2

Upstream: The European Fork

WHILE the ideal of the United States as a melting pot has perhaps been oversold, it is no exaggeration to describe the North American fly fisher as an amalgam of numerous traditions or, as presented previously, standing below the confluence of a number of streams of tradition. Before proceeding to examine the resulting river, it seems appropriate to study each of the tributaries in order to see what each brought to the watershed.

Biblical Roots

Whether overtly religiously oriented or not, all the European streams of thought leading to the formation of North American fly-fishing literature must be seen as reflecting the Judeo-Christian heritage represented in the

texts of the Bible and those ancillary to them. A survey of this literature can be achieved by reviewing the fairly narrow portion of the biblical record in which fish or fishing figures prominently.

There are relatively few mentions of fish in biblical literature; the words *fish* or *fishes* appear forty-one times in one prominent concordance to the Old and New Testaments. By comparison, the same concordance lists 140 appearances of sheep, another prominent symbol in both Judaism and Christianity. With the exception of the book of Jonah, the significance of fish in the Old Testament is virtually nonexistent. In the animal imagery of the New Testament, however, that of fish is second only to sheep imagery in terms of frequency and significance.

Probably the best remembered reference to fishing and fishermen is found as Jesus calls two of his followers: “And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” (Matthew 4:18–19). Norman Maclean begins *A River Runs through It* by describing his father’s attitude toward these apostles: “He told us about Christ’s disciples being fishermen, and we were left to assume, as my brother and I did, that all first-class fishermen on the Sea of Galilee were fly fishermen and that John, the favorite, was a dry-fly fisherman” (1). In truth, of course, Peter and Andrew not only failed to meet Maclean’s expectation as fly fishermen, but were not even anglers in the sense of using a hook, line, and rod, as the passage from Matthew describes the men casting a net into the sea. Later in the story of the gospels, the evangelists once again describe the fishermen fishing with a net. In Luke, this event takes place early in the story, presumably at the same time that Matthew describes the calling. In this tale, Jesus is described as launching out from shore in a small boat owned by Peter. At an appropriate point, Jesus tells Peter to “launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught” (Luke 5:4). Peter responds, indicating that although they had fished all night they had caught nothing. In casting the nets, though, they caught so many fish that the nets broke and the fish, somehow landed, threatened to sink the boats.

In John’s gospel, the same essential story is placed after the resurrec-

tion, when Jesus appears to the disciples, who have inexplicably decided to go fishing. In this telling of the story, Jesus admonishes the disciples to "cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find" (John 21:6). In this case, again, the men are scarcely able to handle all the fish that they net, dragging 153 fish to shore, where they enjoy a meal with Jesus. One small portion of this story is saved for the last chapter of Luke's gospel, as Jesus appears to the disciples and asks for meat: "And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb" (Luke 24:42). J. C. Fenton suggests that if "the catch of fish is a symbol of the evangelistic mission of the disciples, the meal seems to be in some sense a symbol of the Eucharist" (209).

One other prominent occurrence of fish in the gospels is in the story in which Jesus feeds a multitude with five loaves and two fishes. This story appears in all four gospels (Matthew 14:14–21; Mark 6:34–44; Luke 9:12–17; John 6:1–14) with a second telling appearing in two of the gospels, with seven loaves and a few fish (Matthew 15:32–38 and Mark 8:1–9). One common interpretation for this story is that no real miracle occurred in the sense of food being multiplied. Instead, William Barclay suggests in his commentary on John's account, "this story represents the biggest miracle of all—one which changed not loaves and fishes, but men and women" (204). This interpretation has its modern parallel in the stories that suggest that many anglers miss the point of fishing, assuming that it has something to do with the fish, when it really has everything to say about the anglers themselves.

Probably the strangest use of fish as a symbol in biblical texts is an occurrence in which Jesus is being questioned regarding his obligation to pay taxes. Employing what seems strangely like a parlor trick, Jesus instructs Peter, "[G]o thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee" (Matthew 17:27). The story does not indicate that Peter actually carries out this instruction; thus at least one commentator has suggested that Jesus is engaged in a use of hyperbole, essentially saying that Peter can go back to his job for a day and pay the tax that way (Barclay 1978, 172).

