



## The Romance of Fisherwomen in Antebellum New England

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<sup>25</sup> In October 1849, after twenty-year-old Caroline Barrett returned home from a ride with a flirtatious young man along Lake Sunapee, New Hampshire, she versified in her diary. Her entry for the day unmasked an ambivalence toward this suitor, who both captivated and intimidated her. Of the passionate relationship and its challenge to her sobriety, she wrote:

Says he—‘Could we but have our wishes,  
We both would turn to little fishes,  
And make our home down in the deep  
Where dreamy shadows calmly sleep’.

I only sighed and pressed my heart,  
To ease the pang of Cupid’s dart——  
And thought how sad would be our fate,  
Should we get caught with hook and bait.

By imaginatively casting herself in the guise of a fish, Barrett was able to give expression to her apprehensions: falling prey to the lure, the “hook and bait” of

love. Barrett's evocation of the fishing metaphor in constructing images of the courtship ritual still seems familiar enough today—so much so that it has become hackneyed. Yet, for Caroline Barrett and other young women of marriageable age in the decades prior to the Civil War, the comparison—with its grave undertones of “getting caught” and inevitably consumed—resonated with fears of seduction, beginning an untenable courtship, or making a regrettable and irrevocable choice in a spouse. The allusion thus was not, in the antebellum years, devoid of complexity.<sup>1</sup>

The theme of fishing echoed throughout both the published fiction and private writing of Barrett's time and place. This theme was redolent with meaning for men and women passing through the uneasy and at times painful transition from “the first phases of love,” through courtship's “crisis of doubt,” and toward eventual wedlock.<sup>2</sup> The personal papers of antebellum New Englanders reveal that men and women of all classes together enjoyed fishing and, on occasion, they centered their courtship and even honeymoon entertainments upon this sport. As one Rhode Island mechanic wrote shortly before his wedding in 1853: “Went to a pic nic [*sic*] with Miss Annie. . . . We took a sail and fished for scup[paug.] Stole several kisses between the bights [*sic*].”<sup>3</sup> Such experiences were reflected in pamphlet and story paper fiction published mainly in Boston in the 1840s. Targeted at its regional market, such fiction often presented nubile fisherwomen as central characters.<sup>4</sup> These characters faced the same dilemmas as their living counterparts: flirtation versus commitment, ardor versus moderation, power versus powerlessness.

This essay intends to demonstrate that the fictional fisherwomen created by antebellum New England authors and marketed by Boston-based publishers embodied the tensions inherent in antebellum courtship. These included the need to discriminate between infatuation and lasting affections, to temper desire while investing the relationship with romantic, even erotic love, and to balance deliberation and anticipation of a future married life.<sup>5</sup> Proficient in reeling in large and numerous fish, the novels' typical heroine magically garners the rapt attention of her male voyeurs.<sup>6</sup> While the men fall inescapably under her spell, she remains aloof, in control of her emotions. Precisely because she has mastered the art of hook and bait, she never becomes the victim of seduction. If she does decide to court and marry her captive, she does so only after carefully testing her lover's sincerity. These female characters, empowered by their own dexterity in fishing, in turn empowered the young female reader by example: learn how to catch or be caught yourself.

Below we will analyze some of this fiction that addresses Victorian notions of falling in love and courtship, within the context of contemporary practices of fishing. Historicizing the fiction avoids “a psychological and presentist reading” which, as one literary historian claims, “fails to account for the cultural attitudes and behaviors derived from a particular historical moment.”<sup>7</sup>

The historical moment considered here is the mid 1840s, when after a relative absence of romantic literary precedents, representations of women fishing

suddenly appear in Boston fiction. True, schoolgirls immortalized the “Boston fisher-lady” in numerous surviving needlepoint artifacts and many New Englanders (including women) read some of the classics on angling, such as Juliana Berners’ *Boke of St. Albans* and Izaak Walton’s *Compleat Angler*.<sup>8</sup> But with few or no references at all to women as fishers and decidedly lacking in romance or sensuality, these works have obvious utilitarian functions.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, most American books and journal articles on angling called upon pastoral traditions, or confined themselves to practical matters: where to fish, what type of bait or flies to use, how to tell differences between species, and so forth.<sup>10</sup> In the gift books and annuals exchanged as a courtship ritual, engravings or stories about fisher-girls (not women) became commonplace, but these served to ennoble working-class occupations.<sup>11</sup> Contributors to these volumes never illustrated romanticized workers fishing.<sup>12</sup>

The novels that do imbue fisherwomen with sensuality emerged from the literary stables of Boston pamphlet novel and story paper publishers, like Frederick Gleason and the Williams Brothers.<sup>13</sup> Gleason, long forgotten as the



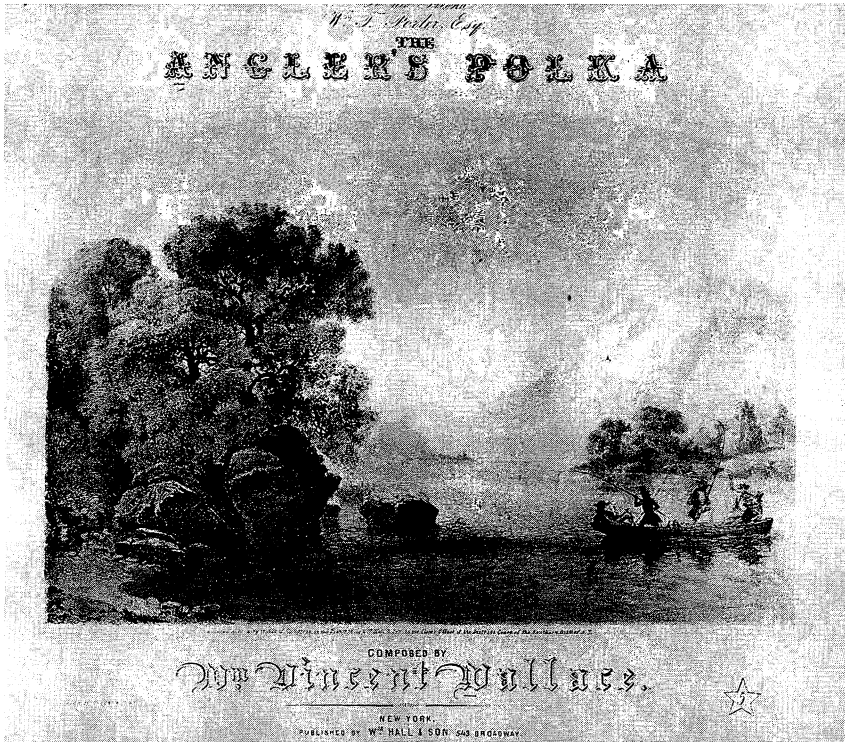
**Figure 1:** Drawing by Caroline Sturgis Tappan. **Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.**

most prolific publisher of American fiction titles in the 1840s, launched one of the most profitable and widely-read antebellum story weeklies, *Flag of Our Union*, featuring popular novelists such as Joseph Holt Ingraham, Osgood Bradbury, and Maturin Murray Ballou.<sup>14</sup> Ironically, the stories Gleason promoted that celebrated the values of the New England countryside were transported there by the very railroads that defiled it.

The simplest explanation of the fisherwoman phenomenon is that it was part of Boston publishers' search for local color in their attempt to "Americanize" (actually regionalize) literary content; fisherwomen just happened to be elements of the scene that was captured.<sup>15</sup> Fishing during courtship or honeymoons was institutionalized at resorts like Nahant, just north of Boston. This vacation spot, which inspired novelist Osgood Bradbury's tale of passion and revenge entitled *The Maniac Beauty; or, Love at Nahant*, attracted outings of men and women to fish from its rocky bluffs. Joseph Lye, a Lynn shoemaker and sometime boat man, took out several couples on fishing parties to the resort on balmy summer days in 1819-1827. At Nahant in the mid-fifties, Pauline Agassiz mentioned one of these jaunts, in a juxtaposition of activities within and outside prescriptions of the women's sphere: "after sewing a little while[,] Alex took us all (five besides himself) out in his boat. We caught some beautiful Medusee for Father." Eliza Southgate Bowne took part in similar fishing voyages near Nahant in which several couples participated. "Caught but few fish," Bowne lamented, "yet pleasant notwithstanding." All in all she conceded it was "a most charming day."<sup>16</sup>

Insofar as such fishing expeditions took place just about anytime or anywhere with fertile waters, they were not always related to courtship nor were they always romantic. But because they were ordinary adventures, they provided the novelist with at least some credible foundation for spinning tales about fisherwomen. Caroline Cary Curtis of Boston, for example, expressed a mixture of exhilaration and disappointment which usually distinguished these ventures: "rolling & very uncomfortable seats, & very good chowder, & a great deal of noise." One mild summer day in 1840, Alvah Goldsmith, a wagonmaker, took his wife fishing with another couple at Faulkners Island and reported, after a day of natural "curiosity": "Wife was sea sick & I was some in the PM." The cruelty of killing living creatures also bothered some fisherwomen: "One day this week I caught 2 trout but they were so pretty I put them back again in the water," wrote Lettie H. Lewis, who nevertheless noted, "I begin to consider myself quite a fisher."<sup>17</sup> In truth, what seems to have made fishing fascinating was the strange ambivalence it evoked—at once enthralling and disturbing, romantic and mundane.

