by the narrator. The chosen selections are linguistically representative of the gossip found throughout each work. Furthermore, they represent a range of the types of gossip conversations in terms of the participants: gossip among exclusively women, exclusively men, both genders, small groups and between two people. Although each of the previously mentioned linguistic features is present in the gossip of each novel, in order to avoid unnecessary repetition, particularly salient passages have been chosen to illustrate how each feature contributes to gossip's coercive knowledge-making properties.

After an introduction to the linguistic-pragmatics of gossip in all four novels, a detailed analysis is presented of *Sawbones Memorial* as a representative case study. An

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[25]The length of the gossip "session" is relative to the rest of the gossip represented in each particular novel. In the case of *Sawbones Memorial*, the entire "session" most often could not be reproduced in the confines of this thesis.

investigation of Ross' novel follows that of the first section of the chapter, looking only at the direct speech of the characters, replicating the conditions of "real life" gossip. Yet, what is being studied here is not unmediated gossip, but rather a fictional, albeit realistic, re-creation of gossip. Literary works are considered secondary genres by Bakhtin, "genres of complex cultural communication" which "*play out* various forms of primary speech communication" (1986, 98). Thus, the final portion of this chapter investigates the relationship between the primary speech genre of gossip and the secondary genre of literature, looking specifically at how the reader is inscribed within the novel's gossiping community. First, I will begin with a more general analysis of all four novels, identifying the characteristic elements of gossip as a speech genre.

Projection is the explicit introduction of a person's speech (direct or indirect) or thoughts. For example, "But Eliza Millward says..." (Brontë 13). Thus, the information following the projecting clause is directly located as coming from a particular place, time and consciousness. M.A.K. Halliday states that in cases of projection, "the secondary clause is projected through the primary clause, which instates it as (a) a locution or (b) an idea" (196). In the following example, projection's effect of locating "statements as contingent -- as coming from somewhere, as having been produced by someone interested in their reception" (Giltrow 225) is readily apparent. Speaking to her friend Mrs. Wilson, *The Untempered Wind*'s Mrs. Deans projects her gossip about Myron's son: "The boy was asleep, and she [Myron] was kneeling by the bed, talking away to the sleeping child! -- good's praying to it, Mrs. Warner said" (41). The projecting clause "Mrs. Warner said", coming at the end of the

sentence, locates the interpretation of Myron's behaviour in a specific consciousness and at the same time identifies it as an interpretation, rather than as fact. One need only read the sentence omitting the final projecting clause to hear the attenuated effect produced by this linguistic feature. When a statement is projected, Halliday notes, it is not the statement itself which can be argued; if we want to argue, the issue is "did he or did he not say these words" (229). Looking beyond the reported speech or thoughts of another person, projection is also involved in the representation of the speaker's own thoughts. Again, the projecting clause locates the proposition, attaching it directly to a specific consciousness, in this case, the speaker: "But I sometimes think we've always bored her" (Wharton 137). Compare with "We've always bored her". Following Halliday, David Stouck and Janet Giltrow extend the concept of projection beyond clauses which report wordings, to projecting clauses of perception and cognition: "Projection realized through verbs of speech, cognition, and perception, attributes the proposition to an identified position" (565). Again from Wharton's novel, the following example of gossip illustrates this type of projection. Gossiping to her mother about Ellen, Janey states: "At the Opera *I know* she had on dark blue velvet, perfectly plain and fat -- like a night-gown" (25 emphasis added). The projecting clause "I know" indicates Janey's cognition whereas "I saw that she had on dark blue velvet" would signal Janey's perception.

In the following passage from *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, the instances of projection have been put in bold print which illuminates the relative knowledge claims of projected and unprojected statements. Near the end of the novel, Eliza Millward and Gilbert Markham discuss Mrs. Huntingdon, as Eliza searches for Gilbert's sister Rose:

'Shall I find Rose at home, do **you think**?' said she,[26] as we closed the garden gate, and set our faces towards Linden-Car.
'**I believe** so.'
' **I trust** I shall, for I've a little bit of news for her - if you haven't forestalled me.'
'I?'
'Yes: do **you know** what Mr Lawrence is gone for?' She looked up anxiously for my reply.
'*Is* he gone?' said I, and her face brightened.
'Ah! then **he hasn't told you** about his sister?'
'What of *her*?' I demanded, in terror lest some evil should have befallen her.
'Oh, Mr Markham, how you blush!' cried she with a tormenting laugh. 'Ha,ha, you have not forgotten her yet! But you had better be quick about it, **I can tell you,** for -- alas, alas! -- she's going to be married next Thursday!'
'No, Miss Eliza! that's false.'
'**Do you charge me** with a falsehood, sir?'
'You are misinformed.'
'Am I? Do **you know** better then?'
' **I think I do**.'
'What makes you look so pale then?' said she, smiling with delight at my emotion. 'Is it anger at poor me for telling such a fib? Well, **I only "tell** the tale as '**twas told to me**". **I don't vouch** for the truth of it; but at the same time, **I don't see** what reason Sarah should have for deceiving me, or her informant for deceiving her; and that was what **she told me the footman told her**: -- that Mrs Huntingdon was going to be married on Thursday, and Mr Lawrence was gone to the wedding. **She did tell me** the name of the gentleman, but **I've forgotten** that. Perhaps you can assist **me to remember** it. Is there not someone that lives near -- or frequently visits the neighbourhood, that has long been attached to her?
(460)

Eliza's first significant assertion, that Mrs. Huntingdon is "going to be married next Thursday," stands without projection. Eliza is putting forth this statement as an unmitigated fact. Markham's refusal to credit her assertion as factual causes her to attenuate her claim by projecting the information as received from others. She thus places herself and Markham as the latest in a line of speakers and listeners, a community of people constructing this

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[26]I am highlighting only the projecting clauses that are contained within the characters' speech.

information. Her statement: "I don't vouch for the truth of it" captures much of the essence of projection. In attributing the source of information as being outside his/her consciousness, the speaker refuses to take full responsibility for the claim. At the same time, projection can work to legitimize a claim, by tracing its origins back to a credible source. The degree to which one or the other effect dominates the statement ultimately depends upon how the source is viewed by the knowledge-making community. As Stouck and Giltrow note, "[w]hen perception, utterance, or belief is agented, and thereby directly assigned to a particular point of view, a reader [or, I would add, a member of the gossip community] can evaluate a proposition and attempt to gauge its validity" (566).

In gossip, a special type of projection, which might be termed nebulous-agent projection, occurs with notable frequency. These particular projecting clauses are characterized by pronouns or nouns with unstable or unclear referents. For example, "*They say*, don't they,...that the secretary helped her to get away from her brute of a husband" (Wharton 27) ; "She [Miss Wilson] is elegant and accomplished above the generality of her birth and station; and *some say* she is ladylike and agreeable" (Brontë 86). The effect of this type of projection is often to set the speaker apart from the rest of the community. In the second example, Markham is implying that he certainly would not say Miss Wilson was ladylike and agreeable, although his unprojected assertions about her elegance and accomplishments are unattenuated and have fact status in his statement. Thus, the use of nebulous agent projection in the manner which distances the speaker from the knowledge base of the community can be risky for the speaker. In this sense, Mr. Markham is inviting his listener, Helen, to agree with him about Miss Wilson, thereby placing herself in alliance

with him against "some people". This can be risky, for she may disagree, leaving Mr. Markham alone in his objection to the majority opinion. His social capital enables him to take this risk. Yet even Mr. Markham, the narrator and an individual with high social and economic status in this community, does not distance himself from the entire community, using the phrase "some people," rather than "everybody". However, nebulous agent projection is not always used to create distance between the speaker and the claim, but rather may create an effect similar to that of agentless projection.

Agentless projection, in which a clause is projected, but not attributed to a speaker/thinker, has "the effect of appearing to distribute the claim more widely, beyond the scope of the immediate, contingent, and possibly interested position of the speaker, and situating the proposition in the larger community of consensus" (Stouck and Giltrow 569). This effect is evident when Jane Wilson gossips to the Markhams about the new tenant: "...though she *is known* to have entered the neighbourhood early last week, she did not make her appearance at church on Sunday" (Brontë 13). The statement simply carries a higher fact status than it would had Jane said "I know...". In the following passage from *Sawbones Memorial*, in which Nellie and Rose gossip about Benny's mother, the ability of nebulous agent projection to create the same effect is highlighted:

> "...We came to Upward when he [Benny] was about five and long after that, a couple of years at least, she used to rig him out so help me in a sailor suit with a ribbon down his back -- that's right, a ribbon -- you must have seen it too. And the scared, lost look. I daresay she used to warn him what would happen if he got his pretty suit dirty or dared play rough with the other boys"
> "Well, I suppose it was knowing how people talk, the humiliation. *They say* she came from a good family."
> "*She said* she came from a good family. What's a good family anyway? If you're really somebody it shows -- that's what Dan always says." (45)

Rose provides the assertion that Benny's mother came from a good family with wider authority by using the nebulous agent "they". Nellie insists that the claim be located in a specific consciousness, in this instance, a very interested one, thereby completely negating the validity of the claim.

