John Donne Journal
Vol. 12, Nos. 1 & 2 (1993)

The Compleat Angler and the Problems of Scientific Methodology

Joe Snader

Recent work on seventeenth-century literary productions has analyzed their political context not simply as a historic backdrop, but rather in terms of the ideologies that inform them, their functions as political acts, and the positions their authors held in terms of state apparatus and political faction.[1] This new attention to the political context of seventeenth-century literature invites attention to a work whose political content criticism has more readily acknowledged in the past: Izaak Walton's *The Compleat Angler*. Commonplaces of Waltonian criticism recognize his Royalist, Anglican reaction against the polemics of radical Protestantism and radical politics, as well as his pastoral praise of the country against the capitalist "busy-ness" of the city. Critics generally oppose this political and social content to the book's nominal purpose as a fishing manual, praising Walton's transformation of a mundane, practical genre into imaginative literature,[2] and thus occluding the possibility that ideology might influence the text's informational content. But *The Compleat Angler* appeared during a period that saw the spread of a developing scientific methodology with close ties to political, social, and economic change. As part of the *Angler*'s reaction against the intertwined worlds of capitalist "busy-ness" and religious controversy, the text reacts as well against the equally intertwined world of a developing scientific epistemology.

This reaction involves a nostalgic depiction of a harmonious oral transfer of knowledge, through a dialogue between an expert fisherman, Piscator, and his eager disciple, Venator. In Walton's time, such oral interchanges of practical knowledge were increasingly supplanted by the interchange between writer and reader through the printed word. The seventeenth century saw a proliferation of printed texts, including fishing manuals, but also including a large amount of religious and political polemic. Although *The Compleat Angler* itself employed the medium of print, its depiction of an oral exchange of knowledge sets that knowledge in opposition to print and its

associations with polemic and change. In addition, this reaction against print involves a resistance to methodology. Walter J. Ong has argued in broad terms for a connection between the spread of print and the Renaissance interest in method.[3] More specifically, a developing "scientific method," as outlined by Francis Bacon and members of the Royal Society, began to influence strategies of writing used for didactic literature such as fishing manuals. The dialogic form of *The Compleat Angler* transgresses the precepts of this developing scientific methodology, as the speeches of the two characters focus attention on their motives, needs, and desires in exchanging information instead of limiting attention to the information itself.

Criticism of the *Angler* tends to overlook the work's epistemological struggles in favor of an effort to justify its status as an aesthetic object. For example, John R. Cooper's 1967 study *The Art of the Compleat Angler* strives to recuperate Walton's book as a work of art against prior criticism, especially H.J. Oliver's focus on the text as a fishing manual.[4] Recuperative criticism such as Cooper's tends to bemoan the lack of critical interest in Walton despite his book's position as one of the most reprinted works in the English language. Cooper blames lukewarm critical responses on misguided critical approaches, identifying three generic categories—the georgic, the pastoral, and the dramatic or philosophic dialogue—as appropriate critical templates for reading the *Angler* in a positive manner. Such templates could compensate for a "critical problem . . . made more difficult by the unquestioning application of the modern distinction between imaginative and didactic writing" (12). Granted that a fully developed post-romantic opposition between literature and didacticism did not guide seventeenth-century literary production and reception, still specific writers of the period in theory and in practice began to institute, in nascent form, boundaries between the realms of artistic production, scientific knowledge, political polemics, and moral or religious suasion, even while other writers, consciously or unconsciously, transgressed such boundaries. David Norbrook's recent work on *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance* documents a poetic and political struggle between the Spenserians and Jonsonians, whom he presents as rival political groups, each trying to appropriate literature and oppose it to practices of writing employed by their opponents. More generally, Michael McKeon has identified a "destabilization of generic categories" in the period from 1600 to 1740, documenting interrelated struggles to define the content of such categories as novel, romance, history, and natural history.[5] Appearing in several editions from 1653 to 1676, *The Compleat Angler* emerged from a

context of struggles to define the content of writings which we would now label "scientific" or "technical," and it should be understood within this context.