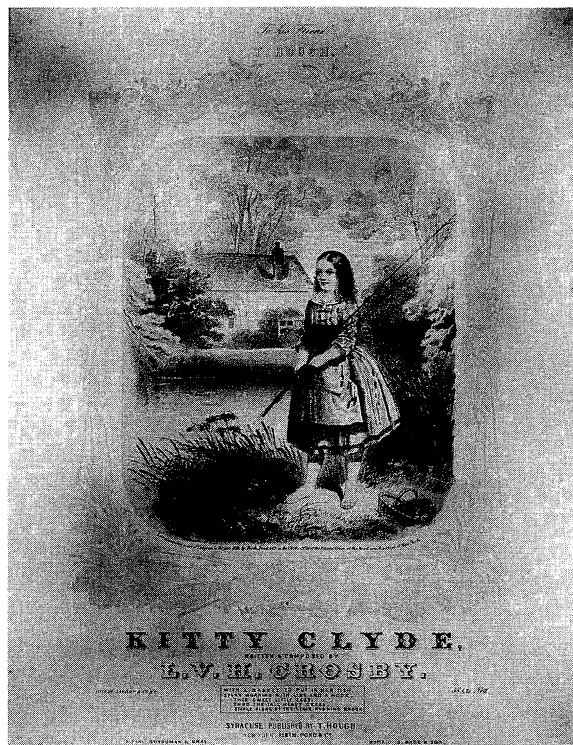
Such prosaism, however, disregards the various romantic embellishments that authors supplied to the underlying social reality.<sup>18</sup> These enhancements, notably those bordering on the erotic, suggest that more was at work than mimesis or social verisimilitude. While this literature interested the reader who may have



**Figure 2:** Sheet music cover for William V. Wallace’s *The Angler’s Polka* (New York: William Hall and Son, 1859). Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

gone fishing while courting, it also reached a broader audience of New Englanders, who recognized as their own, the fisherwoman’s predicaments concerning falling in love. Men as well as women could relate to the fisherwomen, for these male-authored narratives highlighted strongly developed heroes and an “omniscient” point of view (not that of the fisherwoman herself). The lessons these stories taught spoke to both genders.<sup>19</sup>

New England’s socioeconomic transformation before the Civil War lent added significance to the fishing motif: an appeal to the “environmental imagination” of the reading population. Although recreational fishing was common on the Schuylkill, Delaware, and Ohio Rivers, the increasing destruction of New England’s pristine environments due to early industrialization invited authors to romanticize the vanishing settings there.<sup>20</sup> The demise of unrestricted fishing, especially for trout, whose spawning patterns were disrupted by dams for water wheels, coincided with the advance of manufacturing. Moreover, with industrial growth, subsistence fishing suffered as pollution and dams depleted stocks. New



**Figure 3:** Sheet music cover for L. V. H. Crosby’s *Kitty Clyde* (Syracuse: T. Hough, 1854). *Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.*

England states responded with laws to regulate inland fishing, with little success.<sup>21</sup> Catching fish therefore recalled an earlier period of innocence, freedom, and harmony with nature.

With idealization of the countryside, portraits of women fishing, both real and fictive, came to play an important role. Thus a trait shared by fictional fisherwomen was a preference for natural settings and a distaste for urban ones. Several fictional fisherwomen in this “era of the romantic Indian” were Native Americans with strong ties to a traditional woodland lifestyle—sharp contrasts to the victims of federal removal in the 1830s. But, more than conveying nostalgia, nature symbolized virtuous womanhood. As one fictive lover lavished on his “nymph of the forest”: “I have found purity, innocence and natural good taste.”<sup>22</sup>

Of the writers responsible for these works about fisherwomen, perhaps no one so much retained the realism of fishing, while heightening it with romance, than Osgood Bradbury. Born in Maine, where many of his stories are set, he authored several novels about the virtues of New England country life. Some of

his stories treat urban issues, too, of course, and in them he occasionally calls upon his background as a lawyer and Whig politician in Cumberland County, Maine, and in Boston. Similarly, his attention to the lore of fishing hints at a firsthand knowledge of it. Despite the mimetic foundation of his fishing scenes, their references to courtship disclosed the author's own quest for a spouse. For example, in 1844 Bradbury voiced concern over publicity surrounding his novels which praised his worldly wisdom, but implied he was old. "Said author is still a bachelor," the *Daily Mail* reported, "and therefore feels quite sensitive that these allusions to his age may tend to paralyse his efforts to raise himself from the state of 'single blessedness,' and thicken the clouds which now hang over his matrimonial prospects."<sup>23</sup>

His 1845 novel, *Alice Marvin; or, the Fisherman's Daughter* encapsulates the antebellum sensibility regarding courtship.<sup>24</sup> Set on Hampton Beach, a shoreline that was soon to be commercialized, the story interweaves love and fishing. In it, Alice Marvin, the illegitimate sixteen-year-old daughter of a poor "Old Salt," takes to the sea with her young beau, Edward Jones, a competent fisherman. Alice compensates for the unfortunate conditions of her birth (her mother was seduced) by empowering herself as a fisherwoman. "Alice's eyes sparkled at the recollection of the feats she had performed, in catching mackerel with her father, and thought she should like to try her skill with Edward." But her father, delighted with Jones's fondness for Alice while noting his daughter's indifference, tries to underscore the fisherman's desirability as a mate. "'There isn't scarcely [a] gal in old Hampten [*sic*], but would bite at his hook,'" Marvin chides his daughter. At her father's exhortation, Alice goes out fishing with Jones, somewhat reluctant to deepen the relationship, but eager to gather the fruits of the sea.<sup>25</sup>

Bradbury employs the metaphors of angling to describe courtship's "first phase" as Alice and Edward sail far away from land. That phase manifests itself as a competition between fish and bait. On land, Edward had the upper hand. He noticed he could arouse Alice's jealousy by talking about other women; this parlor-room banter "was pretty good bait to put on his hook." But at sea, the tables were turned. As he watches Alice artfully reel in a huge cod, "under great excitement. . . , the red blood in her lovely cheeks spoke more eloquently than words;" Edward concludes that Alice will not be easily swayed by his wooing, that her mastery over fish might mean emotional self-control and immunity to his enticements. He is nonetheless entranced and unable to repress his own feelings. With uncharacteristic impulsiveness, he blurts out: "'Oh, Alice, how shall I bait my hook to catch you?'" Alice withholds and fails to give Edward any clues.<sup>26</sup>

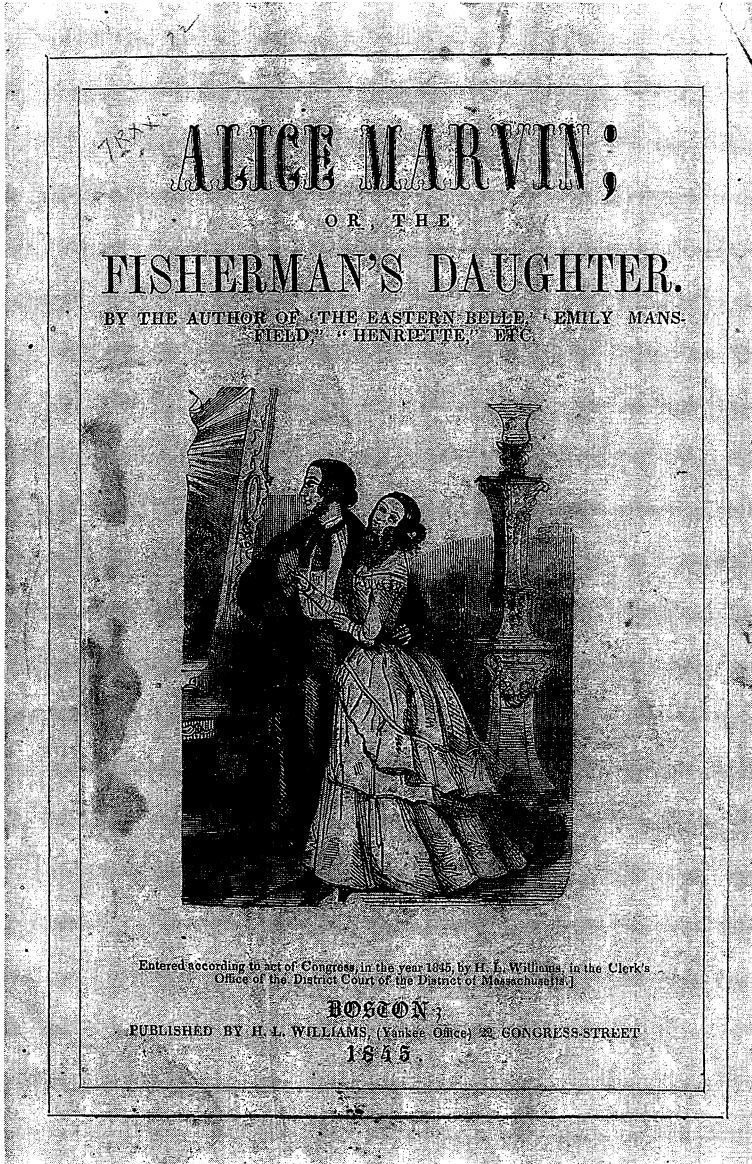
Although discerning and savvy to the ploys of male admirers, Alice becomes the victim of innuendo about her "improper" conduct on the seas with Edward. A gossip, one who in real life might have condemned our verse writer, Caroline Barrett for her lakeside tryst with a gentleman, says of Alice: "'Has she not gone fishing alone with a young man to-day? Is she not in the same boat with him, and

away from the sight of all human eyes? The ocean is a fine retreat from everybody.” The gossip adds, “if she was with a fishing party. . . , it would be entirely a different affair.”<sup>27</sup>

Certainly many New England women went on fishing parties, and here Bradbury’s mimeses is striking. Occasionally romantic in nature, fishing parties, as opposed to single couple fishing trips, protected the social standing of individual women who might otherwise be looked at askance. As one historian notes, “because many courtship activities took place in open view, the public supervised them.”<sup>28</sup> Hezekiah Prince, Jr., of Thomaston, Maine, registered one such party in his diary on 9 June 1826: “About nine o’clock Mr. Cilley, Mr. Starr, Mr. Kelley and myself started for Owls Head with each a lady.” He continued: “We fished some and I had the satisfaction of pulling in the first two that were caught, Mr. Cilley one, Mr. Starr one and Sarah Sampson one.” To complete the romantic picture, he immediately adds that during the angling “the girls sung.” The presence of several pairs of eyes monitoring unmarried gaiety diluted whatever sexual connotations sequestered fishing may have held for Victorians. Less “innocent,” because it happened on Sunday, but respectable because of the presence of a married professional, was James A. Brown’s experience: “Afternoon, have enjoyed myself very much, was rambling over the Hills with two Young Ladys [*sic*], one of which was the aforesaid Schoolmadam[e]. We picked some berrys [*sic*] and caught some trout, not a very good occupation for the Sabbath.” Sometimes, even large numbers of guests at such parties could not assuage the apprehensions of New England suitors. “Now then another thing dear Sarah,” Wallace Clement wrote his fiancé in 1857, “I thought after I wrote that letter I was so sorry about saying anything about your going to that fishing party.” Many such outings took place among antebellum New Englanders; it becomes at times impossible to sort out young lovers from those either married or related as kin. One eighteen-year-old recorded, for example, a mixed company fishing trip that lasted all day; though one member of the group was a naturalist preoccupied with the scientific finds of the day, one couple on the excursion later exchanged May bouquets full of poetry, flowers, and trinkets.<sup>29</sup>