While projection locates the utterance as coming from a specific place in the world, the use of vocatives, which occurs with notable frequency in gossip, can be seen as locating the intended trajectory of the utterance to a specific consciousness. Vocatives, noun phrases that refer to the addressee, have been categorized as summonses and addresses (Levinson 71). The latter, which are normally found imbedded within an utterance, appear with interesting implications in gossip. Phrases like, "But there, *Marian*!" (Wood 40), "You say the secretary merely helped her to get away, *my dear fellow*?" (Wharton 27) and "He's slipping, *Nellie*" (Ross 17) serve to bring the listener(s) closer to the utterance, to create a sense of intimacy between speaker and her/his audience. Vocatives may be employed during particularly sensitive moments of communication, in which something with illicit or secret undertones is being uttered. The direct mention of someone's name serves to directly implicate them in the judgement or speculation being made. When speculating about the "causes" of Benny's sexuality in *Sawbones Memorial*, Rose asks, "Do you suppose, *Nellie*, that's why?" (45), inviting her listener to project from her own consciousness, while simultaneously inviting her to agree with her own speculations. When a speaker is disagreeing with what has been said, vocatives may also be used to maintain a sense of connection and community in the face of opposing views. Earlier in the same conversation, Rose responds to Nellie's criticism of Benny's mother by saying, "That's harsh *Nellie*" (44). Thus, like projection, which names the

speaking consciousness, vocatives name the receiving consciousness, with similar implications for the community-forming powers of gossip.

Complementary to and often coincident with projection and the use of vocatives is modality, a linguistic feature which also effects the fact value or truth status of a statement. Halliday defines modality as "the area of meaning that lies between yes and no -- the intermediate ground between positive and negative polarity" (335). This broad classification includes modal verbs (can, should, may etc.) and modal adjuncts (possibly, certainly, honestly etc.). Modalized statements bear the mark of the speaker's reasoning or opinion in some way. Halliday notes that "even a high values modal ('certainly', 'always') is less determinate that a polar [unmodalized] form: *that's certainly John* is less certain that *that's John*; *it always rains in summer* is less invariable than *it rains in summer*" (86). Of the three types of modality which have been identified, dynamic, deontic and epistemic, the latter two play the most significant role in gossip's knowledge-creating functions.[27]

Deontic modality indicates permission or obligation; it encodes the world's social constraints. F.R. Palmer notes that deontic modals (can, should, must, shall) are often performative, that is, "by using a deontic modal, a speaker may actually give permission..., lay an obligation...or make a promise or threat" (69). It is the latter use which is most prevalent in gossip -- the performative expression of social obligation. In *The Untempered Wind*, the gossiping and formidable Mrs. Deans frequently figures herself as a martyr for employing Myron and this position becomes "reality" as it comes to be accepted by the

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[27]Dynamic modality encodes the physical constraints of the world. For example "I can walk," meaning, I am capable of walking.

community. Deontic modals, used both by Mrs. Deans herself and others, help to create this self-sacrificing persona. For example, Mrs. Deans uses deontic modals to answer the rag man's question about why she keeps Myron: "I feel a duty to have her here, but it goes ag'in me, Mr. Long -- it does that; but there, we all have our crosses and we *must* help along as well as we can" (33). Later, Mrs. Deans informs Mrs. White of her conclusion that Homer is indeed the father: "I felt you *ought* to know the truth of how things stood; so putting aside my own feelings, as I *have* to do very often, I came to let you know what sort of a fellow Homer Wilson is" (126). Constructing herself as a slave to social obligation, Mrs. Deans attempts to obscure her own motivations. Behind deontic modality lie the unexpressed principles upon which it is based. For example, Mrs. Archer tells Newland, "Countess Olenska is a New Yorker, and should have respected the feelings of New York" (57). Mrs. Archer's use of the deontic modal "should" not only indicates that she is in a position of authority to articulate such an obligation for Ellen, but here, as in most uses of deontic modality, the premises which are tacitly consulted to create the obligation are "suppressed"(Giltrow 223). The idea that all New Yorkers (all New Yorkers which Mrs. Archer would consider members of her society, that is), share values and feelings, that these values are sacred and must be respected by every member of the "tribe" are principles tacitly agreed upon within the gossiping community, an agreement which allows Mrs. Archer to make this performative statement of obligation without explaining her reasons or expecting to be challenged.

Epistemic modality encodes the speaker's limits of knowledge, playing a significant role in the machinations of gossip. Its function is "to make judgments about the possibility, etc., that something is or is not the case" (Palmer 50). It is "the modality of propositions, in

the strict sense of the term, rather than of actions, states, events, etc" (Palmer 50). One of the more typical uses of epistemic modality within gossip is found in the following example in which Mrs. Markham speculates about the new mysterious tenant: "Poor thing! how lonely she *must* feel" (Brontë 14). The modal "must" encodes the proposition as Mrs. Markham's inferred judgment about the mysterious widow. The attenuation of modality allows Mrs. Markham to make the claim, which is then entered, in this case without objection, into the knowledge base of the gossiping community. In *The Age of Innocence*, similar speculations are made about the inner consciousness of gossip's primary object, Countess Olenska. May exclaims to Newland, "Fancy how hideously uncomfortable she *must* be at the Blenkers" (137).

Analysis of the sorts of propositions which are modalized or projected, attenuated in some way, and those which are not, can allow tacit community assumptions and values to become explicit. For Halliday, the entire system of modality rests upon an apparent paradox:

> ...the fact that we only say we are certain when we are not. If unconsciously I consider it certain that Mary has left, I say, simply, *Mary's left*. If I add a high value probability, of whatever orientation, such as *Mary's certainly left*, *I'm certain Mary's left*, *Mary must have left*, etc., this means that I am admitting an element of doubt -- which I may then try to conceal by objectifying the expression of certainty. (340)

The use of modality and projection can reveal, not only what the speaker may have hidden doubts about, but also what is not accepted as "fact" within the speaker's community. Comparing modalized statements to those which are completely unmodalized and unprojected indicates the speaker's belief that the latter propositions have fact status within

the community.[28] In the following passage from *The Untempered Wind*, the lack of attenuation for statements surrounding Myron indicate community solidarity about her character and position. Mrs. Warner comments about Myron's ability to spend the night alone with her grandmother's corpse: "That Myron Holder is bad clean through. Any other woman would have been drove crazy last night; but look at her! She's a hardened one" (174). Gossip's speculation has become fact. Later, speaking to the visiting Reverend Fletcher about Myron and her relationship with Brother Hardman, Mrs. Deans carefully uses projection to locate her "opinion" about Brother Hardman, but statements about Myron's character require no such attenuation:

> "Oh, she's deep," said Mrs. Deans; "and that sly there's no being up to her. Always goin' about as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth; but as for wickedness and genuine, inborn badness! Why, Brother Fletcher, it's *my belief and solemn opinion* that she was jest makin' a set at Brother Hardman with them eyes of her'n. (286-87)

That Myron is bad and wicked is a fact beyond reproach within this community, as this reality has been created for her through gossip.

In *The Age of Innocence*, a different pattern emerges. In the Old New York society of manners and form, filled with "kind people who only ask one to pretend," (50) propositions of all sorts are often heavily attenuated through both modalization and projection. Unlike the community's response to Myron, assumptions and judgments about Ellen's motivations and actions are generally politely attenuated. In the following passage, the Archers, Mr. and Mrs. van der Luyden, and Mr. Sillerton Jackson are discussing Ellen's scandalous act of visiting

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[28]"It is important to stress that quotes, reports and facts are categories of the language, not of the real world. There is no implication that a fact is something which is true. Anything that can be meant in the language can have the status of a fact" (Halliday 251).

the financially disgraced Beaufort home:

> "But Madame Olenska's foreign bringing-up *may* make her less particular--"
> "Ah," the two elder ladies sighed.
> "Still, to have kept her grandmother's carriage at a defaulter's door!"....
> "*Of course, I've always said* that she looks at things quite differently," Mrs. Archer summed up. A flush rose to May's forehead. She looked across the table at her husband, and said precipitately: "*I'm sure* Ellen mean it kindly" (201)

The specific judgements and speculations about Ellen, that her foreign bringing-up may have changed her, that she meant her visit kindly, are located as belonging specifically to the consciousness of the speaker. This community, with its excessive politeness, does not assume to *know* anything about Ellen -- all this is speculation and is marked as such.

Immediately following the specific discussion of Ellen and her faux pas, Mrs. Archer makes a statement, which, although it is completely unattenuated, is a generalized maxim and therefore is not directly, linguistically linked to the Countess: "'Imprudent people are often kind,' said Mrs. Archer"(202). Mrs. Archer does not call Ellen imprudent, but rather lets her audience make that inference for themselves. This unmodalized statement thus remains within this community's bounds of politeness. The connection between Mrs. Archer's statement and Ellen in the minds of her audience is referred to in linguistic-pragmatics as conversational implicature. Philosopher H.P. Grice developed what he termed the Cooperative Principle, a behavioural dictum which humans follow when communicating: "Make our conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (as quoted

in Green 90).[29] Things which we hear are supposed to make sense; therefore when they do not appear to on the surface, we work at making other types of connections, or implications. This maxim follows many Bakhtinian assumptions about the inherently communicative nature of language and the constant work of interpretation which takes place between speaker and audience. Bakhtin highlights the importance of what he terms the apperceptive background of the listener(s), "a background made up of contradictory opinions, points of view and value judgments" against which any given utterance is actively understood (1981, 280). When we communicate, more can be conveyed than what is said because we are assumed to be conforming to the Cooperative Principle and the listener(s) therefore makes effort after meaning. Thus, Mrs. Archer's listeners assume that her contribution to the conversation follows the Cooperative Principle, that her contribution follows the direction of the current conversation about Ellen. Through conversational implicature then, Mrs. Archer is able to "say without saying" that Ellen *is* imprudent, for the statement about imprudence

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[29]There are four maxims which further detail the Cooperative Principle:
The maxim of Quality
try to make your contribution one that is true, specifically:
I) do not say what you believe to be false
ii) do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence
The maxim of Quantity
I) make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange
ii) do not make your contribution more informative than is required
The maxim of Relevance
make your contributions relevant
The maxim of Manner
be perspicuous, and specifically:
I) avoid obscurity
ii) avoid ambiguity
iii) be brief
iv) be orderly (Levinson 101-102).

has fact status. In Wood's novel, the gossipers employ no such "polite" discretion surrounding their judgement of Myron. However, even Mrs. Deans is careful when gossiping about the visiting preacher, Brother Hardman. Speaking to his superior, Brother Fletcher, Mrs. Deans uses conversational implicature to create rather sinister speculation about Hardman:

> Why, Brother Fletcher, it's my belief and solemn opinion that she [Myron] was jest makin' a set at Brother Hardman with them eyes of her'n. I'm glad, Brother Fletcher, that Brother Hardman was called away. He was very young, Brother Hardman was -- very". (286-87)

The listener, Brother Fletcher,[30] looks for the relevance of the comment that Hardman is young and must mentally return to connect it with the information he was already given about Myron flirting. Mrs. Deans has thus implied something quite scandalous about a preacher, without saying a word. Conversational implicature is involved in most types of utterance. What is particularly significant about its role in the speech genre of gossip is the way in which gossipers exploit its ability to leave particularly negative or "inappropriate" judgements unsaid.