Like Norbrook, Anthony Low has recently documented a seventeenth-century struggle over the contents of literature, one more immediately germane to the *Angler* because it concerns the georgic. Low discusses the slow development of a "georgic revolution" in poetry and social thought throughout the seventeenth century, following a period of neglect of the georgic mode during the early English Renaissance. Low attributes this early neglect to the disparagement with which a tradition of court poetry would view a mode glorifying labor, especially agricultural labor. This neglect contrasts sharply with a sudden explosion of georgic in the early eighteenth century, and Low connects this outpouring with a revolution in agricultural theory initiated by Bacon and continued through the middle of the seventeenth century by men such as Samuel Hartlib, who "combined an almost messianic commitment to religious reform, to educational reform, and to the advancement of science along Baconian lines for the benefit of humanity."[6] Within Bacon's writings, Low identifies both an increased valuation of labor and a desire for an elite to direct labor for the improvement of the land. Agricultural theorists following Bacon increasingly stressed innovation and experimentation, which depended on enclosure of commons land. This stress on innovation, according to Low, reached a peak in the 1650's: "The proliferation of scientific and propagandistic treatises on agriculture between 1650 and 1655 . . . reveals . . . that at the midpoint of the Interregnum fundamental changes in the way people viewed and practiced agriculture were well under way."[7] Low draws a connection between these changes and religious reform, emphasizing on the one hand the high valuation of labor by poets such as the radical Spenserian, George Wither, and on the other hand the hostility of the Anglican establishment towards labor. As examples of Royalists who produced "negative responses" to the changes in agricultural theory, Low mentions Vaughan and Walton, presumably referring to the 1653 and 1655 editions of *The Compleat Angler*.[8] Appearing during the height of Low's agricultural revolution, the *Angler* acted as a response to the tradition of agricultural innovation which he outlines.

The connections outlined by Low between agricultural innovation, Protestant reform, and literature formed part of a larger network of interrelations, described in the work of Christopher Hill, between the development of science, early capitalism, and radical Protestantism in Renaissance England. According to Hill, "before Bacon began to write an intellectual

revolution was under way," beginning with a "group of non-University Protestants and Puritans" who were "the first English translators of the classics."[9] Hill demonstrates "an intimate connection between merchants and science" in the support of businesses for the dissemination of scientific knowledge through private institutions such as Gresham College, and also in the contributions of craftsmen to the development of science, including improved instruments and experiments of their own (70). The study of crafts received particular emphasis in the work of Bacon, who intended "to compile a History of Trades in which scientific reports would be made of the successful experiments carried on in . . . workshops" (74). Against Bacon's hope for a government that would employ science as a means of power over and improvement of human life, Hill describes a discontent among "inquiring artisans and merchants, so sure of their ability to expand their nation's wealth, to remould its institutions, to extend trade to unknown realms—if only the government would not hinder them" (95). Hill reveals connections between the practices of a nascent science, expanding capitalism, opposition to government, and religious reform. As a royalist, as an Anglican, as a writer hostile towards capitalist "busy-ness," Walton would probably bear some hostility to developing scientific practices as well.

But the *Angler* does not indicate an absolute rejection of Baconian science. A seventeenth-century piscatorial treatise could hardly avoid the pervasive influence of Baconian methodology. Francisque Costa has argued that the text goes beyond a mere presentation of scientific information and exhibits a Baconian spirit of scientific inquiry.[10] He finds scientific skepticism in Piscator's efforts to sort out the competing claims of his sources, and he finds an interest in experiment in some of Piscator's stories of collecting fishing lore. However, Piscator's interest in experimentation appears generally in the context of experiments performed by other fishermen. In discussing the possibility that fish can smell, Piscator cites two "Experiments (but not tryed by myself) which I will deliver in the same words that they were given me by an excellent Angler" (*CA* 132). There is little in the text that suggests that Piscator pursues scientific method as part of his own experiments. The science of *The Compleat Angler* found at least one critic in its own day. A frequently quoted contemporary criticism of the *Angler* came from Richard Franck, a soldier in Cromwell's army, who described the book in 1658 as full of "morals" and "not giving us one precedent of his own practical experiments."[11] Coming from a politically and religiously radical perspective, Franck's criticism reflects a developing opposition between impractical,

amorphous "morals" on the one hand and precise, "practical experiments" on the other hand. Walton's transgression of this opposition often earns praise from twentieth-century critics. Cooper, for example, allies Walton's "view of nature" with that developed by Du Bartas in the *Devine Weeks*, a view celebrating the marvelous details of natural phenomena as examples of God's bounty (50). This mixture of the religious and the scientific transgresses the Baconian dictum of leaving theology to the theologians so that it does not encumber analysis of natural phenomena. Although *The Compleat Angler* must employ some strategies of Baconian writing, it abandons others.

The relation between the *Angler* and Baconian science also forms an important element of Anna K. Nardo's recent discussion of Walton's work. Recognizing the "revolutionary changes in religion, government, and science which convulsed seventeenth-century Europe," she identifies Baconian science as one of these changes: "some elements of the 'new philosophy' and Puritanism encouraged man to set himself apart from nature so that he might analyze it objectively in Baconian experiments or use it profitably in multiplying his talents" (307). According to Nardo, Walton "staunchly held science and religion together," and his work unifies the modern, scientific opposition between subject and object, observer and observed, through a sense of "play" (308). She discusses "play" as a unifying force in the *Angler* and points to Walton's own description of his work as a "recreation of a recreation," or, as she translates, "a reenactment (a re-creation) of a play experience (a recreation)" which "becomes a recreation for the reader as well as the author" (303). For Nardo the *Angler* unifies subject and object both by presenting the unified "play" experience of fishing and by reproducing that experience for the reader. In discussing the experience of reading the *Angler*, she cites W.J. Keith's comment about the general experience of reading "nature" writing: "Above all the rural writer must initiate a response . . . on the part of the reader. When we turn to the literature of the countryside, we go in search, not of 'nature,' but of a way of looking at nature; we seek a guide, not a subject,"[12] not a scientifically objectified representation of nature. Thus for Nardo the *Angler* offers its readers an experience which transgresses the modern, Baconian opposition between religion and science.