These real-life fishing “dates” did not always lead to marriage or even courtship, but in Bradbury’s fiction they often do. He takes his Alice Marvin to the altar by the end of the novel, but not without complications and resistance. Alice unexpectedly falls in love, much to her chagrin, with a handsome and wealthy “scientific sportsman” equipped with expensive gear and a book knowledge of hunting. Hoping to conquer fish and game with his state-of-the-art apparatus, he senses an opportunity to snare Alice as well. She cannot resist the bait that he dangles in front of her: a life of study, leisure, and luxury. This causes a crisis of conscience in Alice; Edward hearkens her to the seas that she loves and that empower her, while the “weekend hunter” beckons her to the pleasures of the city. Alice transcends her infatuation and chooses Edward and the life of a fisherwoman—the only life she realizes she can live.<sup>30</sup>





**Figure 4:** Cover engraving for Osgood Bradbury's *Alice Marvin; or, the Fisherman's Daughter* (Boston: H. L. Williams, 1845). Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Through romanticized fisherwomen heroines like Alice Marvin, Bradbury not only expressed nostalgia for the unfettered coastline and the virgin forest and field, but also a sense of the “changing historical realities” of country and city “interrelations.”<sup>31</sup> With factories booming in Lowell, Lawrence, and elsewhere, railroads pressing ever deeper into the interior and along the coast, and farmers producing increasingly for the market, this fisherwoman epitomized a simpler way of life. Alice’s face-to-face community provided her with a husband who not only adopted her father’s vocation, but kept her within her native town, away from a complex world of the city in which strangers abounded. The prospect of being wrested from home and family was destined for women who married upwardly mobile or cosmopolitan men. As Carroll Smith-Rosenberg reminds us, “to remain in the village of one’s birth frequently meant spinsterhood and economic dependence.” Compounding separation from the childhood home was the inevitable segregation of a housewife’s sphere from her husband’s—a product of the emergent work/home dichotomy.<sup>32</sup>

Real-life newlywed Mary Pierce Poor, uprooted from her native Brookline, Massachusetts, to move to Bangor, Maine, far away from parents and siblings, turned to fishing within the transitional phase from honeymoon to settling in a new town. Like Alice Marvin, Mary Poor exhibited her deftness in fishing and “hooking” an ambitious and promising lawyer for a husband after a long and restrained courtship full of playful but nonetheless earnest testing. Out in the cataracts of Maine with Henry Poor she writes:

At first I wondered how they could take pleasure in the death of such beautiful creatures, but at last quite forgot, in the excitement of seeing who could capture the greatest number . . . Martha and I joined in the sport. I caught the largest trout that was taken. Poor creatures! Their bright and beautiful existence was cut off & they were fried for breakfast the next morning! What a change for them, but what was death to the fishes was sport to us, so they did not die in vain.—I shall always be glad I have seen this beautiful waterfall, it has opened a sort of new era in my experience. . . .<sup>33</sup>

Here, Mary Poor saw in the natural setting a respite from the chaos of her own life passage from an unmarried to a married state.

The solace in nature that Mary Poor as a newlywed sought and found resounds in Bradbury’s other novels. Landscapes in which fictional fisherwomen comfortably move about until they must face the lure of urbane men furnish settings for *Mettallak: The Lone Indian of the Magalloway* (1844) and *Hutoka; or, The Maid of the Forest, A Tale of the Indian Wars* (1846). In these, Bradbury fashions his heroines in the form of Native Americans with fishing competence that not only baffles seasoned anglers, but causes them to fall instantly in love.<sup>34</sup>

In pursuit of a way of appealing to audiences of courting age while discussing his favorite topic—the economic and environmental transformation of New England—Bradbury devised this unusual female character. On the one hand, it was not as far a stretch of the imagination for Victorians to visualize such a fisherwoman given that several tribes in New England prior to the “changes in the land” brought about by colonial settlement subsisted upon hunting as well as fishing. One New Englander living in “Indian country” with his wife, wrote home about a fishergirl:

I made Lot [the “headman of the tribe”] understand that I wanted to go and catch some fish. He sent a yung [*sic*] girl, his daughter to shew us. . . . The girl (Mittetteectee) whom I called Hetty soon learned us their method of catching nippers of which plenty might be caught from the rock at a little distance.<sup>35</sup>

On the other hand, this type of fisherwoman was identified with a world unsullied by the intrusion of Europeans and still strongly reminiscent of tightly knit communities. Even as they disassociated themselves from occupations on the river, lake, and sea, Native American women became stereotyped as experts with a hook and line and, therefore, symbols of a once bucolic world. The plight of “Indian fisherwomen” as sketched by novelists gained the sympathy of middle class white readers who had to choose wisely in a marriage partner, especially one who might take them from their own community and family.

Within this fictional universe, the “Indian fisherwoman” stands as a particular type of character. Like her white counterpart, she was adroit and beautiful; however, she did not always reach a happy ending in her courtship. As Lucy Maddox explains of narratives involving Indians, “no matter where the writer begins, and no matter what his or her sympathies, nineteenth-century analyses of ‘the Indian question’ almost always end . . . at the virtually impassable stone wall of the choice between civilization and extinction for the Indians.” For the fictive “Indian fisherwoman,” the dilemma was likewise an impossible one: “catch” the white man and subsequently disempower oneself by becoming “civilized” (i.e., assimilated) or die by the end of the story.<sup>36</sup>

Keoka, the heroine of Bradbury’s *Mettallak*, is one such character. This granddaughter of an old tribal chief fears the white man and carefully evades his lair by becoming a fisherwoman. “Her grandfather had shown her how to lure the sly trout to the treacherous hook,” Bradbury writes, and during these fishing “excursions” Mettallak “would often impress upon the mind of Keoka a few lessons in moral duties,” among which was: “beware of the *craftiness of the white man*.” Keoka took heed and mastered the art of “catching” rather than being caught by her would-be seducers. Frederick Searsmont, son of a manufacturer and more a poseur than a skillful angler, quotes freely from Isaak Walton, equips

himself with the most expensive fishing gear, and sets off self assuredly to conquer the trout of Maine's backwoods streams and, of course, Keoka. He had turned romance into a sport and "he felt quite sure that he could make a conquest of any female heart which might interest him. . . ." <sup>37</sup>

Sophisticated as his angling assemblage may be, a bewildered Searsmont finds he cannot catch any trout nor can he ever "catch" Keoka, with whom he falls in love while watching her fish. He spies her landing one fish after another with rudimentary fare: worms, hooks, and "wrought stick." Like Alice Marvin's great beauty, Keoka's was enhanced by "the excitement of the sport, [which] had thrown the red current from her heart into her face, and suffused her cheeks with a rich healthy glow." Upon deciding he must have her, he asks "Old Mike" to arrange a meeting leading to a fishing match. "That gal has got . . . fire enough in her eyes to burn off any wood-lot," the old woodsman claims; vocalizing yet another stereotype of Indians, he drifts off with "'and a bosom—. . .'" This ignites in Searsmont an uncontrollable lust, kindled further by his glimpse of Keoka singing and bathing in a woodland lake, "below the basin in which the trout play their gambols." Keoka's nudity is spotlighted by the author in a stock image that has its roots as far back as Columbus's journal. "Having reached a shallow, she gradually raised her beauteous form from the water." <sup>38</sup>

Needless to say, Keoka easily wins the contest that Old Mike referees. As clever in love as she is at fishing, she rebuffs Searsmont, who seizes her with a libidinous kiss after the match. Confident of her preeminence in catching rather than being caught, she exclaims "think not to lure me with such glittering bait as you use to catch the incautious trout!" <sup>39</sup> Ever cautious, Keoka shuns Searsmont's persistent advances; he is finally content to profess spiritual and transcendent love for this elusive fisherwoman. Keoka, as an "Indian fisherwoman," however, must pay a price for her self-possession and power in the relationship. She sinks into a failing, withering state and, longing to be reunited with her mother in the afterlife, she dies of consumption at the hand of her author.