The success of conversational implicature is often dependent upon the listener; he or she must have background information to support the connection intended by the speaker. In this sense, conversational implicature contributes to the linguistic creation of community. Another feature of linguistic communication identified by linguistic-pragmatics contributes to community in much the same way -- by creating "insiders" who understand certain background assumptions. Presupposition is a term used to "refer to propositions whose truth

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[30]One also notices the excessive use of vocatives as Mrs. Deans commands a connection with her listener before making her rather daring implication.

is taken for granted in the utterance of a linguistic expression, propositions without which the utterance cannot be evaluated" (Green 72). For example, during their discussion about Countess Olenska's clothes, Janey tells Mrs. Archer: "At *the* Opera I know she had on dark blue velvet" (25). The fact that there is a specific opera and that Ellen attended it is presupposed. The common "test" for the presence of presupposition is changing the polarity of the main verb and observing which parts of the sentence retain their truth value. In this case, "At the Opera I know she did *not* have on dark blue velvet" continues to presuppose the existence of a particular opera. This knowledge is considered shared within this micro-community of speakers.

In *The Age of Innocence*, presupposition is used in gossip often with the same effect as conversational implicature, saying things without saying them, or more specifically with the case of presupposition, saying things without asserting them. Once again discussing Ellen, Mr. van der Luyden tells his wife and the Archers, "I'm afraid...that Madame Olenska's kind heart may have led her into the imprudence of calling on Mrs. Beaufort" (201). This sentence asserts the modalized and projected proposition surrounding Ellen's motives, but presupposes the "fact" that she did call on Mrs. Beaufort and that such an action is imprudent. These presuppositions are answered by another: "Or her taste for peculiar people," responds Mrs. Archer (201). Presupposition is important because it allows a speaker to create a community of consensus, as such it can be coercive for listeners who are new to a gossiping community, invoking an audience who *cannot* disagree (Giltrow -personal communication 1997). Mrs. Deans uses the coercive powers of presupposition to great advantage in the following conversation in which she is trying to tell Mrs. White that Homer is the father of

Myron's baby *without* asserting this "fact":

> "Isn't it a terrible thing about Homer Wilson? Well, it'll teach Marian a lesson; she set too much store on Homer altogether. I knowed what Homer Wilson was long before this came out!"
> "Why, Jane, I never heard anything against Homer! What do you mean?"
> ...."But what folks tell is that if Myron Holder's young one ain't named Homer, it ain't because it hadn't ought to be." (126)

Mrs. Deans begins by presupposing Mrs. White knows the current talk about Homer. This is a calculated, coercive use of presupposition, for Mrs. Deans knows that Mrs. White does not know. Her use of this consensus-building technique results in Mrs. White being unable to contradict what is presupposed and therefore not asserted -- that there is something terrible to be known about Homer. Her only recourse is to deny that *she* knows what this terrible thing is, rather than deny that a terrible thing exists, or reply that the thing that exists is not terrible. Mrs. Deans quickly tells her what the "thing" is, again using presupposition. Were her last statement to be directly contradicted, "What folks tell is not that...," the "fact" that Homer is the father would remain unchallenged. As Giltrow notes, presupposition not only relies on a community of shared knowledge, but that moreover, such "social circles are in effect maintained or created by the presupposing utterance itself" (217).

Presupposition is said to be "triggered" by certain types of verbs and sentence constructions.[31] Possibly the most ubiquitous presupposition-trigger in the speech genre of gossip is definite descriptions, or the use of definite determiners. Herbert Clark and

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[31]Levinson identifies the following types of presupposition-triggers: 1) Definite descriptions 2) Factive verbs 3) Implicative verbs 4) Change of state verbs 5) Iteratives 6) Verbs of judging 7) Temporal clauses 8) Cleft sentences 9) Implicit clefts with stressed constituents 10) Comparisons and contrasts 11) Non-restrictive relative clauses 12) Counterfactual conditionals 13) Questions (183-184).

Catherine Marshall identify four different bases for the assumption of mutual knowledge which precedes the use of definite determiners. The most interesting in terms of gossip is the idea of community membership,[32] in which speakers assume their audience, as a member of their community, knows certain things "*everyone* in a community knows and assumes that everyone else in that community knows too" (35). Mrs. Archer's question about Ellen, "Was she at *the* ball?" presupposes, through the use of the definite article "the," that her audience knows about the existence of a specific ball to which she refers. However, while this use of "the" seems far from coercive, even this use of presupposition is community forming as Mrs. Archer's audience is in silent and unconscious agreement about this ball's existence. In a later conversation about fashion, Miss Jackson, speaking to Mrs. Archer and Jane exclaims, "The extravagance in dress--" (161), constructing her audience, through the presupposition-trigger "the," as members of a community which values dress etiquette, sees extravagance as a negative thing, and conforms to a similar definition of extravagance. Clark and Marshall acknowledge that community membership is a difficult thing to define, which may cause a speaker difficulties in deciding to which community his/her audience belongs. However, one can look at the act of making this decision and subsequently using presupposition as having an active role in community formation. As though confirming the community forming properties of this type of speech, Mrs. Archer's response[33] is "Ah, Jane Merry is *one of us*"

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[32]The other three are: physical copresence, either immediate, potential or prior; linguistic copresence, either potential or prior; and indirect copresence, either physical or linguistic. (Clark and Marshall 43).

[33]Lines have been omitted. The full exchange reads: "'The extravagance in dress --' Miss Jackson began. 'Sillerton took me to the first night of the Opera, and I can only tell you that Jane Merry's dress was the only one I recognised from last year; and even that had had the front panel

(162 emphasis added). Jane Merry is someone, who unlike "those others," would understand and concur with what is meant by "the" extravagance.

The information which is presupposed need not be mutually believed by the speaker and the addressee. Issues of power and social standing can be at issue here, as someone may "accept," through lack of overt contradiction, a presupposed idea which s/he does not adhere to or understand. Presupposition "can intimidate listeners into compliance or pretense or silence them in fear of betraying their lack of privileged experience" (Giltrow 220). In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, the narrator's response to presupposition in several key scenes serves to demonstrate his vast social superiority over the gossiping community to which he belongs. Early in the novel, Eliza Millward confronts Mr. Markham with gossip about Mrs. Graham and Mr. Lawrence, whom the community believes to be lovers:

> "Oh, Mr. Markham!" said she, with a shocked expression and voice subdued almost to a whisper -- "what do you think of *these* shocking reports about Mrs. Graham? -- can you encourage us to disbelieve them?"
> "What reports?" (77)

Mr. Markham openly contradicts the presupposition that he knows about certain reports. This rejection of community knowledge serves to remove Gilbert from the community. As the narrator, and as a male with considerable social and economic status, this is where he wants himself to be -- figured apart from the common gossip of his town. He lives in this town, but, rests above, rather than among, the community. This situation reoccurs to the same effect, again with Miss Millward. She asks, "do you know what Mr. Lawrence is gone

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changed. Yet I know she got it out from Worth only two years ago, because my seamstress always goes in to make over her Paris dresses before she wears them.'
'Ah, Jane Merry is one of us,'" (162).

for?", presupposing the knowledge that Mr. Lawrence has gone somewhere at all. Gilbert questions this assumption, answering, "*Is* he gone?" (460). Gilbert's social standing allows him to reverse the tenor of presupposition; in challenging assumptions, he is not admitting his lack of privileged experience, but rather questioning the assumed knowledge of his community.

Epithets, short descriptions preceding names, function in similar ways to presupposition and are found in abundance in the gossip of these novels. The objects of gossip, Ellen, Myron, Nick etc., are given titles by the community, which are used in many gossip sessions. Such titles, "Poor Ellen," (Wharton 25) "old Mrs. Holder," (Wood 40) "Old Mrs. White," (Wood 69) "poor Edith," (Ross 17) "Big Anna," (Ross 21, 50, 57) "Little John," (Ross 57) embody the community consensus about this person. The most common epithet, "poor," serves to distance the community from the victim/recipient of sympathy, as well as invoking some tacit standard of misery. They are sympathetic towards someone towards whom they cannot possibly be empathetic.