In attempting a synthesis of the use of fish and fishing in biblical literature, it will be noticed that virtually all the significant use of such imagery occurs in the four gospels. As noted above, with the exception of the book of Jonah, the Old Testament does not use fish in any meaningful way. Pauline and other New Testament texts include virtually nothing from this vein.

Fish are a mysterious quantity for the gospel writers, unlike sheep, which are easily observable and rather unsophisticated animals. Fish multiply to feed as many as might be needed. Fish mysteriously appear when none have been caught for many hours. Fish presumably might be found carrying coins about for the payment of taxes. Perhaps most significantly, though, fish are a metaphor for people, as Jesus implores the brothers to become fishers of men. Fishing, as seen from the biblical perspective, is not simply a way of feeding oneself, but of making connection with the ineffable. It is reaching into the unseen and drawing out life.

The English Tradition

The home waters of fly fishing are undeniably found in the Test River in England. The original contributor to the great tradition of British fishing literature is less certainly named. The Treatyse of Fysshynge Wyth an Angle, written in approximately 1450 and published in 1496 as part of the second Book of St. Albans, is widely attributed to a nun, Dame Juliana Berners, although just as widely that authorship is questioned. If Berners's authorship is not valid, it is understandable that she might have the Treatise assigned to her name. The first Book of St. Albans, a work on hunting, hawking, and heraldry, included a Boke of Huntyng specifically attributed to "Dam Julyans Barnes," the only explicitly named author in the volume. John McDonald calls this compilation in which Berners's earlier work appears "the most celebrated book on field sports in English, the first English sporting book to be printed, and one of the earliest English printed books, issued nine years after Caxton's first in England" (1963, 68).

One of the difficulties scholars have encountered in enthusiastically at-

tributing the authorship of the Treatise to Berners is certainly misogyny, but another, more valid and difficult to escape, is the lack of continuity between the two works. In the Book of Hunting, Berners not only does not treat the subject of fishing, but she treats one of the subjects of the later fishing book, hunting, in a much different light. Far from being simple diversions for the upper class, the subjects of the first book were "fundamentals of a polite education and necessary for the competent discussion of literature as well as correct behavior" (McDonald 1963, 69). One must simply reflect on Sir Gawain and the Green Knight or Sir Thomas Malory to understand the truth of this statement.

Gawain and Arthur, however, do not go fishing, and while in the Book of Hunting Berners embraces hunting as a proper pursuit for a young man aspiring to knighthood, in the Treatise of Fishing, she dismisses hunting as

> too laborious. For the hunter must always run and follow his hounds, laboring and sweating very painfully. He blows on his horn till his lips blister; and when he thinks he is chasing a hare, very often it is a hedgehog. Thus he hunts and knows not what. He comes home in the evening rain-beaten, scratched, his clothes torn, wet-shod, all muddy, this hound lost and that one crippled. Such griefs happen to the hunter—and many others which for fear of the displeasure of them that love it, I dare not report. (1963b, 45)

Berners continues in the Treatise of Fishing similarly to criticize hawking and fowling, settling eventually on fishing, and specifically fishing with an "angle" or hook, as the most likely means to achieve a "merry spirit," which she set out to discover at the outset of the work, using as her epigram Proverbs 17:22, "Animus gaudens aetatem floridam facit," which is translated in the manuscript as "a glad spirit makes a flowering age—that is to say, a fair age and a long one" (1963a, 27). She suggests that three things contribute to the creation of this "glad spirit": merry thought, work that is not excessive, and a moderate diet. Clearly the Berners who extols fishing seems to differ greatly not only in subject matter but also in attitude from the Berners who wrote of hunting.