For the marriageable reader, Keoka personifies restraint and level-headed behavior in courtship. She, like Alice Marvin, refuses to be tempted by city men with their complex assemblages of fancy charms for both fish and women. She also imitates Alice in her decision to remain behind in the secure world of the natural. However, Keoka, emblematic of the plight of Native Americans forcibly torn from their cultures, departs from the typical white fisherwoman in her tragic ending. The denouement allows the white reader a cathartic moment: one's own quandry, to go or "stay behind" was not quite so crucial nor desperate as Keoka's. <sup>40</sup>

Another angler-intruder succumbs to the superior fishing talent of a young woman in Bradbury's *Hutoka*. *Hutoka* mysteriously appears in the woods to Jim Parsons, an occupant of a military outpost who is full of malice for her tribe. He is engaged in a losing battle with a hefty trout and, struck by *Hutoka*'s beauty, he drops his line. "In a moment she was beside the astonished angler, and seizing his

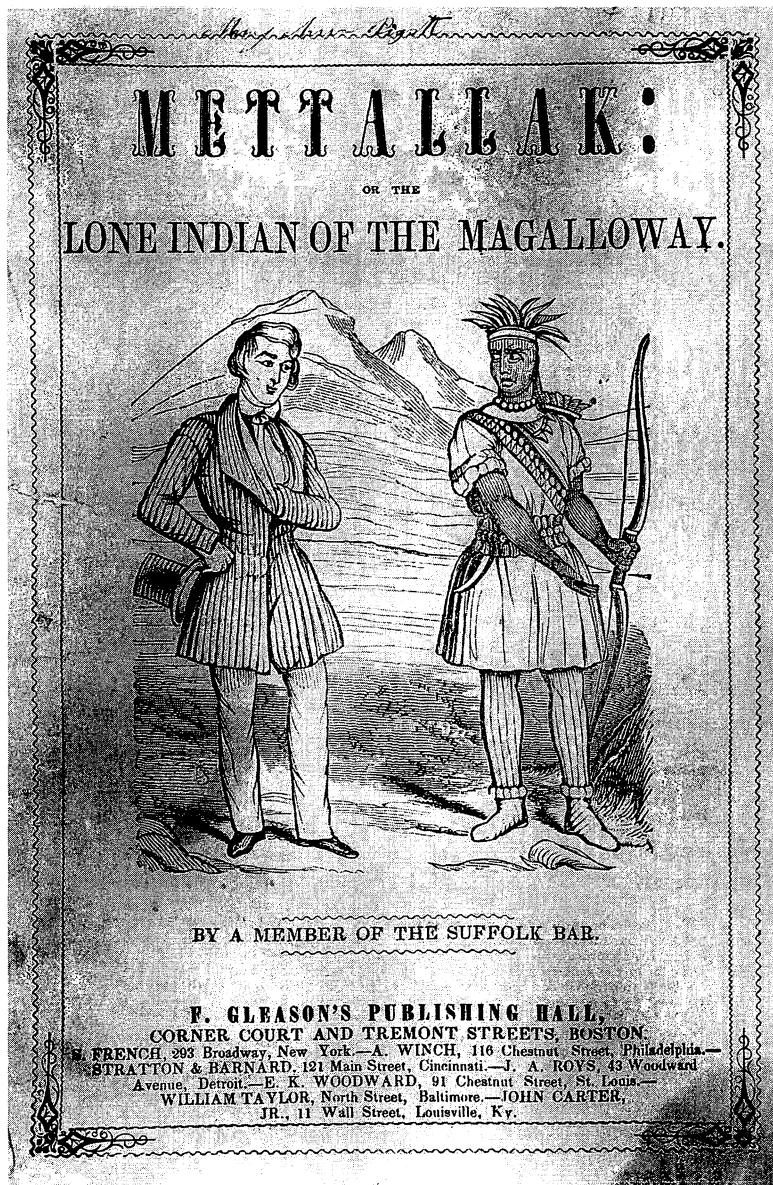


Figure 5: Cover engraving for Osgood Bradbury's *Mettallak: or, the Lone Indian of the Magalloway* (Boston: F. Gleason's Publishing Hall, 1849). Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

fishing rod, she pulled out the trout which had fastened himself upon the hook . . . [and] presented it to the love-stricken Parsons.” Hutoka not only knows how to tussle with a fish, she has the physical strength to reel it in. The act not only enamors him, it miraculously assuages long harbored resentments. “Hating the Indians as he always did, and swearing vengeance upon them as he had a thousand times, yet he now felt strangely about the regions of the heart.” Consequently, Parsons has no trouble leaving behind his graceless lover, Dorcas Rand, who “would have stubbed her toes, and stumbled if she had attempted such a performance,” in order to marry Hutoka, the “Springing Fawn.”<sup>41</sup>

Hutoka, though instructed like Keoka to beware of the white man, nevertheless falls in love with Parsons. In doing so, she forsakes the accomplished warrior called Sebattus, who her father wishes would “catch” her. Sebattus, though not untutored in fishing, is still no match for Keoka when she reels in the largest trout in a contest. “Ah! Hutoka beat you this time,” her dismayed father declares. “Just as he spoke Sebattus felt a bi[t]e, and pulled, but the trout escaped,” a symbol of his own inability ever to win Hutoka’s love. Hutoka marries Parsons after her father is killed in an ambush upon the garrison. Unlike Keoka, who will not marry a white man, this “Indian fisherwoman” eludes the author’s death sentence through miscegenation or assimilation; she settles down on a bucolic farm in Maine.<sup>42</sup>

Similar statements about preindustrial New England expressed through portrayals of beguiling fisherwomen can be found in the work of other Boston pamphlet novelists. For example, in the 1844 novel, *The Midshipman* (by another native of Maine, and scion of a shipowner, Joseph Holt Ingraham), Frank Winter, a man on the up and up, falls in love with a commodore’s daughter as she lands a large trout. He admires her hair, loose and flying in the wind, and finds her uninhibited motions inviting. Upon catching a nibble, Winter noted that “All the while she was merrily laughing at her spirited contest, her cheeks flushed with exercise, and her figure bold and spirited in all its attitudes.” Out of curiosity, Winter extracts information from others that this mysterious fisherwoman “swims like a mermaid.” Despite the fisherwoman’s initial spell on Winter, he resists her power over him. As he stands agape at the accomplishments of his beloved fisherwoman, he realized the force of this image: “the capture of the trout which he had witnessed was but a figure of his own captivity.”<sup>43</sup>

Because the midshipman of Ingraham’s novel recoils from the power of the fisherwoman, he falls under the power of vice: rebelliousness, gaming, and piracy. When he leaves his fisherwoman love-stricken and heartbroken for more worldly employment in the navy, he is subjected to a series of life threatening and demoralizing interludes. He assaults an officer at sea and, while in Marseilles, he acts as the catalyst in the suicide of a woman whose bank he breaks in a ruthless gambling match. After the incident, Winter starts for home. Separated from the navy for his insubordination, disillusioned with city life, and distressed over his role in the death of the banker, he sees all things come right in the end and returns to his fisherwoman and the New England countryside he so loves.

The theme of masculine disempowerment seen in this novel's beginning is mirrored in a misogynistic stanza from the 1834 *Hartford Pearl*. Women are prideful and vain; that is why they seek to capture men with their feminine wiles. The intelligent male rejects such invitations:

Wilt thou not fish for cod or perch,  
Or salmon leaping with the tide?  
Ah! no! thou seekest nobler game—  
Frail man must gratify thy pride.  
Thy charms, sweet maid, are not enough,  
For man is made of 'sterner stuff.'<sup>44</sup>

The ability to charm while snaring power also shows itself in *Mettallak*. Searsmont, during a sleepless night, wrestles with erotic visions of Keoka "dancing before him. . . , hanging from the limb of a tree. . . , bounding . . . like a deer." He verbalizes his crisis of disempowerment: "I have always felt strong, but now I'm weak," he complains. "Is this the nature of love? . . . My locks are shorn, and my boasted strength has fled."<sup>45</sup>

The motif of male disempowerment in courtship amid the clash of cosmopolitanism and rural traditionalism figures in another story, Ingraham's *Edward Austin* (1842). It opens with an idyllic fishing scene "by the side of one of those romantic trout-streams characteristic of New England," but this pristine beauty portentously mocks the urban lifestyle that leads Austin, one of the leisured gentry, to his dreadful end in a duel. Austin, himself an angler, has mastered his emotions and habits; a "total abstinence" man with mild manner and studious air, he catches fish with ease. Roundy, a servile but contented companion of the aristocratic hero, immediately sees the struggle for power as Edward hooks a trout: "You're fixed now, Beersheba. . . . If I had you there you might have some chance o' seeing your parents again, but when Master Nedward is t'other end o' the line then you may jest [*sic*] as well make your will and take it coolly."<sup>46</sup>

The heroine of this story, Anne Laurens, Edward's betrothed, is also an angler. "The fishes seemed to fight for the pleasure o'being caught with the flies what she put on," one admirer declares. Like other fictive fisherwomen, she surpasses her lover: "I have not had much success to day [*sic*]," Edward complains to Anne; "it is because you were not with me to select and fix my flies," he says.<sup>47</sup> Unlike the others, however, Anne lives in the city and convinces Edward to leave his farm and seek his fortune in New York. After joining Anne there, he eventually surrenders to gambling and drinking, which leads to his fatal duel. Both she and Edward lose in the end; upon his death she despairs, relinquishes all self-control, and goes insane.

The moral of this story is that fisherwomen hold the ultimate reigns of power in courtship and because they do, they must faithfully set an example to extol traditional ways of life, community, the countryside, and true love. By yearning

for urban life and the economic power therein (in these novels men usually come from the city), Anne transgressed an important code of behavior for fisherwomen and created a power imbalance that destroyed both herself and Edward. The message for readers was, of course, more complicated. Women generally depended upon men to provide economic support—therein lay the source of men’s power within courtship—but “romantic love . . . gave women some emotional power over men.” Although the Victorian woman assessed her future husband’s ability to support her and worried about his financial success, being overly critical defied the rules of courtship. Anne did so, when her love of the urbane outweighed her fealty to nature and, by implication, her unqualified devotion to Edward as a gentry farmer.<sup>48</sup>

Elizabeth Cary struck a balance in real-life courtship that Anne would not: she maintained an allegiance to the natural, even as a Bostonian. In the spirit of fun, she criticized the scientific lens through which her fiancé (Louis Agassiz) viewed nature, but prudently deferred to his selection of profession. In the role of the fisherwoman, who speaks lovingly to the very fish she hooks, she teases Louis: “Did I tell you that I had the other day a very pretty present from Uncle Wm. Gardiner, bearing a device particularly appropriate for you,” she wrote shortly before their wedding in 1850: “a silver fish knife and fork, and on the blade a little fish swimming along as tranquilly as if there were no such things in the world as hard hearted naturalists, to disturb such innocent enjoyment for the sake of science.” Here she counterpoised herself against the emerging ichthyology of the antebellum years. As formal and even amateur scholarship focused upon the evolution of natural forms, women, largely outside the scientific establishment, constituted voices of the imaginative function of fishing. Beneath the jocular tone lurked a long term tension between the two, for, as her husband’s principal amanuensis (her notes on his lectures were the source of many of his publications), she feared her “picturesque” sensibility might affect the scientific rigor of his thought. However, in this case Elizabeth’s foray into the male sphere of professional research was instrumental to her husband’s career.<sup>49</sup>