The features at work in gossip, identified by linguistic-pragmatics, reveal a speech genre actively creating knowledge and through this shared knowledge, creating community. Of course there are positive aspects to such community-forming speech, such as a sense of inclusiveness and sharing. I have attempted to illustrate, however, that this type of community forming speech also has elements of coercion, often creates "facts" out of opinions or prejudices, and may be confining, particularly to the socially and/or economically vulnerable members of the community. The effects of projection, modality, vocatives, epithets and presupposition, which have been outlined and discussed using examples from

four novels, together form important features of the speech genre of gossip. In the subsequent portion of this chapter, I will analyse how these features of gossip work together to create knowledge and a community in the fictional town of Upward, Saskatchewan. Sinclair Ross' *Sawbones Memorial* raises issues of homophobia, racism and sexism. Through a linguistic-pragmatic analysis, I will illustrate how these social norms are created and sustained through the social and linguistic machinations of gossip.

ii

"...all of Upward is living in a world created by words." (Esterhammer 22)

Sawbones Memorial, a novel with virtually no narrative exposition, is filled with the direct speech and thoughts of characters. As such, it is filled with direct representations of characters actively gossiping, providing a valuable case study for a linguistic-pragmatic analysis of gossip's machinations within a fictional community. A collection of deviants -- deviant women, sexual deviants, racial deviants -- are created, largely through talk. Like Myron Holder, Mrs. Huntingdon, and Countess Olenska, these people are subject to the surveillance of the gossip's panopticism. The identity-forming powers of gossip, working to further remove the socially vulnerable from the inner bounds of the community, create deviants against which the community may define itself. As Judith Butler notes:

> ...the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one

> which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, "inside" the subject as its own founding repudiation. (3)

The act of subject formation through repudiation can be seen the at very level of the sentence, as the linguistic structure of the town's gossip encodes its knowledge-making power. Virtually all the characters in this text are the topic of gossip in one form or another; however, only a few may be seen as the "objects" of gossip, individuals who do not have linguistic agency. The voices of Nick, a central figure and perhaps the most common topic of conversation, Benny's mother and Edith Hunter, both dead when the text opens, and Maisie, the town's "Scarlet Woman" who was not invited to the gathering, are glaringly absent from the novel. This textual absence, of course, enacts their absence as speaking subjects within this community. As inhabitants of the abjected outside, they are spoken for, spoken about, but do not speak. As is generally the nature with gossip, it is the voice of the powerfully creative subject, rather than the disenfranchised abject, which is heard most resoundingly.

Three types of deviants are linguistically sustained throughout the course of the novel: the deviant woman, of whom there are three objects of gossip, Maisie, Edith and Benny's mother; the sexual deviant, the primary object being Benny; and the racial deviant, with Dr. Nick Miller as the central focus.[34] These deviants sustain the existence of the Moral woman, sexually Normal behaviour, and the legitimately dominant race. Gossiping about these deviants allows the community to continually implicitly and explicitly discuss its norms. Marilyn Rose, in "Sinclair Ross' 'Foreigners'", argues that *Sawbones Memorial* undercuts the

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[34]In 1998, a Ukrainian identity may seem more within the category of ethnicity rather than race. I am considering Nick to be a racial deviant based upon the comments of several characters which inscribe him as being not white, and therefore of a different race.

story of ethnic triumph which Nick's return to Upward might seem to represent. However, I would argue that this novel is not about Nick's return to Upward, triumphant or otherwise, but rather about Upward's linguistic creation of Nick and the other inhabitants of the zone of abjection. Attention to the linguistic- pragmatics of the gossip shows that these deviant identities are continually in the process of being constructed. This follows Butler's belief that "[c]onstruction not only takes place *in* time, but is itself a temporal process which operates through the reiteration of norms" (10). Thus, even women long dead, like Edith and Mrs. Fox, are continually constructed through talk because their abjection is part of the community's founding repudiation. Juxtaposed with these objects of gossip's power is Dr. Hunter, the most powerful person in the community. Like Maisie, Benny, Nick and the others, he is an object of gossip; the town discusses his family life, his sexual activity, his future plans, even the imminence of his death. Yet, like *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*'s Gilbert Markham, Doc Hunter remains largely invulnerable to gossip. He is very much a speaking agent, a gossiping contributor to his own identity within the community, an identity which figures as "Normal", built against the deviancy of other characters.

Edith Hunter's deviancy relates to Doc's normality in perhaps the most direct way. She is constructed as an unfit wife, an identity which makes it clear what a fit wife should be. In the following passage Doc's old friend, Harry, and Dan, the newspaper man, are gossiping about Edith:

> "One thing for sure, if she'd treated him right he wouldn't have played around with Maisie. What do you think he married her for, listen to her thump the piano? Sometimes you could hear it right across town." (92)

Harry's initial statement presupposes that Edith did not treat Doc right, which his listener,

through conversational implicature, realizes is because she did not provide what Maisie provided. The "if" clause indicates that Edith was the initial actor in the situation, figuring Doc's actions as only a response to Edith's. In the next sentence, the use of the second person works similarly to a vocative, in that Harry is establishing communal agreement with his presupposed stance. In the third sentence, the second person shifts to the generic use as Harry establishes his credentials for making such statements. The modalized, projected clause "You could hear it," establishes Harry's gossip credentials as an on-site "witness" to the phenomenon of Edith's piano playing.

In an earlier gossip session, Dan's wife Nellie and her friend Rose contribute to the creation of Edith as a certain kind of deviant woman: a bad wife. As in the male gossip, among these women Edith is figured as someone with a problem, leaving Doc to be the husband who had no choice but to be unfaithful. Significantly, the conversation begins by finding fault with Doc, but quickly shifts:

> "He took Rip [the death of his horse] to heart a lot more than he did poor Edith. I can still see him at the funeral, not even a black tie."
> "Dan, I remember, was furious. We wanted something for the paper, a few details about her family, and the prodding it took to make him hunt up a picture!"
> "Although I suppose he had his problems. A strange woman -- thought herself better than the rest of us, better than him too, likely. And absolutely no sense of humour." (17)

Nellie uses the community's most common epithet for Edith, "poor," creating a sense of common judgement about this woman, her position and her life. She later moves from this vague epithet to an outright, unmodalized, unprojected judgement: Edith is "a strange woman" who thought herself better than the rest of "us". The intimacy-forming function of

gossip, in which an inner circle is created through the construction of "outsiders," functions at the linguistic level, as the collective noun "us" includes presumably the Normal women of Upward with the exclusion of Edith Hunter. The modalizing adverb "likely" appears only after Nellie makes a judgement relating directly to Doc. The inner feelings of this "poor" woman may be known without attenuation, but her relationship with Doc is approached with more caution.

After some discussion about her sense of humour, Nellie and Rose continue to discuss Edith's marriage, using presupposition in a way which excludes even the reader at this point in the novel:

> "When you think, though, that she knew, and knew everybody else knew too -- always hanging over her, the humiliation -- "
> "She could forget long enough to buy clothes and rig herself out in them. Remember the new outfits, spring and fall? The beaver coat, and then the Persian lamb? I suppose it was one way to get even." (17)

"Knew" is a factive verb, presupposing the clause which is its complement. In this instance, the complement clause is missing: she knew....[what?]. Thus, knowledge is presupposed to the extent that it is not even repeated in the conversation. Although what Edith knew is elided, the reader comes to know that the community believes Doc was having an affair with Maisie, which is the "secret" everyone talks about. The definite article presupposition, "the humiliation," may have performative effects. Everyone assumes that Edith is humiliated; clearly she *should* be humiliated, any normal wife would. This assumption of humiliation performs, or produces the humiliation. There is no suggestion that Doc might have been, should have been or would be expected to feel humiliated. And clearly he did not. The community's presupposition that "poor Edith" would feel humiliated is possibly a large part

of why she did.[35] Rose goes on to assume Edith's inner thoughts, again completely unattenuated by either modality or projection. The definite article "the" before "the outfits," "the beaver coat" and "the Persian lamb" indicate that these clothes exist within the community's memory. They are distinct items whose existence and importance may be presupposed. Nellie and Rose continue to discuss "poor Edith," constructing her as a bad wife:

> "A very handsome woman -- trust Doc -- and at least she knew how to wear clothes. The nose on her -- as if someone had trimmed it with a knife and ruler, just like a nose ought to be. Only so cold -- you've often said so yourself. Such lovely hair, and such a lot of it, but the way she used to draw it back. I've often looked at it and thought if it was only mine."
> "And he, I supposed, thought it was all just maidenly modestly -- in those days there was such a thing -- and that when he got his hands, etc., on her there'd be a great awakening." (18)

The most severe judgement which Nellie makes, that Edith was "so cold," is not modalized, but rather projected after the fact. Nellie grounds the comment in community consensus, reminding Rose that she shares this opinion which is moving to the realm of "fact" even as it is being spoken. The referent of "it" in the final sentence is similar to "the humiliation". The reader is not immediately aware of what is being presupposed. "It" is somehow related to wearing one's hair back; later, in a sentence which is both modalized and projected, Rose makes explicit what "it" refers to. She tells Nellie: "I suppose it was a case of what the books call frigid" (19). The nebulous "books" attenuate Nellie's claim; she is not naming Edith's condition, "the" books are. "Poor" Edith is thus diagnosed through gossip, as her condition as

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[35]This is assuming that Edith did feel humiliated. Because Edith's voice is completely absent from the text, the reader can only make this assumption based on the gossip about her, obviously a highly ambiguous source of information.

a bad wife figures to excuse Doc's infidelity.

Maisie is mentioned in virtually all the gossip sessions in which Edith appears. Together the two women, one overly sexual, the other perversely nonsexual, represent both sides of the deviant woman. Ironically, the initial basis of deviancy is the same; neither woman is expressing her sexuality in the socially sanctioned manner -- with her husband. Nellie and Rose gossip about Maisie; after having decided she has earned "the Scarlet Woman title," (19) they discuss her marriage:

> "And why hasn't she got her whatever his name was? Because a few months after they were married he caught her in the act and walked out. Not a word, just packed a bag and she never saw him again." (106)

This piece of gossip is notable for its complete lack of modalization or projection. What happened to Maisie's husband is community knowledge, undisputed fact. While it is highly unlikely that Rose, or anyone but Maisie and her husband *know* what he said or didn't say, this assertion is not questioned, indicating that this story is likely one which has been told many times, gradually achieving fact status through the re-telling. Rose continues, saying, "Doc, you know, wasn't the only one, oh no, there's a lot would swear to that. And not killing herself either. She could always afford a girl to help her, she wasn't the one who emptied the bed pans" (106). This statement seems to go beyond the community's accepted "facts" about Maisie as Rose projects the assertion both before ("you know")[36] and after ("there's a lot would swear") its utterance. Through conversational implicature, Rose is also linking the identity of the Scarlet woman to someone who does not work hard and therefore does not

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[36]This might be considered a type of comment clause, one which is a "stereotyped conversation filler" (Quirk et al. 779), rather than a projecting clause.

deserve the community's respect on that front either. The fact that Maisie could afford to pay someone to help her is intended to mitigate her contribution to the community and deny her access to the redemptive power of work agreed upon by the community. It is made explicit that Maisie's redemption must take place in public. The gossiping community is unwilling to create an identity for her apart from the Scarlet woman, unless it is privy to her spiritual rebirth. Rose proposes: "Talk her into coming to church, that's the way to do it. The first time or two I'd even walk in with her myself. People wouldn't forget but they wouldn't mind so much once they saw she'd come around" (107). The Scarlet woman must make her repentance public and absolute before she can be assigned another identity. The community waits for the narrative of the redeemed bad woman to be enacted.