The point of this contrast, in the present context, is not to question Berners's authorship, but to illustrate that The Treatise of Fishing with an

Angle marks a significant shift in thought patterns that will be magnified in the coming years. If Berners is the author of both works, she, like the fly fisherman in midstream, stands in a boundary region, between the Middle Ages and Renaissance, reflecting the chivalrous ideal in the hunting book, while presenting the more reflective and populist ideal in the fishing book. R. B. Marston notes that the first book was published "a few months after the last battle of the War of the Roses" (1894, 10), and thus at the very close of the Medieval period. One might imagine that, having placed behind them the years of internecine war, fueled partly by the ideals represented in the chivalric code that the Book of Hunting exemplifies, Berners and her countrymen determined to pursue more relaxing sport and retired to the streamside. That is, of course, an oversimplification, but it is not overly simple to suggest that the Treatise of Fishing is more representative of the Tudor-Renaissance era then dawning in England, while the Book of Hunting hearkens back to the Plantagenet-Medieval era that was drawing to a close.

What Berners has to say about fishing is perhaps less remarkable than that she speaks of fishing at all. Unlike the outgoing pursuits of hunting and falconry, fishing offers a more conservative and introspective activity. There is little focus on what the angler has to gain from his pursuit, but rather a concern for the avoidance of bothers. "For he can lose at the most only a line or a hook. . . . So then his loss is not grievous, and other griefs he cannot have, except that some fish may break away after he has been caught on the hook, or else that he may catch nothing" (1963b, 46). With a limit to his losses, Berners suggests, the angler can focus on the possible joy of catching a fish. "And if the angler catches fish, surely then there is no man merrier than he is in his spirit" (46). But the joy of the catch is not the only area of reward that Berners delineates for the angler. She, for the first time, mentions the ancillary benefits to the angler:

> And yet, at the very least, he has his wholesome and merry walk at his ease, and a sweet breath of the sweet smell of the meadow flowers, that makes him hungry. He hears the melodious harmony of birds. He sees the young swans, herons, ducks, coots, and many other birds with their broods, which seems to me better than all the noise of hounds, the blasts

> of horns, and the clamor of birds that hunters, falconers, and fowlers can produce. (46)

After her introductory passage proving angling to be the best means of achieving Solomon's ideal of a "glad spirit," Berners proceeds to more mundane matters, such as the crafting of fishing tackle, when and where to seek individual species, what flies to use, and related matters. She describes each species individually, noting that "the salmon is the most stately fish that any man can angle for in fresh water" (56) and calling the trout "a right dainty fish" (57).

In concluding the Treatise, Berners enjoins her readers to follow a few matters of etiquette, such as not fishing on private property without permission, and then proceeds with an admonition:

> Also, you must not use the aforesaid artful sport for covetousness, merely for the increasing or saving of your money, but mainly for your enjoyment and to procure the health of your body and, more especially, of your soul. For when you intend to go to your amusements in fishing, you will not want very many persons with you, who might hinder you in your pastime. And then you can serve God devoutly by earnestly saying your customary prayers. And in so doing, you will eschew and avoid many vices, such as idleness, which is the principal cause inciting a man to many other vices, as is right well known. Also, you must not be too greedy in catching your said game, as in taking too much at one time, a thing which can easily happen if you do in every point as this present treatise shows you. That could easily be the occasion of destroying your own sport and other men's also. (65–66)

Carl Otto von Kienbusch concurs with the division of the Treatise of Fishing into three parts: "The first sets forth the superiority of angling over other forms of sport, the second lists the items of an angler's equipment and gives instructions for their production and use against certain fishes, the third is devoted to the mental, ethical, and spiritual qualities found in the perfect angler." Von Kienbusch insists that, whoever the author of The Treatise of Fishing with an Angle might be, whether male or female, "these twenty-three pages set the pattern for hundreds of volumes that fill our shelves" (1958, 1).

Between Berners and the first appearance of Izaak Walton's The Compleat Angler in 1653, a steady flow of fishing literature tutored the English angler on how best to pursue his quarry. The Art of Angling, recently attributed to William Samuel (Three Books on Fishing, vii) appeared in 1577. Leonard Mascall's Book of Fishing with Hook and Line, largely plagiarized from Berners, was published in 1590. In 1600, John Taverner produced Certaine Experiments Concerning Fish and Fruite, a book more concerned with the husbandry of fish ponds than with angling. John Dennys, in 1613, published Secrets of Angling, a book in verse, which does not deal directly with fly fishing. British writer R. B. Marston notes that Dennys might not be Berners's equal in practical instruction but "he is far ahead of all other English angling writers who have attempted to describe the art in verse" (1894, 70). The Pleasures of Princes, by Gervase Markham, appeared in 1614, a popular book drawing heavily on Berners, Mascall, and Dennys. Finally, only two years before Walton's first edition, there appeared Thomas Barker's The Art of Angling in 1651.