The *Angler* transgresses many of the precepts of scientific methodology as it developed throughout the seventeenth century. As part of Bacon's early formation of an epistemological method based on induction and experiment, he insisted that writers avoid imaginative flights of fancy in order better to concentrate on objects of study.[13] Setting Bacon's theories within the context

of a general seventeenth-century concern with the relation of language to the external world, Barbara J. Shapiro has demonstrated a widespread insistence on the need for concise, unadorned language, free of the encumbrance of rhetorical tropes, especially metaphor and fictional narrative.[14] Thomas Sprat, for example, in his *History of the Royal Society* (1667), described how the Society "indeavor'd to separate the knowledge of Nature, from the colours of Rhetoric, the devices of Fancy, or the delightful deciet of Fables."[15] Moreover,

> They have exacted from all their members, a close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions; clear sense; a native easiness: bringing all things as near the Mathematical plainness, as they can: and preferring the language of Artizans, Countrymen, and Merchants, before that of Wits, or Scholars . . .[16]

This adherence to "plain language," according to Hill, also characterizes the writings of dissenting polemicists (129). Thus associated with artisans, merchants, and polemicists, precepts advocating "plain language" would have aroused the suspicions of conservatives such as Walton.

Such precepts, however, guided much production of texts of natural history or practical instruction. Early in the seventeenth century, as Julie Solomon has recently argued, a proto-scientific "reading formation" had already begun to develop in relation to economic change. Solomon has demonstrated connections between the behavior of Renaissance commercial traders and the Baconian "theory of scientific reading which decrees intentional self-distancing and cancellation of desire."[17] Studying Bacon's prescriptions for suppression of desire to allow accurate interpretation, theorizing, and manipulation of empiric phenomena, she relates his prescriptions to self-distancing or "improvisation," a set of behaviors identified by Greenblatt as emerging in the West during the Renaissance. For both the Baconian theory of science and the behavior described by Greenblatt, she offers the material explanation of "the commercial class occupational experience," characteristic especially of travelling merchants, involving "an ability momentarily to suspend aspects of the self—its desires, values, habits, customs—to reap the material benefit that a thorough understanding of alien circumstances will provide" (521). Against Baconian theory, she offers as examples of practice some contemporary representations of an Indian medicine man by John White, a traveler who produced a body of scientific knowledge in the form of printed texts before attaining a governorship in the Americas and thus achieving a "unity of human power and scientific

knowledge" (551). Solomon finds in White's paintings evidence of the developing scientific method of self-distanced objectification, and for her these representations indicate "the complex character of reception and production within the scientific reading formation" at work during the period when Bacon's theories originated, as readers began to receive works produced on the scientific model (553). Appearing in the midst of this "scientific reading formation," the *Angler* necessarily incorporated some of its strategies while it reacted against others, particularly the suppression of desire.

Several remarks in Walton's preface demonstrate both an awareness of the expectations of contemporary readers with regard to scientific literature and at the same time a willingness to abandon the strictures usually guiding the production of such literature:

> Next let me tell the Reader, that in that which is the more useful part of this Discourse, that is to say, the observations of the nature and breeding, and seasons, and catching of Fish, I am not so simple as not to know, that a captious Reader may find exceptions against something said of some of these . . . . (*CA* 6).

Thus Walton recognized the importance, within the genre of piscatorial treatise, of providing "useful" information, information which readers could apply in their own piscatorial experiments. With this in mind Walton attempted to disarm criticism of his science by explaining his inclusion of material which did not directly contribute to the work's informational value:

> And though this Discourse may be liable to some Exceptions, yet I cannot doubt but that most Readers may receive so much pleasure or profit by it, as may make it worthy the time of their perusal, if they be not too grave or too busie men. And this is all the confidence that I can put on concerning the merit of what is here offered to their consideration and censure; and if the last prove too severe, as I have a liberty, so I am resolv'd to use it, and neglect all sowre Censures.
>
> And I wish the Reader also to take notice, that in writing of it I have made myself a recreation of a recreation; and that it might prove so to him, and not read dull and tediously, I have in several places mixt (not any scurrility, but) some innocent, harmless mirth; of which, if thou be a severe, sowre-complexion'd man, then I here disallow thee to be a competent judge . . . . (*CA* 5)