Fictive New England fisherwomen also challenged prescribed femininity. This comes as no surprise given what Karen Lystra has called a “blurring of separate spheres” in courtship.<sup>50</sup> Fishing apparently broke through the cultural coding that deemed many other activities gender specific, even in courtship. Indeed, the quintessential vehicle of the women’s sphere, *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, carried stories on the topic.<sup>51</sup>

One novel goes so far as to explore the constraints of the cult of true womanhood in debilitating a “natural” femininity. Alonzo Tripp’s pamphlet *The Fisher Boy*, published in 1857, long after the triumph of the new gender prescriptions, contrasts a young man’s desire for the rugged and free life of an ocean-bound fisherman with the relentless draw toward land by the local women who roam the coastline and streams of early nineteenth-century Cape Cod. One scene, in which a vessel docks for “washing” (i.e., removing salt accretions) only to let the fishermen stray “off towards the Fishing Flakes, attracted thither by the



young damsels so busy there,” sums up Tripp’s vision of women unhampered by the dictates of domesticity:

. . . in those days, the practice prevailed among the fishermen of employing young women to help at the flakes. . . . Not unfrequently the wives and daughters of the crew, skipper and shoreman, and even of the owners themselves, did not feel too good to lend a helping hand. Indeed, oftentimes, some fair young daughter, the pride of the neighborhood, whose father, it may be, in solid wealth, could outweigh a score of some of your puny city misses, too delicate to look a rough Northwester full in the face, might have been seen among the numbers.<sup>52</sup>

Bradbury and Ingraham also idealized the earthy movements and lack of cosmetic artifice in their fisherwomen. Alice Marvin, for example, who as a child always went fishing with her father, later tried to protect her complexion from the ravages of the wind and sea by staying indoors—until she fell for her fisherman lover, Edward. Grace Ellingwood in *The Midshipman*, used “all her strength to hold her grasp, while she each moment drew him [a trout], in spite of his plunges, nearer and nearer to the boat.” Such are hardly images of the “steel-engraving lady” which appeared on the covers of many pamphlet novels, including *Alice Marvin*; but such packaging tempered the content and allowed readers to visualize these fictive women as “natural” beauties surviving the demanding conditions of courtship without a sign of anxiety to mar their looks.<sup>53</sup>

While the above portrayals of fisherwomen reflect writers’ earnest, didactic treatments of issues of power, loss of innocence, and the encroachment of the city—all within a narrative about courtship and marriage—other examples more drolly tapped into the romance of fishing. The rich tapestry of sea tales spun by sailors probably inspired the tone of funny pieces about fisherwomen.<sup>54</sup> Certainly, story papers like Frederick Gleason’s *Flag of Our Union* contained numbers of “tall tales.” In these tales, singing fish chant “Coming through the Rye” and men are eaten alive by shoals of mackerel—a fantasy of revenge by the prey over their captors. In one story a coy seductress whispers in the erotically playful tone characteristic of courtship letters:

‘Flib, you are very meditative to-day.’

‘O, such a delicious dream I had last night! I lay in bed, and a throng of lovely maidens came dancing and swimming in the golden air beside me. And, O, there was one with such lovely black eyes, such a sweet bosom, and such delicious lips, all dressed in white; she came dancing by my bedside, and while her face lit up with a beaming look, and as her dark eye glanced

love, while her pouting lips wreathed in a smile, she spoke—  
 ‘She spoke!—well, Flib, what did she say?’  
 ‘She asked me how many pickled mackerel were a dozen.’

In these absurd lines, ethereal fish-women eroticize even market relations, but for those engaged in courtship, the message is obvious: flirtation, rather than true love, is as ephemeral as a dream.<sup>55</sup>

Some stories lampoon more serious efforts to romanticize angling, especially those containing the stylized fishing contest. One, entitled, “The Clam-Digger’s Courtship,” tells the tale of Billy Schrimp, a confirmed “bachelor, . . . very fond of clams” like “his father before him,” who feels assured he will never find a woman as fond of clams as he. When she does one day materialize in the form of a fisherman’s daughter from Marblehead adept at both digging and cooking clams, Billy is hooked. “Somehow or other, he was pleased with this sea-bird, and wished the tide might be slower in its movements towards the shore, for he was afraid she would be off as soon as she landed him.” They go back to his place and instead of engaging in a fishing competition, they have a clam eating contest:

Billy found his match this time, for she piled up the shells faster than he did. . . . Every clam Billy saw her swallow added intensity to the flame already kindled in his heart. And some minutes before the last one disappeared, Billy Schrimp was absolutely in love. . . . Yes, the fisherman’s stomach was full of clams and his heart full of love.<sup>56</sup>

Predictably, the two clam connoisseurs marry, and beget more mollusk diggers and gourmands.

Joseph Holt Ingraham’s lighthearted story, “Trout-Fishing: Or, Who is the Captain?” (1845) puts a twist on the theme of “catching” a mate. It begins with a commonplace: the narrator’s former fishing buddy has married and can no longer go angling. The married friend warns, “‘as you fish, moralize deeply on the dangers of hook baited with a woman’s bright eyes!’” But the narrator gets hooked in a different way, by the yarn spun by another fishing companion, a sea captain. At the unresolved conclusion of the captain’s formulaic yet thrilling tale of his adventures at sea with a beautiful Buenos Airean woman, the bachelor narrator complains, “‘Upon my word, I thought you were going to give me a regular love story with a marriage at the end.’” The captain does not verbally end the suspense, but rather introduces the bachelor to his wife—who, it turns out, is the Argentinian. The moral: a man’s being “hooked” is not a misfortune since life after wedlock can be romantic. Ingraham at once makes fun of both formulaic happy endings and a growing body of literature that valorized the sport as a distinctly masculine activity, apart and above the world of the feminine and the sensual.<sup>57</sup>

Other writers with less sophistication ridiculed the notion of men being tragically hooked by women's bait. "A Miss Gilmore was courted by a man whose name was *Haddock*," one such piece began, "who told her that he only wanted *one gill* more to make him a perfect fish!" Another author, simply called "one of Izaak Walton's Disciples," prefaces his gibe at scientific fishermen with a mock-serious quest for the gender of the primogenial fisher: "We don't know as there is any record of the man who caught the first fish. Whether Adam or Eve angled in any of the crystal brooks that flowed near the garden of Eden is matter of speculation. . . ."<sup>58</sup>

Comic stories involving women and fish became common at the end of the 1840s and into the next decade, just as the relatively more serious tales of fisherwomen in the Boston region became scarce. This succession suggests a cycle in the representation of angling women, from their real-life appearance on lakes, streams, and oceansides, to their rendering—sometimes mutated into Native American forms—in fiction, to their final, satiric concretization as images at once hackneyed yet disjunctive with the women's sphere, hence, to many readers, outlandish in their incongruity.

This essay has attempted to bring to light a previously neglected strand of antebellum New England culture: fisherwomen in real space and time romantically refracted through the lens of fiction writers. Diary accounts and correspondence demonstrate that women attended fishing parties, went on fishing dates, and fished at times on their own or with other women. Because much of the feminine participation in fishing denoted courtship, it took on romantic undertones. This romance filtered into the cheap literature produced by New England-based authors and publishers who sought to catch the interest of readers.

Literary entrepreneurs of the 1840s, particularly those in Boston, consequently supplied the market with tales at once reminiscent of old sailors' yarns about bewitching mermaids and reflective of the contemporaneous world surrounding gender and courtship. At times these tales bordered upon the ridiculous in their attempt to romanticize their subject matter. But for all their willing playfulness and unintended clumsiness, even the light stories ground the reader in the reality of human relationships; in this manner, romantic exaggeration can be sobering.

Certainly, Caroline Barrett felt inspired by her ride to create a verse which in its darkly comic tone assuaged her inner conflict. In the vein of the humorous depictions of fishing, which perhaps were well intended to remind young lovers of the more serious responsibilities of married life by mocking the romantic, Barrett gave her poem a tritely witty, but ominous twist:

And after being fairly hooked,  
To think we also might get *cooked*—  
The very thought it made me shiver,  
And like an aspen I did quiver.<sup>59</sup>

Barrett, like many other Victorian women, thought about the long-term ramifications of courtship which the fishing metaphor intimated. She ultimately listened to her head instead of her heart—yet another cliché of the cheap fiction—for she left her lakeside suitor behind and married an unexciting but monetarily secure man for whom she felt less passion.

Ironically, then, in these antebellum fisherwomen stories we often see an attempt to reweave through the cultural fragmentation attending the economic transformation of New England, older values of the world being lost. At the same time, we see in these tales the courtship drama being enacted through mythical women who resemble their living contemporaries both in their love of the sport and confusion over grappling with love. These fiction publishers proffered, for a fair price, succor and guidance to those young rural folk whose lives were being refashioned not only by matrimony, but by the penetration and intensification of commerce and industry. At the same time for the readers of this fiction in metropolitan Boston, many of whom had in their youth migrated into the city from rural towns that had undergone similar transformations, these fisherwomen sequences summoned up visions of by-gone days. Thus, the therapy for woes provoked by market society came packaged as yet another commodity, the shilling or two-bit pamphlet novel or the equally inexpensive story paper. Little wonder that the so-called periodical depots that specialized in this cheap fiction sold lozenges and other nostrums as well.<sup>60</sup>

“*Truth is stranger than fiction*”—Osgood Bradbury evokes this cliché at the start of *Mettallak* and it runs through the popular literature of the time.<sup>61</sup> Authors like Bradbury, by fishing for readers, wound up baiting them with glimpses of “real” life in the form of fishing imagery. Women like Barrett, fishing for a mate, contemplated their adventures through self-reflexive images of angling. Together, the real and the fictive would create a composite of the fisherwoman situated in an imaginative and erotically enhanced culture of antebellum New England fishing. Over time the constant repetition of domestic ideology in books and periodicals would help to reshape the basis of sexual attraction and so influence real-life experiences in which fishing has, for most people, all but lost its attractiveness in courtship. Today, the very concept of romantic fishing seems odd—a testament to the enduring power of the cultural work performed by the mid-nineteenth-century culture industry. As a casualty of this work, the romance of both real and fictive fisherwomen in antebellum New England, has faded, forgotten, into history.