In addition to the complementary "bad wife" and "other woman" created by gossip, against which the "upstanding" women of the community may be compared, a third type of abject woman exists in the form of Benny's mother, Mrs. Fox.[37] She is the fallen woman, who unlike Myron Holder, marries the father and attempts to move on, but dies because, according to Dunc's interior monologue, "Benny had come when she was married six or seven months and they never let her forget" (40). Gossip between Rose and Nellie, initially about Benny, turns to the topic of his mother, a woman long dead, re-performing the town's need to create and sustain the identity of this fallen woman:

> "More like his mother every day, now that at long last he's starting to lose the little boy look. Something about the mouth -- "

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[37]This woman is known only as Benny's mother or Mrs. Fox, reminiscent of Sinclair Ross' most famous female character, Mrs. Bentley, who "is inserted into a lexical set which in a sense obliterates her and which perhaps denies her a self sufficient to become the artist she has always wanted to be" (Cooley 103).

> "I know, mouth and eyes, a pinched look. I suppose she suffered, poor soul, more than any of us knew."
> "Well, it was her own doing. She brought it on herself."
> "That's harsh, Nellie. She was all alone, remember, without her mother."
> "And I don't just mean because she let Sam Fox talk her off the straight and narrow. He did the right thing by her. She was a respectable married woman just like the rest of us. She had the right to hold her head just as high. It was the grand way she tried holding it higher, talking down to everybody -- and the way she took it out on poor Benny and Sam." (44-45)

Speculation about Mrs. Fox's inner feelings, at least the ones which would inspire sympathy, are projected, as Rose only supposes she suffered. In the following sentence, the referent of "it" remains unspoken, as the significance and reason for her suffering is known and agreed upon within this community. Rose's use of the vocative "Nellie" directs her dissent to a specific consciousness, linking her immediate audience directly to her statement. Nellie's reply, beginning with the conjunction "And" appears to completely disregard Rose's objection and continue where her previous utterance ended. The sentence which follows "And" contains presupposition within presupposition as the fact that Benny's mother "let Sam Fox talk her off the straight and narrow" as well as the concept of what exactly "the straight and narrow" is are presupposed. The community appears to be in agreement about who the instigator of the sinful act is (Sam Fox) and also who is truly to blame (the woman who let him get away with extramarital sex), for the future Mrs. Fox is the agent of this sentence. Nellie continues to presuppose both the existence and the understood meaning of "the right thing". Both phrases, "the right thing" and "the straight and narrow" encode an array of assumptions; the fact that neither phrase is questioned speaks of the depth and extent of the community's agreement on these ideals. The community, through discussing the specific example of Mrs. Fox, is able to reiterate its norms and expectations. Through the example of

Benny's parents, the standard of a quick marriage after pregnancy can be articulated without having to be overtly generalized and prescribed. Nellie's speech goes on to presuppose, to state without stating, that the group to which she belongs, "us," consists of "respectable married wom[e]n". While ostensibly stating that Mrs. Fox did indeed belong to this group, it is clear that it is only the constructed identities of outsiders, like Maisie, and borderline cases, like Mrs. Fox, that allow the "insider circle" of respectability to exist.

The product of the indiscreet act between Sam Fox and his young friend is Benny, one of the only "others" to have a voice in this text. His sexuality is discussed in several different gossip sessions, always in general, nebulous terms. Two unknown gossips, for example, speculate on the idea that Benny's mother could have had an abortion (although this word, of course, is not spoken): "Better than going through with it and then doing away with herself. And poor Benny -- the way he's turned out he wouldn't have been much of a loss either" (71). Benny, like Maisie and Edith, receives the epithet "poor," a sympathetic gesture which ensures the community will not, cannot, be empathetic. The Poor Bennys are kept at a clear distance. Definite article presupposition in the form of "the way" indicates a community consensus about Benny's sexuality and the manner in which it controls his identity, or rather, is his identity. This utterance's assumption that Benny's life is not valuable goes unchallenged, as the unnamed listener instead challenges the fact status of Mrs. Fox's suicide, saying, "Of course, it might have just been an overdose" (71). Clearly, there are disputed claims within this gossip microcosm, but the assertion that Benny's life is worthless is not one such claim.

The first hint the reader gets that Benny is a sexual deviant comes early in the novel

as Doc is speaking to Caroline about Stan: "And he [Stan] shouldn't sing with Benny's band for the simple reason that he can't sing. It's terrible, and everybody knows about Benny. Benny's alright, twice the man some who make fun of him are, but a town this size, sooner or later there are bound to be some raised eyebrows" (28). Doc's use of nebulous-agent projection gives the assertion wide, almost undisputable truth value. What exactly everybody knows remains unspoken, which has the effect of making what is known the only thing to know. Everybody knows (all) about Benny because everybody knows about his (reported) homosexuality. Like Maisie, the Scarlet woman, Benny is the Homosexual. Through conversational implicature, Doc is able to say without saying that since Stan has no musical reason for playing with the band, the reasons must be sexual, or at least that is what people will say, which is essentially the same thing. Speaking with Doc, Benny parodies the town's gossip about him, capturing its voice and speaking about himself in the third person:

> "Friendly, lots of fun, easy to get along with -- Benny can liven up the dullest evening. Everybody knows about him, everybody winks behind his back. Sometimes he catches them, but nobody minds. A very broad-minded town -- musicians, you know, a lot of them are like that." (102)

Benny echoes the very phrase Doc uttered earlier, "Everybody knows about him,"(28) locating him as a member of the gossiping community that created Benny's identity, although Doc would profess to be above it. Benny articulates the power of gossip to create truth, saying "nobody wants to be seen getting too friendly with him" (102). The panopticism of gossip creates identities within Upward. Like Dunc and Caroline, Sarah Gillespie worries about her son Stan associating too closely with Benny. In her interior monologue, Sarah thinks: "Sooner or later there'll be talk, maybe there is already for all I know, and it's going to

make it hard for Dunc and Caroline" (68). In this sentence, "talk" exists without the agency of speakers. Its existence is introduced by "there," and later, "talk" is the referent for the pronoun "it" and is what is going to make things difficult for Dunc and Caroline. Gossip has a life of its own, seemingly. And an ability to create identities which is so powerful it affects not only the person being talked about, but his entire family and potentially the family business as well.

Benny, the sexual deviant, is frequently associated with Nick, the racial deviant, although, as Dunc notes, "We put him [Nick] and Benny on the same side, the other side, together, but they weren't on the same side....he [Nick] was strictly on his own side" (38). But in the gossiping creation of a racial other, sexual deviancy plays a role. Butler suggests that race, like sex, is created through "regimes of regulatory production" which "contour the materiality of bodies" (17). The same regulatory production, gossip in this case, which helped create Benny's deviancy creates Nick's race. The text is filled with conflicting references about whether or not Nick is "one of Upward's own," as the community is continually in the process of constructing race and difference. The anonymous tour guide[38] tells Mrs. Clarke how she feels about Nick being the town's new doctor:

> "No, I don't remember him either but just between ourselves I'd as soon it was one of our own. I wouldn't carry on and make a fuss like some are doing but still I don't see why. You know, they've got their own way of looking at things, funny ideas, and now that we've got the hospital there must be plenty of nice young doctors like ourselves who'd be only too glad...Once a hunky always a hunky....Nick the Hunky -- it's going to be awfully hard for people to forget." (33)

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[38]Although the reader is not told her name, it is stated that she is the assistant secretary of The Ladies' Aid.

The speaker's use of collective nouns creates multiple boundaries of exclusion. Her phrase "just between ourselves" establishes an intimate collectivity of two, as though she were going to say something transgressive, but instead she reiterates the majority opinion. In the first two sentences, the first person singular is repeated four times as the speaker articulates what could be a contested opinion -- implicit negative judgement upon her fellow "White" community members. In the third sentence, however, the projection switches, as the speaker seeks to reestablish a connection with her audience. The collective pronoun "they," of course, creates the second zone of exclusion. Nick is not a person, a potential resident and doctor, but a class, a type, one of "them"-- a race. The speaker's second use of "ourselves" is at once more inclusive and more exclusive than the first usage, for while it includes more than herself and her immediate listener, it also excludes on a less arbitrary, more definitive basis than who happens to be listening. The line between "ourselves" and "they" has been linguistically created with a broad brush. The final statement is the only one which is completely unattenuated. It is a fact for this community-- a fact made real in every sense through talk -- that people will not be able to forget Nick's racial identity.