Critics have often identified the "too grave or too busie men," the "sowre-complexion'd men," expressing "sowre Censures," as Puritans, including both those belonging to dissident, argumentative factions, and also those empowered by the revolution, who censured the Anglican establishment as well as mirthful plays, and who conducted the serious "busie-ness" of post-revolutionary government. Walton's description of "sowre" men criticizing his mirth indeed suggests a reference to Puritan condemnation of the mirthful theater, and this suggestion demonstrates a connection within the text between scientific standards of criticism and Puritan criticism of pleasures. The text associates Puritanism with the Baconian dictum to evacuate pleasures and their concomitant desires from the site of information exchange. Reacting against this dictum, Walton justifies his inclusion of mirth as an antidote to the "dullness" and "tediousness" of ingesting the high information content of proto-scientific treatises.

But Walton goes further than justifying his inclusion of mirth by arguing that mere information cannot teach an "art or science":

> Now for the Art of catching fish, that is to say, how to make a man that was none, to be an Angler by a book? he that undertakes it shall undertake a harder task, than Mr. Hales (a most valiant and excellent Fencer), who in a printed book called, A private School of Defence) undertook to teach that art or science, and was laugh'd at for his labour. Not but that many useful things might be learned by that book, but he was laugh'd at, because that art was not to be taught by words, but practice: and so must Angling. (*CA* 6-7)

Walton here identifies a contradiction between, on the one hand, the Baconian emphasis on learning by means of experiment and, on the other hand, writing as a tool for inculcating such learning. As an example of seventeenth-century didactic literature, Hale's work (1614)[18] focuses on concise, practical instruction in the techniques of fencing, relying partially on second-person narratives of steps for the reader to follow. Such second-person narratives represent an important application of proto-scientific methodology to techniques of writing, asking the reader to focus on the individual steps of a process schematized at a minute level of detail. In order to aid the reader's concentration on the process itself, these narratives minimize reference to the expected result of the process, mentioning it briefly only before and perhaps at the end of the process description. Such techniques, for Walton, represent

an impossible effort to teach by means of "words" only, as if language could transparently encode the actions of the external world. In insisting on a division between the printed instructions of Hale's words and their practical goal, Walton suggests that in order to induce the reader to practice such experiments, it may be necessary to abandon the precepts of scientific methodology.

Walton's reaction to Hale's didactic text would also apply to the bulk of seventeenth-century fishing treatises, which presented their information in a straightforward, unadorned, laconic manner, offering a sharp contrast to Walton's flights of fancy. The *Angler* belongs to a minority tradition of piscatorial treatises employing a dialogic structure. Two such texts appeared before the *Angler*, including the first known English fishing volume, *The Treatyse of Fysshynge wyth an Angle* (written c. 1450, printed 1496) and a later printed volume, *The Arte of Angling* (1577), both of which adopted the form of a dialogue between Piscator and Viator.[19] Besides these exceptions, English piscatorial treatises printed during the Renaissance generally consisted of expository prose, alternating between third-person descriptions of the habits of fishes and second-person narratives detailing the steps needed to catch a fish.[20] For example, Leonard Mascall's *A Booke of fishing with Hooke & Line*, which Gerald Bentley has described as "largely and clumsily pirated from the 1450 *Treatyse*,"[21] abandons the earlier work's dialogic form, setting its information into an expository framework. Whereas the dialogic form entailed a large amount of simulated verbal interchange, necessary for the dialogic fiction but extraneous to a Baconian transfer of information, the expository texts concentrated on providing useful information for the fisherman, briefly outlining varieties of fishes, methods of catching them, and ways to produce tools for catching them. Renaissance treatises on fishing, by the time of Walton's work, generally focused on the use-value of a modicum of information, carefully expunging what Bacon would dismiss as poetic flights of fancy.

These two forms of piscatorial writing, the dialogic and the expository, achieve a heteroglot union in Walton's *Angler*, which employs the form of a dialogue but which simultaneously increases both the amount of didactic information and the range of imaginative exploration. The dialogue form allows for transfer of some didactic information in that the teacher's speeches involve didactic instructions, including both third-person descriptions of fishes and second-person narrations of chronological activity. For example, *The Arte of Angling* contains several short passages of instruction, never exceeding thirty lines. Walton's *Angler*, on the other hand, amplifies the level

of didactic content by devoting whole chapters to instruction. Chapters ten and eleven, for example, concentrate on providing useful instructions in the second person without relieving the reader with dialogue, poems, or dramatic narrative. These uninterrupted speeches largely fulfill the promise of a "Compleat" informational work advertised in the title.