## NOTES

1. Caroline Barrett White, *Diary*, 27 and 29 Oct. 1849, Octavo Volume 1, pp. 41, 43, courtesy, American Antiquarian Society (hereafter “AAS”). Many thanks to AAS’s Laura Wasowicz for pointing out this verse. An earlier version of this essay was presented at “Work in Progress in the History of the Book in American Culture,” Colloquia Series at AAS, 18 August 1992. Research for this essay was supported by an AAS-National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship (1992), a Study Grant at the Schlesinger Library (1993), and the Benjamin F. Stevens Fellowship at the

Massachusetts Historical Society (1994). Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *Women Who Run With the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype* (New York, 1992), ch. 5, explains that the use of fishing imagery in the various stages of a romantic relationship is archetypal.

2. On the "first phases," see *ibid.*, 137-42; and Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, 1989), 186-91, and, on the "crisis" phase, 10 and ch. 6. Lystra also points to the delicate balances of emotional power maintained between men and women in courtship (9, 51).

3. George H. Clark, *Diary and Memorandum Book, 1846-1858*, 31 July 1853, Henry B. Dexter Papers, Manuscript Collection, Rhode Island Historical Society. Clark, who had recently moved to New Brunswick, Connecticut, is but one of many informants in our data set of over 250 New England diaries and sets of correspondence. These papers comprise the foundation for a book-length study in progress on reading and culture in antebellum New England. As we went about reading these manuscripts, we were struck by the number of mixed-gender fishing experiences. While historians have noted the role women played in postbellum angling in America, they have usually neglected the earlier period. Coleen J. Sheehy, "American Angling: The Rise of Urbanism and the Romance of the Rod and Reel," in *Hard at Play: Leisure in America, 1840-1940*, ed. Kathryn Grover (Amherst, Mass., and Rochester, 1992), 77-92. See also J.L. Herring's portrait of a fishing party in antebellum Georgia, "Cat-fishing in the Olden Time," in his *Saturday Night Sketches: Stories of Old Wiregrass Georgia* (1918; Tifton, Ga., 1978), 108-11. Most studies, however, ignore women: Paul Schullery, "Early American Angling," *Early American Life* 16 (April, 1985), 34-35, 71-73; Nathan S. Lowrey, "A Historical Perspective on the Northern Maine Guide," *Maine Historical Society Quarterly* 26 (Summer, 1986), 2-21; Donna R. Braden, *Leisure and Entertainment in America* (Dearborn, Mich., 1988); Stephen Hardy, *How Boston Played: Sport, Recreation, and Community, 1865-1915* (Boston, 1982).

4. Boston-based publishers tapped into a mass market now reachable because of train lines which extended out into greater New England. See Ronald J. Zboray, *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (New York, 1993), ch. 5 and, on "sectional book distribution," 65-68. Hamilton Andrews Hill, *Boston's Trade and Commerce for Forty Years, 1844-1884* (Boston, 1884), 3-4; Francis X. Blouin, Jr., *The Boston Region, 1810-1850: A Study of Urbanization* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1980); E.H. Derby, *Boston: A Commercial Metropolis in 1850, Her Growth, Population, Wealth, and Prospects* (Boston, 1850); Edward E. Chase, *Maine Railroads: A History of the Development of the Maine Railroad System* (Portland, Me., 1926), 1-17. On backcountry readership for Boston fiction, see Ronald J. Zboray, "Technology and the Character of Community Life in Antebellum America: The Role of Story Papers," in *Communication and Change in American Religious History*, ed. Leonard I. Sweet (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1993), 204.

5. The literature on Victorian courtship is not extensive, but these dilemmas seem common throughout. See Lystra, *Searching the Heart*, esp. chs. 2 and 6; Ellen K. Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (New York, 1984), esp. pt. 2, 95-107, 144-56, and, on the "fear of consequences," 139-43; Peter Ward's *Courtship, Love and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century English Canada* (Montreal, 1990), although not about the United States, does provide insight into courtship practices of the time. On the "turbulent feelings" embedded in courtship, see 160-67. Among the extensive literature on Victorian sexuality and love, see: Steven Seidman, "The Power of Desire and the Danger of Pleasure: Victorian Sexuality Reconsidered," *Journal of Social History* 24 (Fall, 1990), esp. 55-59, which explores the boundaries set between "true love" and "mere incidental attraction"; *idem*, *Romantic Longings: Love in America, 1830-1980* (New York, 1991); Ronald G. Walters, *Primers for Prudery: Sexual Advice to Victorian America* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1974); G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Horrors of the Half-Known Life: Male Attitudes Toward Women and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, 1976). Of course, a seminal work on the relationship of sex and power is Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1., *An Introduction*, tr. Robert Hurley (New York, 1980).

6. Laura McCall, "'With All the Wild, Trembling, Rapturous Feelings of a Lover': Men, Women, and Sexuality in American Literature, 1820-1860," *Journal of the Early Republic* 14 (Spring, 1994), 71-89, argues that "physical encounters Victorian writers described could be joyful, awaken powerful physical sensations, and even include elements of humor" (75).

7. McCall, "'With All the Wild, Trembling, Rapturous Feelings of a Lover,'" 89.

8. As a testament to women's interest in angling, Caroline M. Fitch of Boston inscribed her name in AAS's copy of Richard Penn, *Maxims and Hints for an Angler: Embellished with Humorous Engravings, Illustrative of the Miseries of Fishing to Which are Added Maxims and Hints for a Chess Player* (Philadelphia, 1855); *Massachusetts Vital Records: Boston Births, 1800-1849* (Oxford, Mass., 1986), microfiche #67. For an illustration of a "Boston fishing lady" needlework picture, see Susan Burrows Swan, *Plain & Fancy: American Women and Their Needlework, 1700-1850* (New York, 1977), 2-3 pl. 2, and description, 4; stitching this common motif occupied Boston-area schoolgirls in the mid-eighteenth century, 91. Juliana Berners, *A Treatise of Fysshynge Wyth an Angle* (c. 1450), published in her *A Boke of St. Albans* (Wesmestre, 1496). See also Paul Schullery, "The Reel Woman: A Fish Story," *New York Times Book Review* (7 July 1996), 19. Depictions of women and

fishing abound in *The Angler's Song Book*, ed. Robert Blakey (London, 1855), but even these lack imagination and a romantic cast. Isaac [sic] Walton and Charles Cotton, *The Complete Angler; or, The Contemplative Man's Recreation* (New York, 1847), 67-73; Izaak Walton, *The Compleat Angler, 1653-1676*, ed. Jonquil Bevan (Oxford, 1983), 89-91.

9. In Humphrey Davy's popular *Salmonia*, an account of a trout fishing expedition in Denham in 1810, women likewise go unmentioned, except for a discussion of mermaids and a passing reference to a young lady who "I am told, is a most accomplished and skilful [sic] salmon fisher." The first American edition is Humphrey Davy, *Salmonia: or, Days of Fly Fishing in A Series of Conversations with Some Account of the Habits of Fishes Belonging to the Genus Salmo* (Philadelphia, 1832), 17, 269-71. Fishing scenes in Walter Scott's writings, especially *The Antiquary* (1816), *Peveeril of the Peak* (1822), and *Redgauntlet* (1824), doubtless provided some precedent for later bucolic representations of the sport. Kathryn Sutherland, "Fishing Manuals and Scott's *Redgauntlet*," *Scottish Literary Journal* 13 (Nov., 1986), 20-30. A Campbellian-Jungian interpretation of the women/fish connection might lead to a consideration of women fishers as progeny of the Naiads, the daughters of Jupiter, who appear prominently in Milton's *Comus* (1634), and, later, throughout Victorian literature.

10. Austin S. Hogan, "An Introduction to the History of Fly-Fishing in America," *American Fly Fisher* 12 (Fall, 1985), 3-4, 8 n. 7. Between the panics of 1837 and 1857, Americans published at least thirty-one books dealing principally with angling [see Charles M. Wetzel, *American Fishing Books: A Bibliography from the Earliest Times Up to 1948 Together with a History of Angling and Angling Literature in America* (Newark, Del., 1950)], but women never appear in these. For examples of the periodical literature, see J.R.P., "Trout Fishing in Maine," *Spirit of the Times*, 10 Dec. 1831, 4; the Angler, "The Delights of Trout Fishing," *Spirit of the Times*, 4 Feb. 1832, 4. William Post Hawes, *Sporting Scenes and Sundry Sketches: Being the Miscellaneous Writings of J. Cypress, Jr.*, 2 vols. (New York, 1842) 1:64-69, contains a tall tale of an encounter with a mermaid which resembles fisherwoman scenes in New England fiction. [N.S. Dodge], *Sketches of New England; or, Memories of the Country* (New York, 1842), tells the story of Cary Arran, an orphan, who "was exceedingly fond of all field sports" and with her fiancé "traced together every mountain streamlet to its source" (225); nevertheless, it does not depict the woman fishing. We are indebted to AAS's S.J. Wolfe (a very good angler), Exhibition Labels for "Business and Diversion Inoffensive to God," 1992, AAS.

11. Charles West Thomson, "The Fisher Girl," in *The Violet: A Christmas and New Years Present, 1840*, ed. Eliza Leslie (Philadelphia, 1839), 122-23; Bernard Barton, "The Fisher Girl: A Seaside Sketch," in *The Hyacinth; or, Affection's Gift for 1854* (Philadelphia, 1853), 7-9. For an unpublished sketch of a fishergirl, see Fig. 1. For an interesting twist on the image of female physical exertion, see Linda J. Borish, "Farm Females, Fitness, and the Ideology of Physical Health in Antebellum New England," *Agricultural History* 64 (Summer, 1990), 17-30; and, more generally, *idem*, "The Lass of the Farm: Health, Domestic Roles, and Culture of Farm Women in Hartford, Connecticut, 1820-1870" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 1990). On lingering pastoralism, see Sarah Burns, *Pastoral Inventions: Rural Life in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture* (Philadelphia, 1989). Cf. Cathy Lynn Preston, "'The Tying of the Garter': Representations of the Female Rural Laborer in 17th-, 18th-, and 19th-Century English Bawdy Songs," *Journal of American Folklore* 105 (Summer, 1992), 315-41.