The interrelations of these books, each one drawing on one or more of its predecessors, leads one bibliographer to the following: "The genealogy of English fishing books is long and complicated, but for most readers—as for most anglers—there is one ancestor which attracts all pious veneration" (Bentley 1958, 67). This one ancestor is, of course, Izaak Walton's The Compleat Angler, "that lovely bucolic idyll, the most famous book in all the literature of sport" (von Kienbusch 1958, 2), first published in 1653 with subsequent and expanded editions in 1655, 1661, 1668, and 1676. This last edition was the final one published during Walton's lifetime and the first to contain Charles Cotton's book on trout fishing. Walton, like his predecessors, draws on those who wrote before him. He openly cites Dennys, Markham, Barker, and Mascall, quoting directly from Dennys and Barker (Bentley 1958, 69). It is not in his similarity to his predecessors that Walton is remarkable, however. For while those before him had been largely practical and didactic, Walton brings a more creative quality to his text, which contains "a narrative which envelopes teaching in the delights of story and description" (Bentley 1958, 70). Using dialogue be-

tween two friends, Piscator and Viator, as his organizing principle, Walton introduced narrative, rich description, and a sense of drama to his work, interspersing little poems and songs into the text. The dialogue, which had long been thought to be Walton's unique creation, was discovered in the early 1950s to have been almost certainly borrowed from William Samuel's The Arte of Angling (1577), which not only employs a dialogue format but also uses Piscator and Viator as the names of his principals.

Having titled his great work The Compleat Angler, or, The Contemplative Man's Recreation, Walton might be assumed to be simply a happy soul who enjoyed fishing and possessed a literary bent, but his literary output began with biographies of Donne and Sir Henry Wotton. It was not lazy summer days that sent Walton streamside, but rather the ascendancy of Cromwell. With the execution of Charles I in 1649, Walton, a devout Anglican, found himself increasingly marginalized. While The Compleat Angler is certainly a book of instruction on fishing, it is at the same time a set of instructions for life, and a sort of coded message to Anglicans, with Anglers serving as a not-too-subtle metaphor for his fellow-believers (Bevan 1993, xviii). It is at this juncture that the book takes on greater significance for the present study and where its critics have often missed the point. One critic has noted that

> Walton has been canonized as the angler's saint, the source of knowledge where fishing is concerned. His elevation to this pinnacle has been achieved to a large extent by those who have not read his book. Walton added almost nothing to what was already known, his experience being limited. Bait fishing was his proper sphere. He never caught a salmon and what he learned about fly fishing was mostly at second hand. (von Kienbusch 1958, 2)

Richard Franck, a Cromwellian soldier, writing in 1658, similarly assails Walton's lack of new wisdom, noting that Walton "has imposed upon the world this monthly novelty [the twelve flies for trout, which derive from Berners's Treatise], which he understood not himself; but stuffs his book with morals from Dubravius and others, not giving us one precedent of his own practical experiments" (qtd. in Walton 218).

Where Berners begins to suggest that fishing is about more than just fishing, Walton does so openly. Bryn Hammond describes the post-Walton attitude as follows:

> By 1676 and the publication of Walton's 5th edition, coupled with Cotton's 1st edition as Part 2 of The Complete Angler, going fishing became more of an event once again, and the sentiment Piscator non solum piscatur (there is more to fishing than catching fish) became not only acceptable, but the prime reason for going fishing. In this respect Walton's influence was not only singular, but persists to this day and has permeated much of the vast literature on angling since that time. (4)

By making this move, Walton not only allows the reader to understand that there is far more to fishing than simply catching fish, but also uses his text as a sort of parable of his particular version of Christianity. Interestingly, as the early Christians used the sign of the ιχτηψσ to camouflage their activities, so does Walton some fifteen centuries later use fish to camouflage his Anglican spirituality.