In addition to amplifying the didactic content, *The Compleat Angler* also amplifies the flights of fancy of the dialogue form. Whereas *The Arte of Angling* contains an interlude of conversation between Piscator and his wife, and *The Compleat Angler* expands the role of the feminine by introducing a milkmaid and her young daughter, who sing songs and cook food for Piscator and Venator at two points in the text. Whereas *The Arte of Angling* offers a single scene of convivial repast, *The Compleat Angler* provides several, with two extra revelers to increase the conviviality. Whereas *The Arte of Angling* presents some lively verbal sparring that manages to anger Piscator, *The Compleat Angler* devotes much dialogue to establishing a respectful relationship between teacher and student. Finally, *The Compleat Angler* introduces singing contests, recitations of poetry, and a large number of references to contemporary literature. This wide range of imaginative material separates the work from the bulk of contemporary piscatorial treatises. Much of this imaginative material appears in the long first chapter, which occupies nearly twenty percent of the work but contains no practical information concerning steps for catching a particular fish. Though even the most narrowly didactic fishing treatises routinely began with a brief section praising the antiquity and virtues of angling, *The Compleat Angler* develops such concerns into a drama of combative dialogue, with Piscator debating the merits of angling against the claims of Venator for hunting and Auceps for falconry. Their debate covers topics such as the relative merits of air, land, and water and the relative merits of contemplation and action. This long prefatory debate would probably exasperate contemporary readers such as Franck who expected to open the book for practical instruction.

Even when the text finally starts to impart practical information, it does so gradually, with pieces of didactic, second-person narrative often interrupted by Venator's reactions. Moreover, the text inscribes practical information within a dramatic context, as information concerning how to catch a fish appears only when the two characters actually try to catch a fish. The narrative first signals the advent of practical information when Piscator promises to catch a chub, but Venator's response immediately overlays the practical intent with the physical reaction of distaste: "Oh Sir, a Chub is the

worst Fish that swims, I hoped for a Trout to my dinner" (*CA* 63). But Piscator replies that

> though a Chub be by you and many others, reckoned the worst of fish, yet you shall see I'll make it a good Fish by dressing it.
>
> Ven. Why, how will you dress him?
>
> Pisc. I'll tell you by and by, when I have caught him. Look you here, Sir, do you see? (but you must stand very close) there lye upon the top of the water in this very hole twenty Chubs. I'll catch only one, and that shall be the biggest of them all: and that I will do so, I'll hold you twenty to one, and you shall see it done. (*CA* 63)

With the chub the text introduces two forms of dramatic tension that will recur when the taxonomy moves onto other fish. One form involves the tension of wagers between Piscator, Venator, and other characters concerning fishing prowess. The other form involves Piscator's promises concerning good recipes for fishes with bad reputations. In the case of the chub, the text provides almost immediate satisfaction of these tensions, as Piscator first catches the largest chub and then offers to lead Venator to an ale house. The dialogue allows some more dramatic tension to arise as Piscator describes the appeals of the ale house, Venator complains of hunger and weariness, and the two converse with their hostess before she cooks the chub. After tension is resolved by Venator's praise for the special recipe, he asks Piscator that

> from henceforth you would allow me to call you Master, and that really I may be your Scholar . . . .
>
> Pisc. Give me your hand; from this time forward I will be your Master, and teach you as much of this Art as I am able; and will, as you desire me, tell you somewhat of the nature of most of the Fish that we angle for, and I am sure I both can and will tell you more than any common Angler yet knows. (*CA* 65)

These lines complete chapter II, and chapter III immediately begins with the first long passage of second-person didactic narrative, containing instructions for cooking the secret recipe and for catching the chub. Rather than begin with the didactic narrative, the text begins by fostering its reader's desire for the narrative. By dramatizing the ease with which Piscator's knowledge allows him to capture the chub, and by dramatizing the gustatory

pleasure which his secret knowledge can create, even for a fish as distasteful as the chub, the text attempts to create desire in its audience for the knowledge which offers such pleasures. The base didactic narrative of practical instructions for cooking the chub is inscribed within a dramatic narrative of doubt, promise, tension-building delay, ultimate sensory pleasure, and, most importantly, initiation into the mysteries of the small group of those who relish the chub, the cult familiar with the special recipe. The emphasis on the secrecy, or at least the rarity, of Piscator's knowledge also heightens the reader's desire to possess this knowledge.

The *Angler* heightens its reader's desire through a dramatic narrative of the transfer, practice, and pleasure of piscatorial knowledge. Within this dramatic narrative, the two characters perform functions analogous to those which Peter Brooks has attributed to the characters who tell and listen to the tales contained within framed narratives such as *Heart of Darkness* or *Absalom, Absalom!*. For Brooks such characters enact a process of "transference" among both readers and writers, a process of identification with both the desire to narrate and the desire to consume the narrations of others. Though all narratives involve such desires, "Framed narratives and those . . . that incorporate the listener in the discourse of the speaker illustrate most explicitly a condition of all narrative: shape and meaning are the product of the listening as of the telling."[22] Like framed narratives, the dramatic narrative of *The Compleat Angler* calls attention to the roles of teller and listener in shaping meaning. On the other hand, second-person didactic narrative, following the dictates of scientific methodology, presents a set of externalized actions as a permanent meaning seemingly independent of teller and listener. Whereas second-person didactic instruction represses the roles of teller and listener and thus represses the desires to tell and to listen, Walton inscribes his passages of second-person narration within a dramatic narrative with a teller and listener who heighten these desires.