12. Compare with John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting, 1730-1840* (Cambridge, 1980). For an interesting piece of programmatic dance music that tries to capture the excitement of fishing, see William Vincent Wallace, *The Angler's Polka, To his Friend, William T[rotter] Porter* (New York, 1854). Porter, of course, was the editor of the sporting paper, *Spirit of the Times*. Though the polka does not mention women fishing, obviously its role in mixed-gender dancing has a romantic undertone (Fig. 2). See also George Cooper (lyricist), *There are (The're) Plenty of Fish in the Sea* (Cincinnati, 1846)—thanks go to Martha Burns, Brown University, for this citation.

13. Representations of fisherwomen of other areas and in publications outside of Boston are rare; see, for example, Hawes, *Sporting Scenes and Sundry Sketches*; and a song (Fig. 3), *Kitty Clyde* written and composed by L.V.H. Crosby (Syracuse, 1854). On Gleason, Williams, and other story paper publishers, see Mary Noel, *Villains Galore: The Heyday of the Popular Story Weekly* (New York, 1954).

14. Gleason (c. 1817-1896) still awaits the full biography he deserves. Scattered bits of biographical information, at times recycled and filtered through several sources, can be found in Ralph F. Adimare, "The Dime Novel: Its Place in American Literature," *Dime Novel Round-Up* 2 (May-Aug. 1932, July-Aug., Oct. 1933) 17: 2-4; 18: 4-6; 19: 2-3; 21: 4-5; 23: 3-4; 3 (Dec. 1933) 25: 3-5; Peter Benson, "Gleason's Publishing Hall," in *Publishers for Mass Entertainment in Nineteenth Century America*, ed. Madeline B. Stern (Boston, 1980), 137-45; George Waldo Browne, "Pioneers of Popular Literature: New Hampshire Authors Among Them," *Granite State Magazine* 3 (Feb. 1907), 49-56 and 3 (March, 1907), 109-16; Joseph J. Hinchcliffe and Philip B. Dematteis, "F. Gleason's Publishing Hall, M.M. Ballou," in *American Literary Publishing Houses, 1638-1899*, ed. Peter Dzwonkoski, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 49, 2 pts. (Detroit, 1986) 1:176-78;

"Frederick Gleason," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 21 Sept. 1867, 6. Many biographers allow Maturin Murray Ballou, Gleason's editor and one of his authors, to overshadow the elusive publisher. On the numbers of titles published by Gleason and other fiction publishers, see Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, "American Fiction Publishing, 1837-57," a paper presented at the annual convention of the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing, Washington, D.C., 15 July 1994, on deposit at AAS.

15. Nina Baym argues that nineteenth-century novelists' popularity depended upon their appeal to a reader's sense of realism, "as a picture of nature." See her *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1984), ch. 8; and her *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels By and About Women in America, 1820-1870* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1978).

16. [Osgood Bradbury], *The Maniac Beauty; or, Love at Nahant* (Boston, 1844). Joseph Lye, Diary, [transcript] 1817-1832, 31 July 1819, 15 Sept. 1819, 5 July 1821, 6 Aug. 1821, 5 June 1822, 29 July 1822, 28 Aug. 1827, typescript in Lynn Historical Society. We are grateful to Karen V. Hansen, Brandeis University, for pointing out these passages. Pauline Agassiz (Shaw) to Sallie G. Cary, 2 Aug. c. 1854-57, pp. 2-3, Elizabeth Cary Agassiz Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College. Eliza Southgate Bowne, *A Girl's Life Eighty Years Ago; Selections from the Letters of Eliza Southgate Bowne* (New York, 1887), 119-20. "Nahant was seized upon as a seashore resort as early as 1819.... As the steamboat *Housatonic* went down to Nahant every morning, and came back every night, a day at Nahant made a charming summer expedition, which we young folks relied upon at least once a year"—Edward Everett Hale, *A New England Boyhood and Other Bits of Autobiography* (1893; Boston, 1900), 142. A Staffordshire pottery souvenir plate at AAS depicts Nahant visitors fishing from a rock (plate 13, Morse Collection of American Historical Pottery).

17. Caroline Gardiner (Cary) Curtis, Diary, 1852, 8 and 10 July 1852, Cary Family Papers III, Massachusetts Historical Society. Alvah B. Goldsmith, 30 July 1840, Memorandum book, 1840-41, MS 74665, vol. 1, Connecticut Historical Society. Lettie H. Lewis, South Berwick, Me., to Emma Brown, 29 May 1859, Emma Brown, Correspondence, 1855-1923, Brown Family Papers, Maine Historical Society.

18. It is always difficult to sort out the various meanings of the term "romantic." In this essay, its context is varied. The act of fishing we describe was itself part of the romantic sensibility in which natural settings inspired the imagination. The pamphlets referred to here might also be called "romances" but because of the attempt to attain verisimilitude, they would be more strictly termed "novels." Finally, fishing was romantic in the sense that it could be an activity linked to the expression of romantic love as in courtship or the honeymoon period. For a concise summary of the different attitudes, see Lystra, *Searching the Heart*, 266-67 n. 2; Michael Davitt Bell, *The Development of American Romance: The Sacrifice of Relation* (Chicago, 1980), esp., pt. 1; William A. Ellis, *The Theory of the American Romance: An Ideology in American Intellectual History* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1989); Nicolaus Mills, *American and English Fiction in the Nineteenth Century: An Antigenre Critique and Comparison* (Bloomington, Ind., 1973); Leon Chai, *The Romantic Foundations of the American Renaissance* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1987); David Morse, *American Romanticism* (Totowa, N.J., 1987); Joel Porte, *In Respect to Egoism: Studies in American Romantic Writing* (New York, 1991).

19. We have yet to locate references to these specific novels within the diaries and letters we have consulted. However, a few people did read story papers, including Gleason's *Flag of Our Union*, which contained serialized fiction. For the purposes of this paper, then, we deduced readers from the text in the manner of Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader; Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore, 1974) and the essayists in Susan Suleiman and Inge Crosman, eds., *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation* (Princeton, N.J., 1980). On our historicist approach, see Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, "'Have You Read...?': Real Readers and Their Responses in Antebellum Boston and Its Region," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 52 (Sept., 1997), 139-70. That men authored these novels is not unusual; novels written by men outnumbered those produced by women by about 50 percent. See Zboray and Zboray, "American Fiction Publishing, 1837-1857."

20. The term "environmental imagination" comes from Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995). The novels under consideration in this essay reflect to a great degree Buell's definition of a "green" text (7-8).

21. On fishing for subsistence and its clash with industrialism in New England, see: Theodore L. Steinberg, "Dam-Breaking in the 19th Century Merrimack Valley: Water, Social Conflict, and the Waltham-Lowell Mills," *Journal of Social History* 24 (Fall, 1990), 25-45; Gary Kulik, "Dams, Fish, and Farmers: Defense of Public Rights in Eighteenth-Century Rhode Island," in *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation: Essays in the Social History of Rural America*, ed. Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1985), 25-50; Steven Pendery, "The Archeology of Urban Foodways in Portsmouth, New Hampshire," in *Foodways in the Northeast*, Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife, Annual Proceedings, 1982 (Boston, 1984); Jerome V.C. Smith, *Natural History of the Fishes of Massachusetts, Embracing a Practical Essay on Angling*, 2d ed. (Boston, 1833), 346; Raymond McFarland, *A History of the New England Fisheries with Maps* (Philadelphia, 1911), esp.

ch. 11; Secretary of the Commonwealth, Massachusetts, *Laws Relating to Inland Fisheries in Massachusetts, 1623-1886* (Boston, 1887), 189-219, 241-55, 346. The manner in which fishing previously worked into the agrarian seasonal cycle in Maine is described in Alan Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760-1860* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1990), 77.

22. Osgood Bradbury *Larooka: The Belle of the Penobscotts* (Bangor, ME., 1846), 24. On the "romantic Indian," see Robert S. Tilton, *Pochahontas: The Evolution of an American Narrative* (Cambridge, 1994), ch. 3.

23. On Bradbury, see Daniel A. Cohen, *Pillars of Salt, Monuments of Grace: New England Crime Literature and the Origins of American Popular Culture, 1674-1860* (New York, 1993), 328 n. 79; Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, "The Mysteries of New England: Eugène Sue's American 'Imitators,' 1844," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* (forthcoming, 1998). Osgood N. Bradbury, *Norway in the Forties*, ed. Don L. McAllister (Norway, Me., 1986), 718-19. "The author of the 'Empress of Beauty,' 'Mettallak,' etc.," [Boston] *Daily Mail*, 22 May 1844, 2.

24. Osgood Bradbury, *Alice Marvin; or, The Fisherman's Daughter* (Boston, 1845, see Fig. 4). We thank Daniel A. Cohen, Florida International University, for pointing out to us the fisherwoman in this novel.

25. *Ibid.*, 6.

26. *Ibid.*, 9, 11-12.

27. *Ibid.*, 17-18.

28. Ward, *Courtship, Love and Marriage*, 100-1. On the importance of "peer group activities" in courtship, see Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 165.

29. Hezekiah Prince, Jr., 9 June 1826, *Journals of Hezekiah Prince, Jr., 1822-1828* (New York, 1965), 301; Sarah would be a bridesmaid to his role of bridesman, later that month (303). James Amsted Brown, 27 June 1858, *Journal*, 1 Jan. 1858, MSS 18, no. 48, Vermont Historical Society. Wallace Clement, Centre Rutland, Vt., to Sarah (Fish) Clement, Washington, Ill., 19 July 1857, Clement Family Papers, 1850-1859, Doc. 187, folder 11, Vermont Historical Society. Calista Billings, 8 April and 9 May 1849, *Diary*, 1848-9, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

30. Bradbury, *Alice Marvin*, 17-18, 24.

31. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York, 1973), 289. He points out the necessity of understanding the dichotomy in terms of its historical development and moment in time and space (ch. 25).

32. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York, 1985), 81. Nancy Cott's *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven, Conn., 1977); and Barbara Welter's "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (May, 1966), 151-74, are now classics on the topic of separate spheres. The spatial expression of the divergence of workplaces from homes for one occupational group is discussed in Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, "The Boston Book Trades, 1789-1850: A Statistical and Geographical Analysis," in *Entrepreneurs: The Boston Business Community, 1700-1850*, ed. Conrad Edick Wright and Kathryn P. Viens (Boston, 1997), 210-67.

33. Mary Pierce Poor to John and Lucy Pierce, 30 Sept. 1841, p. 2, Poor Family Papers, Schlesinger Library. On the emergence of the honeymoon as a nuptial activity and travel, see Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 175-76; on Mary Pierce Poor, see James R. McGovern, *Yankee Family* (New Orleans, 1975), chs. 5-6, and, on her relationship to consumption and reading, Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, "Books, Reading, and the World of Goods," *American Quarterly* 48 (Dec., 1996), 587-622.

34. Osgood Bradbury, *Mettallak: The Lone Indian of the Magalloway* (Boston, Portland, and Bangor, 1844, see Fig. 5)—one illustrated cover gives the erroneous title name "Metallak" and it sometimes appears in bibliographies and library catalogues as such; *idem*, *Hutoka; or, The Maid of the Forest, A Tale of the Indian Wars* (Boston, 1846); his *Larooka* also focuses upon fisherwomen, but since it was published outside of Boston and contains a slight variation on the usual themes, it remains beyond the scope of this essay. *The Eastern Belle; or, The Betrayed One!* (Boston, 1845), also contains a scene of woodland women baiting a hook in the traditional way, with a grasshopper (21).

35. Joseph Carpenter [presumably in Maine] to his "Niece" Eliza, c. 1840, letter no. 15 in "Eastern Pioneers: Facts Connected with One of the First Lumber makers in that region [sic] his family [sic] and decendants [sic] by AN old mechanic," 1 vol., New Hampshire Historical Society. Carolyn Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1989), 82; William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York, 1983), 39-40, 44-45, 52, however, assigns fishing to men within the division of labor.

36. Lucy Maddox, *Removals: Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Politics of Indian Affairs* (New York, 1991), 8; on the "dying Indian" as an analogy to extinction, 31; see also Louise K. Barnett, *The Ignoble Savage: American Literary Racism, 1790-1890* (Westport, Conn., 1975), 90-6; John J. McAleer, ed., *The Matter of the Red Man in American Literature* (Hartford, Conn., 1976); Gaile McGregor, *The Noble Savage in the New World Garden: Notes Toward a*



*Syntactics of Place* (Toronto, 1988); Priscilla Sears, *A Pillar of Fire to Follow: American Indian Dramas, 1808-1859* (Bowling Green, Ohio, 1982); and, of course, Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, Conn., 1973).

37. Bradbury, *Mettallak*, 14, 16.

38. *Ibid.*, 16-19. Sears, *A Pillar of Fire to Follow*, notes that American Indian dramas often portray the female Indian as "amorously passionate," "comely," and having a "gentle bosom heaving" (37).

39. *Ibid.*, 26.

40. The phrase here comes from Hal S. Barron, *Those Who Stayed Behind: Rural Society in Nineteenth-Century New England* (New York, 1984). Not only rural New Englanders found themselves displaced because of both economic and physical mobility; see Stewart H. Holbrook, *The Yankee Exodus: An Account of Migration from New England* (New York, 1950).

41. Bradbury, *Hutoka*, 23, 25.

42. *Ibid.*, 53. Most nineteenth-century authors decried miscegenation, another interpretation of this type of ending; see Barnett, *The Ignoble Savage*, 103-25. On some implications of such representations of miscegenation in the popular literature of a later period, see Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York, 1992), 205-7.

43. Joseph Holt Ingraham, *The Midshipman; or, The Corvette and the Brigantine, A Tale of Sea and the Land* (Boston, 1844), 6-8.

44. *Hartford Pearl and Literary Gazette* 4:3 (3 Sept. 1834), 25.

45. Bradbury, *Mettallak*, 19.

46. Joseph Holt Ingraham, *Edward Austin; or, The Hunting Flask, A Tale of Forest and Town* (Boston, 1842), 7.

47. *Ibid.*, 15.

48. Lystra, *Searching the Heart*, 9. On the tensions concerning women's permissible "authority" in economic matters, see 136-47.

49. Elizabeth Cary Agassiz to Louis Agassiz, c. 1849-50, transcript, p. 2, Elizabeth Cary Agassiz Papers, Schlesinger Library. On Agassiz and his place within the scientific establishment, see Walter H. Conser, Jr., *God and the Natural World: Religion and Science in Antebellum America* (Columbia, S.C., 1993), 21-2, 138, 141. She would later in life herself co-author scientific writings and take on precise scientific usage. See Lucy Allen Paton, *Elizabeth Cary Agassiz, A Biography* (1919; New York, 1974), 50, 64; and, for an analysis of her approach to nature, Linda S. Bergmann, "A Troubled Marriage of Discourses: Science Writing and Travel Narrative in Louis and Elizabeth Agassiz's *A Journey in Brazil*," *Journal of American Culture* 18 (Summer, 1995), 83-8. Some of this association of women and nature, of course, has deep roots, as pointed out by Carolyn Merchant in her *Ecological Revolutions*, 8, 24-5, and chs. 7 and 8, and her *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco, 1980); see also, Greta Gaard, ed., *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* (Philadelphia, 1993).

50. Lystra, *Searching the Heart*, ch. 5. That it was permissible, given the prescriptions of the women's sphere, for women to fish may be a vestige of preindustrial domestic routines. These traditional values, inculcated in childhood during this generation, demanded that New England women cultivate skill in both farming and fishing. For evidence of fishing as part of childhood socialization, see *The Boy's and Girl's Book of Sports* (Providence, 1835). Daniel Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-1850* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1994), 133-39, 160-61, 174-76, 280, discusses women's labor in early American fishing families. Though she does not mention fishing, Karen V. Hansen, in her *A Very Social Time: Crafting Community in Antebellum New England* (Berkeley, 1994) notes the absence of strict gender divisions of labor and leisure in the region during this period. On gender and leisure, see Kathy Peiss, "Commercial Leisure and the 'Woman Question,'" in *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure into Consumption*, ed. Richard Butsch (Philadelphia, 1990), 105-17.

51. For an example in *Godey's*, see Mrs. A.M.F. Annan, "Old Truth and the Trout Fisher; A Country Story," *Godey's Lady's Book* 31 (Nov. 1845), 207-15, (Dec. 1845), 253-60.

52. Alonzo Tripp, *The Fisher Boy* (Boston, 1857), 217.

53. Bradbury, *Alice Marvin*, 4; Ingraham, *The Midshipman*, 6. On "The Ideal Woman," see Lois W. Banner, *American Beauty* (Chicago, 1983), ch. 3; on disdain for the artifice of cosmetics, 40-44. None of the books discussed here illustrate scenes of women fishing, although Larooka is depicted with her hunting gear on the novel's cover.

54. See, for example, Frank Shay, *A Sailor's Treasury; Being the Myths and Superstitions, Lore, Legends and Yarns, the Cries, Epithets, and Salty Speech of the American Sailor in the Days of Oak and Canvas* (New York, 1951); John Codman, *Sailors' Life and Sailors' Yarns, By Captain Ringbolt* (New York and Boston, 1847); Nathaniel Ames, *An Old Sailor's Yarns* (New York, 1835).

55. See the following in *Flag of Our Union*: "Musical Fish," 22 Jan. 1853, 3; "Eaten By Mackerel," 25 Nov. 1848, 2; "Romantic, Very," 13 May 1848, 2. On the erotic content of courtship letters, see Lystra, *Searching the Heart*, ch. 3; Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 122-38.

56. "The Clam-Digger's Courtship," *Flag of Our Union*, 12 Aug. 1848, 2.

57. Joseph Holt Ingraham, "Trout-Fishing: Or, Who is the Captain?" in his *Henry Howard; or, Two Noes Make One Yes* (Boston, 1845), 15, 32. The period witnessed the start of sport journalism; *American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine* (1829) and William Trotter Porter's *Spirit of the Times* (1831) were among the first of the type, and these regularly carried articles on angling. Norris W. Yates, *William T. Porter and the Spirit of the Times: A Study of the Big Bear School of Humor* (Baton Rouge, 1957). See also Robert J. Higgs, "The Sublime and the Beautiful: The Meaning of Sport in the Collected Sketches of Thomas B. Thorpe," *Southern Studies* 25 (Fall, 1986), 235-56.

58. "Merry-Makings," *Flag of Our Union* 18 March 1848, 3. "The Scientific Angler, by one of Izaak Walton's Disciples," *Flag of Our Union*, 28 Oct. 1848, 2.

59. White, Diary, 29 Oct. 1849, p. 44. Laura Wasowicz, "The Quest for Home: The Early Married Life of Caroline and Frank White, 1851-1859" (unpublished paper, Clark University, 1992).

60. On in-migration to Boston from these areas, see Peter R. Knights, *Yankee Destinies: The Lives of Ordinary Nineteenth-Century Bostonians* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1991), 13-35. On urban nostalgia for a bucolic way of life, see Tamara Plakins Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen: The Meaning of Country Life Among the Boston Elite, 1785-1860* (New Haven, Conn., 1989). On periodical depots, see Zboray, *A Fictive People*, 29-34; on medicines sold there: Edwin T. Freedley, *Leading Pursuits and Leading Men; A Treatise on the Principal Trades and Manufactures of the United States...* (Philadelphia, 1856), 99.

61. Bradbury, *Mettallak*, 5.