Although Walton had undoubtedly passed into immortality with the success of The Compleat Angler, he was not without his detractors. In A River Runs through It, the Maclean brothers poke fun at Walton, noting, "The bastard doesn't even know how to spell 'complete'" (5). A somewhat more literary criticism came from Byron, who had little sympathy for Walton or for anglers in general, commenting in Don Juan on both the author and his followers:

> And angling, too, that solitary vice,
> Whatever Izaak Walton sings or says:
> The quaint, old, cruel coxcomb, in his gullet
> Should have a hook, and a small trout to pull it.

Byron continues his diatribe, claiming that the angler has no interest outside of his "dish of fish" and that he cannot take his eyes from the stream to appreciate that wonder that is around him. "But angling! No angler can be a good man" (qtd. in Hammond 1994, 161). That Byron remained of the minority party in regard to attitudes toward fishing cannot be ques-

tioned, yet, despite the rather offhand nature of his remarks, he does raise two points that can, with minimal overgeneralizing, be said to typify the British attitude toward angling, especially as it is contrasted with the attitude that has evolved in the twentieth century in North America—notably, whether the angler is cruel and whether the angler is single-mindedly fixed on the goal of catching fish.

A review of fishing literature published in the golden age of British angling, the Victorian and Edwardian periods, illustrates that while anglers in Walton's period might have truly subscribed to the *Piscator non solum piscatur* credo, those who came after either completely abandoned that ideal or relegated it so far behind the primary conflict between angler and fish that it disappears altogether from the literature. John William Dunne, one of the most significant British fishing writers of the early twentieth century, goes to great length in his first chapter to make the point that anglers stray when they become overly consumed with the task of exactly mimicking nature. Having early in his fishing been mystified at some of the contents of a selection of flies he had purchased, he realized one day while on the river that these flies were indeed the elusive "blue-winged olives" (1–12). There is, in Dunne, nothing like the introductory chapter that might be found in writers as far back as Berners and up to the present day, positioning angling in general or this trip in particular in a larger philosophical field. Gone is the scheme that served all angling writers from Berners to Walton, by which the first task that must be accomplished is to celebrate or validate angling as a worthy pursuit. Such a chapter, although very different in tone and content from what Berners and Markham have left, seems obligatory in American writings. An American contemporary of Dunne, Bliss Perry, whose *Pools and Ripples* was published in 1927, prefaces his collection of fishing articles with an explanatory note, justifying not only fishing as a sport but his own approach to it, which included fishing with worms.

There is nothing of the contemplative nature to be found in Dunne, however. In chapter two, he forges ahead very practically, discussing the manner in which one should compare colors: against the sky, as the fish

might perceive the fly (13–24). For Dunne and the others whom he represents, fishing is not the “Contemplative Man’s Recreation” as Walton would have it, but is instead a return to primitive existence and a form of warfare. According to Dunne, the “origin of that excitement [of success in hunting or fishing] may possibly be traced to the days when success or failure in these pursuits meant, to primitive man, all the stark difference between satiety and starvation” (101). He describes the difference between a game and a sport in the fact that in a game your opponent is another person, while in a sport your opponent is “Nature herself—Nature, wild and free and entirely lawless,—Nature, wayward, cheating, laughing, alluring, infinitely diversified, entrancingly mutable” (102).

At about the same time, in 1924, John Waller Hills was fishing the legendary rivers of England. In “The Iron Blue,” Hills details a challenging day on England’s Test River. The fishing is best described as a conquest. “A fish rose just where the quick run left the pool, on the very lip, and if ever I saw a fish between 3 and 4 pounds it was he. No fisherman could possibly leave such a prize” (1990, 38). He describes trying a couple of casts, changing flies, and finally drawing a rise out of the trout. “I reeled furiously, felt the fish, off he careered again, but my line brushed against something, underwater weed no doubt; only a touch, but it was enough, he was off. What a tragedy” (38). “Thus ended the day, a day of hard work, and of failure mingled with success. What more can the fisherman desire? And what sport can compare with fishing?” (41). There is a sense of dividedness in Hills’s writing, yet more prevalent is the idea that the sport is a form of battle, in which the fish is to be first deceived, then captured, and finally devoured. Where many contemporary American writers would draw a highly introspective 1,500 words—or an entire novella, as in the case of William Humphrey’s My Moby Dick—out of the mighty fish that got away, Hills describes the loss as a “tragedy.”