The desire to consume narration is figured within the *Angler* through the speeches of Venator, who acts as a construction or reflection of reader response, an attempt to signal or imitate reader reaction. Venator first acts as a figure for reader response with his initial skepticism towards anglers, as he tells Piscator that he has "heard many merry huntsmen make sport and scoff at Anglers" (*CA* 21). This skepticism allows him to act as a figure for audience reception of the section, required by the generic piscatorial formula, of praise for the antiquity and virtues of angling. Venator's role as figure of reader response is especially pronounced within the section on the chub.

When Venator asks to become Piscator's apprentice, a drama of initiation occurs, complete with ritual handshake, that encodes the reader's desire to possess the secrets of piscatorial knowledge and to join the circle of insiders, Piscator's "brothers of the angle." Appearing just before the work's first true didactic section, this drama of initiation figures the reader's passage through the long first chapter into the didactic sections. A sense of ritual also pervades the close of the work, which Cooper likens to a performance of the "sacrament" of "communion," complete with a ritual repast celebrating Piscator's and Venator's relationship as brothers of the angle (103). As the drama of initiation reflects Venator's arrival within the circle of knowledgeable fishermen, it also figures the reader's achievement of knowledge through consumption of the text.

Between the ritual handshake that begins the initiation and the ritual repast that completes it, the text mingles second-person didactic instructions with dramatic dialogue. The second-person instructions generally occur in long, uninterrupted passages, offering a sharp contrast to the earlier dialogue, *The Arte of Angling*, in which Viator frequently interrupts Piscator's instructions with impertinent questions or skeptical wisecracks. Although Walton's Venator occasionally interrupts his master's instructions, these interruptions generally separate long paragraphs of instruction. If Venator asks a question, it serves as a device for shifting to a new topic. In contrast with the earlier Viator, Walton's Venator shows much more deference to Piscator, allowing his master to control the organization of the day's events. At one point Piscator outlines the following plan:

> My honest Scholar, it is now past five of the Clock, we will fish till nine, and then go to breakfast: Go you to yonder Sycamore-tree, and hide your Bottle of drink under the hollow root of it; for about that time, and in that place, we will make a brave breakfast with a piece of powder'd Beef, and a Radish or two, that I have in my Fish-bag: we shall, I warrant you, make a good, honest, wholsome, hungry breakfast. And I will then give you direction for the making and using of your flies: and in the mean time, there is your Rod and Lines, and my advice is, that you fish as you see me do, And let's try which can catch the first Fish. (*CA* 101)

The text subsequently satisfies the tensions created by Piscator's promises through a dramatization of their practice of fishing and their repast. After

Venator expresses his satisfaction with the meal, he requests "And now good Master, proceed to your promised direction for making and ordering my Artificial flie" (*CA* 103), and his request signals the passage to a long section of didactic, second-person narrative. As the voice of satisfaction with the dramatic interlude and the voice of desire for piscatorial information, Venator acts a figure for reader response to the different materials that compose the text. At another point in the text, when Piscator wants to pause in his instruction, Venator asks him to continue—"Nay, good master, one fish more"—, but Piscator expresses the need to mix instruction with pleasure: "But Scholar, have you nothing to mix with this discourse, which now grows both tedious and tiresom?" (*CA* 167). Here Piscator acts as a figure for the text's arrangement of material and control over the mixture of information and pleasure for the reader's instruction. The dialogue itself enacts the tension between the attraction of didactic narrative and the attraction of scenes of mirth and pleasure.

The *Angler*'s intermixture of knowledge and desire has appealed to a large number of readers, starting in the seventeenth century. Walton's contemporaries recorded positive reactions to the mixture that constituted his work in the prefatory poems which accompanied later editions. In general the prefatory poems focus not on the work's informational content, but on the art, mirth, and wit mingled with that information and on the pleasure which they produce. Floud's poem compares the *Angler* to Erasmus' *Colloquies*, in which are "mixt some toys, that by varieties/ He might entice all readers" (*CA* 9). With its mixture of "Pleasure and information," the *Angler* "makes an art a recreation" (*CA* 9). Floud draws on an opposition between seventeenth-century meanings of "art" as an activity guided by a set of rules and "recreation" as a pleasurable activity. In "mak[ing] an art a recreation," the *Angler* makes a technical activity pleasurable. Floud identifies his reading experience as a "recreation," drawing on the dual meaning of "recreation" as a reproduction and as a pleasurable activity:

> 'Twas so to me; who saw the chearful Spring
> Pictur'd in every meadow, heard birds sing
> Sonnets in every grove, saw fishes play
> In the cool crystal streams . . . . (*CA* 9).