The constant repetition of the epithet Nick the Hunky[39] at once creates a category

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[39]Marilyn Rose traces the history of the term "Hunky": "The *OED* for example, lists its first recorded use in this sense [to name a foreigner] as a New York *Herald* account in 1896 of the Pennsylvanian use of the term 'hunky' (as derived from the word 'hun') to refer to 'Hungarians, Lithuanians, Slavs, Poles, Magyars, and Tyroleans.' (In Canada, 'Russians,' 'Ukrainians' 'Ruthvenians', 'Galacians,' 'Slavs,' and 'Bohemians' would be added to the list.) From the turn of the century, then, through the end of the Second World War, the use of 'hunky' and its synonym 'bohunk' developed as a derogatory term meant to categorize the uneducated and unskilled Eastern European immigrants to North America as low, rough, and loutish" (93). It is interesting to note then, that by the strict terms of this definition, Nick, as a doctor and a captain in the army, would certainly not fall into the category 'hunky'.

through a specific example (Nick), and locates that specific example within that category. Although we do not know the circumstances surrounding the decision, we are told that Nick has changed his name to Miller, "his own name, just short of a few Ukrainian z's and s's" (21),[40] and as Dennis Cooley notes, the epithet "Hunky," serves to undermine Nick's attempt to re-name himself: "The appositive, 'Hunky', reconstitutes the actual name, 'Nick', and constricts it. The construction consigns the name to some realm of fixed and inescapable limits that will not allow Nick even his own new naming" (104). Butler discusses the effects of naming on the creation of gender binaries, the "girling" of a newborn, arguing that the initial naming "it's a girl," is continued: "that founding interpellation is reiterated by various authorities and throughout various intervals of time to reenforce or contest this naturalized effect. The naming is at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm" (8). Certainly, this normative power of naming is at work as Upward's gossip articulates Nick as a Hunky. The only characters to locate Nick as "our Nick" (Caroline quoting Dunc 56) and "an Upward boy" (50) are the Gillespies. When Caroline defends the hospital board's choice of Nick, Mrs. Harp reaches back in time to more firmly place Nick outside the boundaries of normalcy:

> "His mother, Mrs. Gillespie, used to wash for my mother. Big Anna. She wore a black handkerchief and red socks. She couldn't even speak English; she just used to grunt." (50)

The use of the vocative, in this instance, in a formal tone, serves to contact the audience even

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[40]When asking what Nick's new name is, Rose uses projection in distancing manner, asking, "What is it *he calls himself* now?" (emphasis added 21). The source of the name is thus located in a specific, very interested consciousness, rather than being presented as an unmitigated fact.

as the speaker is repudiating Caroline's point of view. Through conversational implicature, the audience must infer the significance of the black handkerchief and red socks, presented as the costume of an outsider. In this passage, it is significant that nothing is presupposed; Mrs. Harp is treating Caroline as a complete gossip outsider, someone who knows nothing about the community, and so must be told everything through assertion. Caroline is being linguistically constructed as someone who supports Nick only through ignorance; there is no other way to comprehend such a position. Indeed, at the end of the conversation, Mrs. Harp notes: "You've got a lot to learn, Mrs. Gillespie. It's not hard to see you've never known a hunky" (50). Yet at the same time, Mrs. Harp assumes that Caroline is familiar with the assumptions producing the implicature about the significance of a black handkerchief and red socks. This suggests that Mrs. Harp takes these assumptions as universal or self-evident, at least to someone of her own race. After establishing his "hunky" lineage, Mrs. Harp returns to the epithet, this time with an indefinite article, indicating the broad similarities which must exist between "Big Anna" and her son.

Contrary to the statement of several characters, critic Marilyn Rose argues that Nick is "white," saying that "Upward's categories ('white' and 'non-white') have permitted Nick to slip through, for he is 'white' and cannot, by whatever verbal sleight of tongue Upward attempts, be confined to the category of 'non-white'" (97). Such a statement assumes an essentialist view of race, that Nick's racial identity somehow exists apart from the act, verbal and otherwise, of categorization. Ross' text, on the contrary, highlights the constructed quality of race, particularly when read with a 1990s sensibility which considers Ukrainians to be "white". The concepts of "white" and "non-white" do not exist apart from the conditions and

examples decided upon by the community. There seems to be consensus on the "fact" that Nick is a hunky, and two places in the text indicate that for many, this identity is synonymous with "non-white". In a gossip session between two anonymous men, the community's conception of Nick as a racial deviant is expressed in the most extreme terms:

> "What I'd like to know is how. Right through the bad years, everybody flat broke -- I can remember when a tin of pork and beans was living high, a Sunday treat -- and he ends up a doctor."
> "They do things a white man wouldn't, that's how. Same as the Chinks -- live on anything, live like pigs -- it doesn't bother them. And summers I suppose he'd find a job."
> "But there were no jobs. He left just when things were starting to get tight, he must have been fifteen."
> "They stick together, cousins, friends, half a dozen to a room, three to a bed. Somebody I suppose would let him bunk in and give him a bowl of cabbage soup." (53)

Many racist ideas about Chinese and Ukrainian people are clearly accepted in this gossip community as fact. The generalized statements about "them" are completely unmodalized and unprojected: "They do things a white man wouldn't,"[41] they "live on anything", "live like pigs" etc. There is no doubt or sense of uncertainty about what "they" do or don't do. The direct comparison between Chinese people and pigs is not only not challenged, the speaker's lack of modality indicates that he doesn't even subconsciously consider that it would be. However, the propositions most closely concerning Nick, who is a specific member of the "they" class, and a person known to these men as an individual, are attenuated. The speakers express their uncertainty through modalization and projection about their statements concerning Nick. These statements are presented as speculation through the statements, "I

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[41]Although "wouldn't" is a modal, in this utterance it is not modalizing what "they" do, thus, it is not attenuating this claim. Therefore, the speaker's assertion about what "they" do has fact status.

suppose"(stated twice) and "he must have been". Throughout the novel, the character of "Hunkies" is rarely disputed by any character, nor is the "fact" that Nick *is* a hunky. The dispute about whether or not Nick is a suitable replacement for Doc Hunter revolves around the extent to which Nick is thought to be capable of mitigating his hunky identity. One man argues that Nick is an acceptable choice because, although he is Ukrainian, "[o]ur old friend Nick won't just stop at being white. He'll bleach himself," (55) expressing a widely held opinion that "Hunkies" try harder to be civilized, refined, professional, precisely because such things do not come naturally to a Ukrainian.

Nick's racial deviance does not stand apart from sexual deviance, an illustration of Butler's contention that homophobia, misogyny and racism "require and deploy each other for the purpose of their own articulation" (18). Largely through conversational implicature, Nick the Hunky is Nick the sexual deviant. In a gossip session between two anonymous men, Nick's suitability as a doctor is discussed:

> "We didn't bring them in to take over and go to college. How's your wife going to feel if she gets sick and has to tell him things -- maybe about her and you? Or take off her clothes for an examination? They've got funny minds and don't fool yourself, he's still a hunky. It would take a lot more than Medical School." (54)

The agent in the first sentence is the collective noun "We"; once again, the speaker is creating grammatical circles of exclusion. The utterance "He's still a hunky" presupposes that Nick was a hunky as the speaker asserts that he still is one. Thus, Nick's identity as a racial deviant and through implication, a sexual deviant, is again reiterated. The norm is expressed through its negation in the embodiment of Nick. Questions about Nick's sexuality are not confined to male gossips. Later in her conversation with Caroline, Mrs. Harp discusses why "Big

Anna's" son should not be a doctor: "How do you think the women of this town are going to feel about discussing things with her son -- intimate things?" (50). Interestingly, like the men who imply Nick's sexual deviance, Mrs. Harp words her judgments in the form of a question. For these speakers, who represent the extremes of the community's hostility towards Nick, perhaps it is safer to proceed with innuendo in question form, which cannot be challenged the way an assertion can. The speculation about Nick's sexual suitability can be introduced into the gossip narrative more discreetly, more efficiently, through this type of rhetorical question.

For at least two members of the community, Nick's genetic identity is questionable, although the question itself is too trangressive to be formed. In one gossip session between Dan and Harry, they discuss Doc's treatment of Nick and his parents:

> "He was worried about Nick?"
> "Well, I suppose t.b.'s something you didn't play round with."
> "Just between ourselves, did you ever wonder -- "
> "No, Dan, I didn't ever wonder. When it comes to that kind of wondering you can do enough for two." (95)

The partially formed question about Nick's parentage remains both unasked and ultimately unanswered.[42] It is the secret that the text keeps -- unknowable. For Nick as Doc's son would make visible that the place of the abject is inside the subject. Nick returns to Upward because he is Upward. The community as subject depends upon his abjected identity, which might literally, genetically, have originated in the most powerful member of this community-subject. As Upward prepares to have a "hunky" doctor, the gossiping community continues

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[42]In his interior monologue, Doc makes it clear that, although he paid for Nick's medical school and other expenses, and refers to himself as "Daddy" (138), he does not *know* if he is Nick's father. Indeed, Anna herself may not know: "...although give her her due she maybe didn't know herself. At least not for sure - maybe John all the time was getting a little rock and heave in too" (136).

to construct racial deviants to inhabit the abjected zone. As one Upward citizen notes: "You know what this town needs right now? A Jew....one at a time they're fine, same as the hunkies" (55). One at a time racial deviants are necessary and will be created, at least partially, through gossip.

In sharp juxtaposition to the inhabitants of the abjected zone, Edith, Maisie, Mrs. Fox, Benny and Nick, exists Doc Hunter, the embodiment, in many ways, of the norm. Throughout the course of the novel, we learn how his life touches those Abjects: Edith was his dysfunctional wife, Maisie is believed to have been his mistress; he made the choice not to abort the foetus which became Benny, and he believes himself to be Nick's father. From his position of power, Doc Hunter controls much of the gossip about himself, certainly influences the town's creation of his identity as a powerful, sexually experienced, compassionate but tough god-figure. Doc Hunter is figured through gossip as one who does not care about gossip, who is above the town's petty secrets and disclosures. Rose notes that "He didn't care about the gossip" (21) and his friend Harry tells Dan, "Doc's never been the man to worry about what other people say" (85). Such an image belies his use of the gossip. Critic Charlene Diehl-Jones argues that within this town, "nonconformity to a sexual norm obviously poses a powerful threat: Upward's secrets include Doc's promiscuity" (84). Yet, Doc's promiscuity embodies a sexual norm. As a powerful man, one whose wife has been figured as sexually incompetent, Doc is necessarily promiscuous. Doc manipulates this identity in the opening pages of the novel, telling his friend Harry that his sexual attentions "kept a few [women] out of North Battleford asylum," (9) thereby placing his sexual prowess in the realm of his services as a healer.