At about the same time that Theodore Gordon was floating his first dry flies on the Beaverkill, Theodore Roosevelt, writing of hunting, pronounced a stern judgment against the British sporting tradition:

> To my mind this is one very unfortunate feature of what is otherwise the admirably sportsmanlike English spirit in these matters. The custom of

> shooting great bags of deer, grouse, partridges, and pheasants, the keen rivalry in making such bags, and their publication in sporting journals, are symptoms of a spirit which is most unhealthy from every standpoint. (Roosevelt 1990, 291)

A final example of the single-mindedness of the mainstream of British fly-fishing writing can be found in Huish Edye, who, working in the 1940s, detailed how one might find and catch the largest trout in any stream. "The term 'good' as applied to trout is relative to the stock of any given water. A good fish is something considerably bigger than the merely adult trout—an exceptionally heavy trout" (1990, 183–84). This article is reminiscent of contemporary ones in American bass-fishing magazines, detailing the how-tos for catching "lunker" bass.

Another fishing writer of the early twentieth century is philosopher A. A. Luce, a native of Gloucestershire who spent most of his adult life in Ireland, a professor at Trinity College. While Luce can be described as closer to the balance struck by Walton than is Dunne, he is far more concerned with overcoming the fish and far less concerned with real introspection than one finds the Americans of the same period and beyond. This fact is well illustrated by comparing a passage from the foreword by American Datus Proper to the 1993 reprint of Luce's *Fishing and Thinking*:

> The fishing comes before the thinking, he [Luce] insisted. You may go out simply to fish with one hand and pick wild raspberries with the other, but you find yourself becoming part of the four-dimensional world of sense and spirit. You get to know the river by entering it, in the manner of Plato. You cast over wine-dark waters, and your fly falls as falls the fancy on a perfect phrase. In time you achieve the philosophers' dream—action at a distance. By then you are fishing a long line and thinking long, long thoughts. (vii)

In contrast to Proper's rather ethereal, mystical view of fishing-thinking, Luce is, as a good follower of George Berkeley, considerably more didactic and reductive, a tendency that is especially notable in his final chapter on "The Ethics of Angling," yet is nevertheless present from the first chapter. Luce, like Dunne, eschews the traditional celebratory opening and begins his account with "My Best Day on the River," in which he,

with no vanity apparent, describes a day when, inexplicably, the trout rose to everything he laid on the water. In attempting to explain why he might have such an exceptional experience on the day described in chapter one, Luce avoids the slightest hint of mysticism. There are none of the "long, long thoughts" that Proper describes, but rather a return to solid empirical foundations:

> The question looks well beyond one particular day and its personal interest; and the answer touches on the why and the wherefore of angling experiences that all anglers meet on their best days and their worst. For one cannot hope to understand and explain the particular experience of a special day without a good deal of general knowledge about the way of a trout with a fly. (18)

In short, Luce suggests, there is no ineffable experience on the water. There is simply an experience for which one's stock of knowledge is inadequate. Later, he again sounds an empiricist tone: "In fishing you just never know. The angler must 'fish and find out'" (9).

Lest Luce be cast in too stodgy a manner, his attitude toward Yeats illumines another, somewhat less didactic aspect of his personality. In the section of his book describing Yeats's country, he spends considerable time dealing with the poem "The Fisherman." In the poem, Yeats encounters a

> freckled man who goes
> To a grey place on a hill
> In grey Connemara clothes
> At dawn to cast his flies.

The poet, after his encounter with the fisherman, presents his writing to the general public:

> The craven man in his seat,
> The insolent unreproved,
> And no knave brought to book
> Who has won a drunken cheer.

Finding this audience unworthy, the poet remembers the fisherman and vows,

> Before I am old
> I shall have written him one
> Poem maybe as cold
> And passionate as the dawn. (61–62)

Luce praises this poem, calling it a difficult one to fathom; it is neither mystical nor weird; but it is strange, sui generis, and baffling. The mists of morning twilight hang around it; the language is simple, but the meaning is complex and obscure. The poem is by an angler, about an angler, and it has some deep meaning for anglers, if we could find out what that meaning is (80).