For Floud the work recreates a complete environment of pleasure with a varied sensory impact on the reader.

In another prefatory poem, Harvie likens the *Angler*'s effect on the reader to a fisherman's catching a fish:

> For he that views it with judicious looks,
> Shall find it full of art, baits, lines, and hooks.
> The world the river is; both you and I,
> And all mankind, are either fish or fry:
> If we pretend to reason, first or last
> His baits will tempt us, and his hooks hold fast. (*CA* 9)

But Harvie alters this analogy somewhat when he broaches the question of eating the catch, as the reader is

> Drest to be fed, not to be fed upon:
> And danger of a surfeit here is none.
> The solid food of serious Contemplation
> Is sauc'd here, with such harmless recreation,
> That an ingenious and religious mind
> Cannot inquire for more than it may find
> Ready at once prepar'd, either t'excite
> Or satisfie a curious appetite. (*CA* 10)

The bait and hook analogy signifies the book's appeal to and satisfaction of the reader's "appetite." Contemporary reactions such as this, praising the book's balanced mixture of instruction and pleasure, create an implied contrast with unbalanced texts, such as proto-scientific informational treatises, which provide a glut of information without a balance of pleasure and delight, failing to satisfy the "appetite" of readers.

Twentieth-century critical readings offer further evidence of the text's evocation of its readers' desires. In discussing the differences between Walton's work and its predecessors, Jonquil Bevan identifies several ways in which the book appeals to the senses, including the eye, the ear, and the palate (57). Arguing that Walton's inclusion of images of fish and musical notation produced a costly project for a seventeenth-century printer, Bevan emphasizes the appeal of the pictures to the eye and suggests that the musical notation acts as an invitation to the reader to join in the song (48-57). For Bevan, the book as a whole "invites" the reader to join Piscator's "Brotherhood of the Angle" (63-4), acting in general as an advertisement for the

pastime of fishing. Costa speaks more frankly of the book's hortatory effect in describing the reader's reaction to the text's portrayal of fishing: "Non seulement il connaîtra mieux le monde aquatique, mais il aura le désir de le mieux connaître" (314). For Costa, "Walton persuade, séduit. Avec lui, le monde des poissons de rivière est entré dans la littérature" (314). Interestingly, Costa connects "literature" with "persuasion," "seduction," and "desire." For him, the presence of these qualities in the text justifies its status as a literary object, an item preserved from out of the forgettable detritus of typical fishing treatises.

The presence of these qualities can also explain both the book's immense popularity from the end of the eighteenth to the middle of the twentieth centuries and its status as a landmark within the literary-critical "tradition" of naturalist writing. W.J. Keith, for example, places the *Angler* at the head of his study of the *Rural Tradition* in English literature.[23] Costa attributes the book's success to what he calls its "naturalisme," its employment of the techniques of naturalist-writers, in whose work "la science se poétise, se vivife" (313). Thus Keith and Costa place the *Angler* in a conservative tradition that promotes an image of unchanging, eternally "natural" landscape free from the ravages of change. Such an image of an unchanging natural world would produce a powerful evocation of desire and does much to explain the *Angler*'s popularity, both with the general reading public and with a small circle of critics who praise its artistic merit. By association this sense of permanence and naturalness extends to the information provided by the text and to its depiction of an oral transfer of knowledge.

Elizabeth Eisenstein has identified printing as an important "agent of change" for Renaissance revolutions in both religion and science.[24] Even before the English revolution, political and religious tensions produced a tremendous outpouring of printed polemic. When the revolution freed the press, it increased both the amount and the audacity of polemical writing. The seventeenth century also saw a steady increase in the amount of writing which followed the precepts of the developing scientific methodology. In relation to the shift from a manuscript to a print culture, Ong has argued for sweeping epistemological changes, affecting especially educational methodology, centering on a shift towards the fixity, permanence, and visual orientation of the printed word and away from a manuscript environment still saturated with the orally based traditions of dialogue and rhetoric.[25] The *Angler*'s harmonious depiction of an oral transfer of knowledge from master to pupil is a nostalgic celebration of a decreasingly significant medium of communication, a

celebration which reacts against the changes wrought by print. Within the piscatorial tradition, the dialogue form itself harks back to a manuscript context, which informed the original dialogic fishing work in English, the *Treatyse on Fysshynge wyth an Angle*. Written around 1450, this text circulated in manuscript for fifty years until its publication in 1496, and so the dialogic form reflects the text's genesis within a manuscript reading formation, where oral performance still held some prominence, rather than within a print reading formation. In adopting the format of a dialogue between a fishing master and his student, later printed texts such as the 1577 *Arte of Angling* and Walton's *Compleat Angler* recreate in dramatic form the transmission of knowledge from a master to an apprentice, via the spoken rather than the written word. For a reader engaged in the process of acquiring knowledge from a printed volume, this dramatization of oral learning would produce "transference" or identification with a teller and a listener actively engaged in the process of oral exchange. Combined with the text's pastoral appeal, this identification would create desire for an oral past.