Doc's affair with Maisie is well documented within Upward's living history. And the double standard which precipitated his reputation as a ladies' man and hers as a whore occurs at the very sentence-level construction of this gossip. Rose and Nellie discuss how Doc used to sit with Maisie at the restaurant, "sitting close to the window to make sure everybody would see -- deliberately giving people something to talk about" (20). This act, figured as Doc and Doc's alone, is thought by Rose to be "His way of showing what he thought of us and our self-righteous little world. And I suppose we had it coming" (20). In these sentences, Doc is not a part of the Upward community, but rather stands apart from "us" and "we"; the implication being that Doc is not himself self-righteous or petty. Later, Nellie moves the specific into the abstract, generalizing from Doc's situation to remark: "Trust the man to get off scot free -- it never fails" (20-21). The act of the man getting off scot free is figured as agentless -- it is its own agent. No one is actively figured as "letting him off". These two members of the gossiping community cannot recognize the way in which their own talk contributes to this age-old performance of repudiation and social capital. Doc not only "gets off scot free," he gains from this affair, if in no other way than his moral superiority over Maisie. Re-telling the circumstances of what these women refuse to give the respect of calling an affair, Rose summarizes: "And if he was in the mood -- well, he was the Doctor" (20). His actions towards Maisie in public are interpreted as an act of sympathy, an act of kindness consistent with the Doctor's identity as a healer. After noting that "poor Maisie" was the one who paid, even though Doc stuck by her, the women proceed to talk about Doc's other relationships within the community: "Although give him his due it wasn't only Maisie. He was always on the side of the underdog, the down-and-outer" (21). Through

conversational implicature, Maisie is categorized as "the underdog", "the down-and-outer". Nellie and Rose seem blind to the irony that Doc, who contributed to Maisie's identity as an abject, is now being praised for treating such a socially distasteful woman with some measure of kindness.

Like Mr. John Knightley in Jane Austen's *Emma*, Doc is a consummate gossip. Although it is likely that Mrs. Bates, Emma, Harriet and Nellie and Rose are remembered as the gossips by the novels' respective readers, these two powerful men are constantly judging and speculating about others. Doc tells Harry that Dunc and Caroline's baby has eczema (11), tells Caroline that Stan shouldn't sing with Benny's band (28), confides to the new teacher that Mr. and Mrs. Harp are afraid of Nick, and discusses how they behaved as children (83-84), tells Dunc the story of Cliff Dean's suicide and his girlfriend's abortion (115) and so on. Doc takes advantage of the intimate knowledge of people's lives which is inevitably accorded a doctor to increase his value as speaking agent within the gossiping community. Furthermore, the linguistic-pragmatics of Doc's gossip reveal a man with such authority he need not attenuate his claims. For example, Doc gossips with Harry, contradicting Harry's attempt to make a stereotyped connection between two Englishwomen:

> "Yes, but you're not going to compare Caroline to Mrs. Pim. It's not easy you know, coming a war-bride to a town like Upward with that accent and a lot of the women just lying in wait because she'd snapped up Dunc on them. A good girl, trying hard and keeping her head. But that day just the same it showed." (11)

This passage is completely without modalization. Even his direct response to Harry's remarks, in which Harry did compare Caroline to Mrs. Pim, is not "you can't compare" or "you shouldn't compare," but simply that he is not going to make this comparison of which

Doc disapproves. Doc's judgement of the women ("lying in wait") as well as Caroline ("a good girl") are presented as unmediated facts, rather than as coming from Doc's consiousness. Doc Hunter's profession, his position in the community indicated by the epithet which has replaced his name, gives him access to the town's secrets as well as the power to make judgements as though they were diagnoses. Sociologist Jorg R. Bergmann argues that women are associated with gossip because the occupations they held such as servants, maids, washerwomen, gave them access to private information (65). Yet, Ross' novel clearly illustrates the gossiping power of a traditionally male- dominated profession. The idea of gossip as the voice of the disenfranchised does not hold in this novel. The truly disenfranchised do not speak; the middle class, men and women, gossip to keep the disenfranchised that way, and the person with the most power also has the most powerful gossiping voice.

This novelistic gossip is encoded within the secondary genre of literature; gossip as primary speech genre is played out within this secondary genre. As such, the reader becomes a citizen of Upward, is inscribed with the values and assumptions of that community. The same events are gossiped about with different speakers, giving the reader a sense that she holds capital in this gossiping economy. For example, when Harry tells Dan about how he used to get his bread from a neighbour who was English (86), we can name this woman based on our "overhearing" the opening conversation between Harry and Doc (11). The existence of "Big Anna's" black handkerchief and red socks are initially presupposed for the reader (21); when Mrs. Harp, addressing Caroline as an outsider asserts their existence, the reader has more community "knowledge" than even Caroline. Such small moments of reader

recognition occur throughout the novel as we become members of this gossiping community.

In addition to these small moments of recognition, the reader also comes to intimately understand the wider intersection of narrative that make up the community's gossip cannon. We can place unnamed characters within their respective stories. It has been noted that gossip relies on the proper noun. Talk about an unknown, unspecified person's foibles is not gossip; one must be able to know the object of the talk for gossip to be occurring. Yet the proper name need not be stated. Through community background knowledge, it may be assumed to be known. Near the end of the novel, Doc engages in an extended gossip session with Dan, discussing various cases, medical and otherwise, in which he made decisions. In each story, the figures are unnamed: a woman dying of cancer, a girl whose father stabbed her attacker, an incestuous father who gets his daughter pregnant -- stories within whose telling are encoded numerous community values and norms. They are not, however, gossip, for these narratives do not classify or admonish particular members of the community. Yet the final story told by Doc also has unnamed protagonists, but is gossip. This late in the novel, the reader is a fully functioning member of this gossiping circle and recognizes the story of Benny's mother without a proper name. Initially it seems to be a generic abortion story, but when Doc tells what became of the mother: "she suffered and eventually she cracked. And along the way she made others suffer too," (118) the reader, a gossip insider, knows this is part of the continuing gossip narrative of Benny's mother.

In a sense, the novel dares us to judge the characters even as they are judging others. Armed with information which comes almost exclusively from gossip, a reader may make conclusions about Maisie, Edith, or Nick without ever having "met" them. At least one critic

has seemingly fallen into the interpretive "trap" that this gossiping novel leaves for the reader. Speaking of Nick, Marilyn Rose writes: "In 'bleaching himself' (55), in eradicating all traces of his parents, his history, and his ethnicity, it seems evident that Nick Miller has not so much beaten Upward as joined it on its own terms in an act of erasure, of silent complicity with the very categories he appears at first glance to have successfully resisted" (97). While this statement is modalized ("seems"), Rose takes as evidence the town's gossip about Nick ("bleaching himself"). The reader does not *know* anything about Nick. One can safely assume that he did change his name, but the motivations, circumstances, feelings surrounding this act remain unknown, indeed, unknowable within the limits of this text. Nick is not a character who may be analysed, but is Upward's verbal creation, the construction of which the reader overhears.

Sawbones Memorial's inscription of the reader as community member can be seen as representative of the process which occurs in many gossip-centred novels, including the three previously discussed in this thesis. As Bakhtin reminds us, "Form and content in discourse are one" (1981, 259). Like gossip in the "real" world, fictional gossip gains its power through exclusion. Characters are excluded as the reader comes to have more gossip capital than they; knowledge is created as the reader constructs her way into the fictional community.

Conclusion

"To fear gossip is to fear that one is becoming a character; an 'other' in someone else's fiction." (Gordon 723)

The gossip in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *The Age of Innocence*, *The Untempered Wind* and *Sawbones Memorial* enacts and inscribes various community norms and standards, often through the creation of an inhabitant of the abject zone. Although certain disenfranchised characters appear to gain agency from this type of talk, ultimately they are contributing to the inculcation of the very values which enact their disenfranchisement. While gossip has been shown to create intimacy and form bonds of community within these novels, these circles of inclusion are necessarily formed through the exclusion of another. Thus, the celebration of gossip as a source of female power in particular, or the power of the socially vulnerable, in more general terms, would seem to neglect these negatively conservative and prescriptive functions carried out by gossip. However, it would be simplistic to simply label gossip as either wholly negative or wholly positive. Particularly with a speech genre as tied to context, as inscribed with intimacy, as given to subtlety, and as full of variation as gossip is, it is surely unwise to make absolute judgements about its social functions and effects.

In each of the novels discussed in this thesis, as well as many others which are concerned with gossip, gossip is discussed by the gossipers as both an agent in and of itself, or as an agentless, almost ephemeral phenomenon. In L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green*

Gables, for example, the narrator notes, focalized through the inveterate gossip Mrs. Rachel Lynde, that Anne was a new comer, "concerning whom all sorts of stories and suppositions had gone abroad in Avonlea" (62). The gossip is, as it were, in the air, entirely removed from the originators of these speculations and narratives. In Jane Austen's *Emma*, Mr. Weston, after telling a piece of information he was asked not to, notes that he doubted "that it would be of any consequence; for 'such things,' he observed, 'always got about'" (378). This combination of agency on the part of the speaker coupled by its erasure in the content of the speech, is a pattern which speaks to the power of gossip. Although the need to deflect the act of gossiping away from onself is partly due to the social sanctions against this activity, I believe it can also be seen as a genuine response to the enormity of gossip in our lives. Gossip seems to emulate the eternal narrative in which we are a part. It seems larger than any one, or even a multitude of speakers. Critic Homer Brown discusses the ambiguity that gossip is authoritative without an author. This ambiguity, he argues "is emblematic of its [gossip's] riddle of narrative voice (and perhaps of language itself): who (or what) speaks (writes)?" (579). Once spoken or heard, the words of gossip seem to take on a life of their own. Much like the norms and values they help inscribe, gossip seems to have originated in some primordial space, inaccessible to the individual speaking or listening agent. The tendency of gossipers to view gossip as an outside agent which "talks" norms, identities, and communally held assumptions, apart from the actions of the community itself can be seen as both a testament gossip's power and as source of much of that power.