What Luce determines that meaning to be, though, is less than one might have expected from the foregoing. Yeats suggests, according to Luce, that if all the poet-narrator's readers were like the angler of the title, they would listen. He determines that perhaps Yeats chose angling because the angler experiences objectivity and a sense of control over an object (82). Luce seems to dismiss the "mists of morning twilight" and any hint of mysticism rather summarily, ascribing objectivity as a desired goal of one of the English language's most mystical and least objectively inclined poets.

Clearly, for Yeats, angling is not simply a matter of catching one's dinner. On the contrary, the sport provides a possibility to go beyond the obvious and to make a connection with profundities that have remained hidden. This view by Yeats can be seen to contradict one of Byron's criticisms of angling, that of single-mindedness toward the catch, yet Yeats's verse cannot completely refute Byron's attacks. The criticism, while perhaps overstated, is certainly based on a kernel of truth. Byron's other criticism, cruelty, is also taken up by both Dunne and Luce.

For Dunne, the issue of cruelty seems to hearken back to ideas of chivalry. "Unless your quarry be afforded a reasonable chance of escape, you are apt to feel yourself uncomfortably akin to a butcher," he says (1924,103). This sentiment, that the challenge of fly fishing is what makes it worthwhile, is prevalent in many writers on both sides of the Atlantic, but it lends itself to an argument by extension. If one feels more like a

butcher as the odds shift away from the fish, then the contents of these books, dedicated to helping one improve angling skills, would seem self-defeating.

A. A. Luce, as one might expect, is less prone to logical fallacy. In "The Ethics of Angling" he takes on the charge of cruelty with considerable vigor: "People with a conscience who love their fishing rod are placed in a sad dilemma, as long as the question [regarding the cruelty of fishing] remains unanswered" (173). He begins with a definition: "Cruelty is the voluntary infliction of unnecessary or avoidable pain" (174). His argument seems straightforward enough until it reaches a turn that will shock virtually any serious, contemporary angler:

> It may look paradoxical at first sight to hold that it is cruel to hook and release trout, and not cruel to hook and kill them; but such is the case. Cruelty is largely in the mind and motive, and it is just here that the primary object of angling becomes of importance for both theory and practice. The primary object of justifiable angling is to catch fish for food; there are various pleasures incidental to angling; but they cannot justify the infliction of pain or death. (180)

Luce does not take up the issue of the unnecessary nature of the pain and suffering that an angler inflicts on the fish. In his view, if the fish is bound for the angler's plate, then fishing cannot be cruel. One wonders if this accomplished logician would have reached the same conclusion had he fished the heavily fished waters of New York's Beaverkill River in 1990, rather than relatively empty waters in rural Ireland. He argues, typical of the British school, with the reductive logic of Descartes, where North American writers would be more apt to use thought patterns drawn from Lao Tzu.

William Humphrey, an American, upon traveling to and fishing in England, noted certain facets of the country's fishing that shed considerable light on the attitudes described above:

> Nowhere is the class division more sharply drawn than in the national pastime. "Fishing in Britain," says the pamphlet sent me by The British Travel and Holiday Association, "falls in three classes: game, sea, and

> coarse." Read: upper, middle, and lower. Trout taken from the public water here must be returned; they are the property of Mr. Mitchell that have strayed. Only coarse fish may be kept by the coarse. (1990, 253)

A survey of the three classes of angling in Britain, carried out in the early 1980s, asked a number of anglers from each class which among a group of reasons for pursuing their sport were the most important. All three groups included such items as "peace of mind" and "adventure and excitement"; only the coarse anglers omitted the item "take home food" from their top ten, while only they included the item "learn about new things" (Haworth 1983, 188–89). One would, of course, expect quite the opposite results. Stereotypes suggest that the working-class angler by the Mersey or the canal is fishing for huge carp that will feed the entire family, yet Howell Raines describes these anglers as "the most militant catch-and-release fishermen in the world. The distance they have advanced beyond the Tweedy Gents in environmental consciousness would have to be measured in light-years" (100).