Within the secondary speech genre of literature, gossip of course, plays a fundamental role. The realist novel employs gossip as a plot device, for character development, as a

thematic concern and as a way to inscribe readers within the novel's community. Although unexplored in this thesis, a valuable area of study in relation to gossip and literature is its role in enriching the heteroglossia of the novel. Gossip within novels can be seen to enact Bakhtin's notion that centripetal forces of the unitary language operate in the midst of the centrifugal forces of heteroglossia:

> A unitary language is not something given [*dan*] but is always in essence posited [*zadan*] -- at every moment of its linguistic life it is opposed to the realities of heteroglossia. But at the same time it makes its real presence felt as a force for overcoming this heteroglossia, imposing specific limits to it, guaranteeing a certain maximum of mutual understanding and crystalizing into a real, although still relative, unity -- the unity of the reigning conversational (everyday) and literary language, "correct language." (1981, 270)

Within a single gossiper's utterance lives the words, phrases, registers of others; often the words of the original speaker (if there is such a thing) are layered with the registers of others as the information is passed from speaker to speaker. Thus, a maturely formed piece of gossip may contain the voices of a number of community members speaking from different subject positions, which simultaneously encodes the accepted community norm or standard.

Gossip enacts the heterglossia of the novel within itself not only as it passes amongst characters, but also as this primary speech genre interacts and is encompassed by the secondary speech genre of literature. The linguistic analysis of this thesis was primarily restricted to gossip as the direct speech of characters. However, an investigation into the various methods of inscribing gossip within a novel (free indirect discourse, gist, etc.) would offer new perspectives on the way in which the reader is inscribed as a member of the novel's community as well as the manner with which narrators often function as chief gossips. Furthermore, looking at the way in which gossip may be satirized or parodied by the narrator

would also be of interest in terms of locating the ideological assumptions of the narrator or the text itself.

Sociologist Sally Engle Merry argues that in modern society, although gossip is pervasive, "it seems to have little deterrent effect and is generally of minor concern" (272). Although none of us is likely to be subject to the same relentless surveillance by the same group of people as was Myron or Helen, if we think of ourselves as belonging to not one, but several gossiping communities, the deterrent effect of gossip seems far from inconsequential. In the fractured post-modern society, one is likely to inhabit, not one, but several social identities. Certainly office gossip, or work gossip, effects one's understanding of office norms and therefore one's office behaviour. So it is, I would argue within family gossip circles, the gossip among sports teams or social clubs, etcetera. Gossip's power has not diminished; it is merely splintered into smaller factions of watching, speculating people. Each of our varied subject positions may be informed and shaped by gossip, even as each subject position itself gossips within that sphere.

Recently, gossip has become a subject of popular celebration, particularly with respect to women. This act of passing positive judgement upon an activity almost universally reviled for centuries raises numerous questions. From magazine articles[43] to newspaper columns[44] to

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[43]For example, Brenda Peterson's "What Gossip is Good" in *New Age Journal* November/December 1997 in which she suggests that gossip "can be a path to the soul".

[44]For example, Robert Fulford's October 15, 1997 column in *The Globe and Mail* in which he argues gossip has a higher purpose and wishes people would think kindly of "one of [his] favourite art forms". Interestingly though, Fulford does not deny gossip's role in social control, but rather celebrates that too: "Children learn how people act, and should act, by eavesdropping on the gossip of their parents".

print advertisements, gossip is being given a positive spin. Perhaps in a diffuse response to some feminist scholars' acclamation of the empowering aspects of gossip, it is currently being celebrated in two separate advertising campaigns clearly directed at female consumers. The perfume company Coty is currently marketing a perfume titled "gossip," with the slogan: "Give them something worth talking about".[45] This advertisement is interesting (and disturbing) on many levels, not the least of which is its celebration of women as the *object* of gossip. In this instance, the woman is not even achieving limited power through being a speaking subject. Rather gossip is celebrated as a community norm -- you will be talked about; make it interesting. The photo accompanying the text depicts a conventionally attractive white man and woman running across a bridge. The way to be interesting and valuable in this gossiping community is clearly to be (seen) with a man. In a related advertisement, Philip Morris Incorporated is marketing their cigarette for women with the following text: "Be nice to us before we go to the ladies room. You will be discussed. Virginia Slims: It's a *woman* thing."[46] These advertisements sell the 'sexiness' of gossip as an empowering discourse while inscribing the target audience as concerned about conservative values including their attractiveness towards men, as well their overwhelming concern about men in general. Furthermore, both advertisements use the idea of gossip to construct a community cohesive enough to be treated as a target audience. As a woman reader, I am to understand what a "woman thing" is. In this sense, the cigarette advertisement employs some

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[45]The website is an astoundingly blatant attempt to market gossip as empowering while simultaneously inculcating conservative values surrounding the importance of 'catching a man'. It can be viewed at http://www.gossipbycoty.com

[46]I found this advertisement in *Premiere*, March 1997 p. 25.

of the generic forms of gossip, attempting to create an intimacy with the reader through presupposition. These advertisements suggest that the concept of gossip as an empowering discourse for women has already been appropriated by the capitalist ideology and the mass media, perhaps the latest incarnation of the dominant class being best served by gossip. Furthermore, the advertisements suggest that far from being less important in post-modern life, gossip and even the idea of gossip continue to play an important part in the inscription of gender roles.

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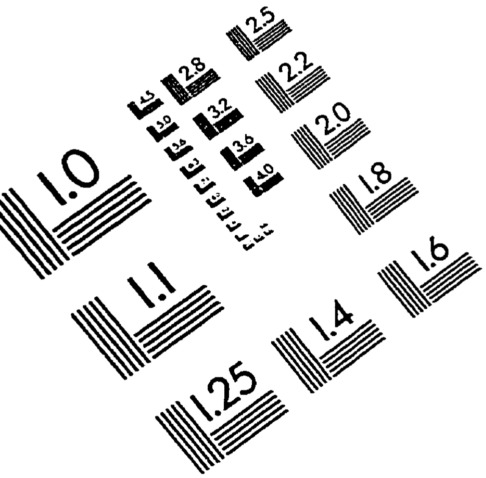

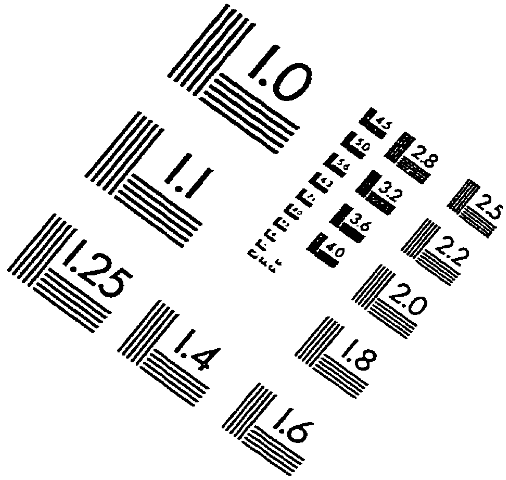

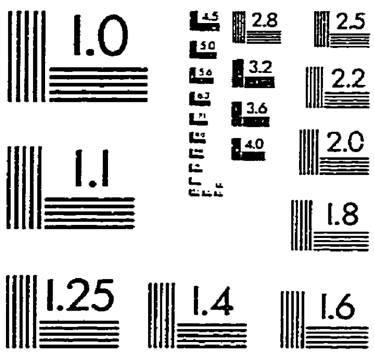

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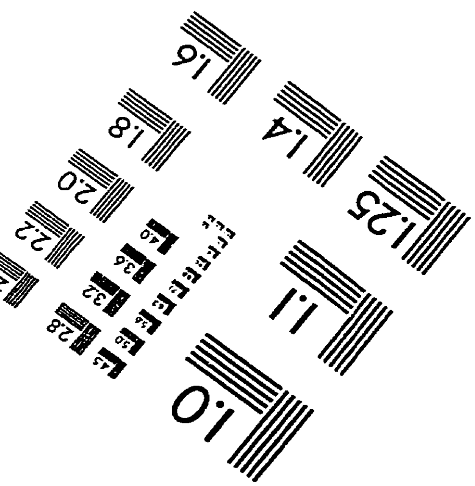

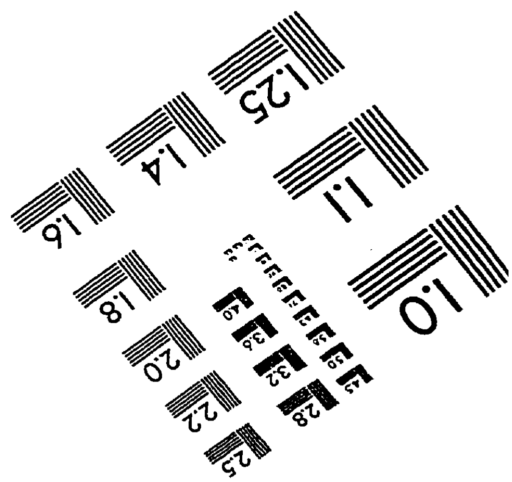

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