Fishing in Britain is inextricably tied to the land and more precisely to the ownership of land. The fish in the stream that Humphrey fished are not viewed, as they might be in the United States and Canada, as a public trust over which one has an obligation of good stewardship, but as the "personal property, every one of them, of Mr. 'Porky' Mitchell, the meat-pie king. Eighty-five hundred pounds sterling he paid for the fishing in three miles of the stream for ten years" (Humphrey 1990, 252).

Humphrey also notes a curious aspect of British language in regards to the verbiage of fishing: "One does not catch a salmon. One kills a salmon. The distinction resembles that preserved in English between the verbs 'to murder' and 'to assassinate': ordinary citizens are murdered, leaders are assassinated. So with the King of Fish. He is not caught, like your perch or your pike or your lowly pickerel. He is killed" (258). One does not find just the salmon being "killed" in Britain, however. In many British texts, the verb *to kill* is used where an American would, even if intending to consume the fish, use the word *catch*.

It is generally agreed that while fly fishing enjoyed its birth and adoles-

cence in Britain, its best practitioners are now and have been for some years those working the waters of North America, and just as the best of angling expertise has made its way to the Catskills or the Yellowstone, so the deepest and most rewarding angling writing has made the passage as well. Bryn Hammond, in his excellent treatise on the contemporary trout-fishing culture, notes a missing ingredient in recent British works:

> British angling writing has often been redolent with the nostalgia of past fishing events. Rarely, however, during the past fifty or so years have many British fishing writers explored the introspective why?, as in why men fish. It is almost as if they take it for granted their readers know and understand full well, without being told. I suspect it is more to do with two prime, though dissimilar reasons. To begin with, the genre has tended to produce thoroughly practical anglers, averse to too much wonderment about it. Secondly, it is uncommonly difficult to do. (1994, 11)

American writers, as will be seen in the following pages, have not ignored the question of why one fishes, nor have they, as a whole, become blind to the wonderment of their sport. Certainly in the years between the appearance of Berners's *Treatise* and the beginning of the twentieth century one would look to Britain for the continuation of the tradition of the literature of angling, but in recent years this has shifted. England is the land of Walton, but the United States is home to virtually every significant writer following in Walton's tradition. Hammond notes this move and the place that it has reserved for the land of Walton:

> Until recently it was generally Americans who made the pilgrimage across the Atlantic to fish in Britain, partly to escape the frenzied car-chasing of hatchery trucks on some of the more popular streams, partly as real pilgrims to fish in such fabled waters as the Test or Itchen or Dove—or even in stillwaters such as Blagdon. American flyfishermen, by and large, are generally more piscatorially literate and well-read than their British counterparts, and seek out and absorb the timeless redolence of well-remembered fishing books along with their fishing. It is part of fishing as far as they are concerned, and an important part at that—perhaps also they regard this pilgrimage to the historical cradle of fly fishing as being good for their souls. (118)

Something of an exception to Hammond's generalization can be found in Neil Patterson, whose Chalkstream Chronicle details a year in the midst of "The Hollow," a web of English chalkstreams. Patterson evokes memories of recent American fishing writers, yet he still presents many distinctively British attitudes. He lives on the river. He speaks of those who own the fishing rights to the area (1995, 89). Despite these reservations, which derive chiefly from the geography of his country, Patterson shows that influences on fishing writing can flow in both directions across the Atlantic.

R. B. Marston, in his 1894 bibliographical and historical study of Walton and his forebears, laments the flow of the early editions of Walton's work to United States collectors, noting that they will probably never come back to England (1894, 8). At about the same moment in history, Marston could have witnessed the crest in fly fishing expertise passing from the waters of the Test and the Tweed to the wilder climes of the Beaverkill and points farther west. Perhaps Marston understood what was happening as he wrote, observing that "Walton is not out of place at Chicago. Extremes meet; and we have, as it were, a precedent for it in the contrast between Walton's calm life and the turbulent, terrible times in which he lived" (105).

Both Berners's and Walton's works were produced in times of great upheaval in England, the former at the close of the Wars of the Roses and the latter during the English Civil War. While the past century has been far from placid for the British, perhaps it is noteworthy that Walton's mantle has passed to another country that has been still attempting to define itself and realize its potential.