In addition to its image of Piscator and Venator, the text creates an image of an extended network of fishermen who exchange information orally. Costa has called attention to Piscator's repeated references to oral sources of piscatorial information, among friends or acquaintances who have related particular methods or facts concerning particular fish. In one case Piscator describes a technique used by an old fishing-buddy, Oliver Henly. Piscator narrates first his personal request of Henly for an explanation of his technique, then Henly's evasive reply, and finally the explanation of the technique as given by "one of his most intimate and secret friends" (*CA* 131). Piscator's discussion inscribes the second-person didactic narrative which explains the technique within a context of secrecy, intimate friendship, and oral transfer of information. Costa has praised these narrations of oral transmission as "l'un des traits les plus originaux du traité," especially with regard to "le cadre de la littérature didactique contemporaine, où l'individualisme, souvent même le prétention, sont le règle générale" (271). For Costa the oral transmission or fishing lore represents a communal sharing of information, which sharply contrasts with the "individualism" of the didactic format typically employed by piscatorial treatises. Although Costa does not clearly specify this "individualism," "prétention" suggests that he conceives of a rule of authorial ambition against which Walton's Anglican humility offers an exception. In contrast to the individualistic competition of the print marketplace, the *Angler*'s oral community enjoys a free exchange

of piscatorial information. There are even sharper contrasts, first, between, on the one hand, the privacy, secrecy, and rarity of oral instruction as recreated by Walton and, on the other hand, the easy availability, promiscuity, and ubiquity of printed instruction. Second, there is a contrast between, on the one hand, the proximity of teacher and student within Walton's recreation of oral instruction and, on the other hand, the isolation of the student/reader from the teacher/writer within printed transmission of information. Walton's recreation of oral instruction incites its reader's desire by depicting the pleasures of learning in an oral community.

This celebration of oral culture extends to an appreciation for oral poetry. In a recent essay devoted primarily to Donne's *The Baite*, Low discusses Walton's handling of that poem within *The Compleat Angler*. Considering the narrative setting of the poem in terms of the vocal performance and reactions of Walton's characters, Low contrasts its setting with those of Marlowe's *Passionate Shepherd* and Raleigh's *Nymph's Reply*. The latter poems appear in the context of a friendly singing contest between a mother and daughter. Cogently arguing that "Walton's handling of the two songs makes it seem as if neither ever came from the pages of a book," Low associates this context with a "rustic oral tradition," a "sense of community," and a "defiance of the destructive power of change."[26] Low quotes Piscator's warm response to the milkmaids' songs: "They were old-fashioned Poetry, but choicely good, I think much better than the strong lines that are now in fashion in this critical age."[27] Low then focuses on the stylistic differences between Donne's "strong lines" and the "remnants of a more gracious age of song,"[28] but Piscator's criticism of the "strong lines" of his too "critical age" could also involve a Cavalier rejection of the close association of poetry and politics in his age, especially considering the *Angler*'s repeated emphasis on quiet retreat from political controversy. In reacting against Baconian science, Protestant political polemics, and the public, printed literature of his day, Walton produced an image of an oral past free of the problems and practices introduced by print culture.

Thus the political and religious conservatism of *The Compleat Angler* also entailed a conservatism with regard to developments in science and writing, including both poetry and technical prose. This conservatism reflects the close connections among religious dissenters, political radicals, early capitalists, and early scientists, connections which suggest ties between writers of polemic and writers employing Baconian methodology. Because of such ties, proto-scientific methodology must have represented a problematic tool for conservative Anglicans who wished to write about the natural

world, despite the value of such a methodology for presenting concrete information. As a central strategy in the project of applying Baconian methodology to the transfer of information through printed books, second-person narrative must have represented a problematic tool for Walton despite its value for explaining the steps in a particular process. His sense of its inadequacy as an instrument of instruction without some intermixture of pleasure indicates his suspicion of a developing scientific epistemology with close ties to both economic changes and the spread of print. Against a negatively portrayed city of capitalist "busy-ness," he produced an image of quiet communal exchange. Against a profusion of printed treatises prophesying radical religion and radical politics, Walton presented a work that constructed an image of a harmonious oral past, free of polemics and free of dissent. Against a profusion of printed books offering proto-scientific, second-person instruction for isolated readers, he offered an image of oral instruction full of pleasurable interludes. Against the developing scientific practice of eliminating desire from textual representations of useful information, he offered a text full of scientific information, but he inscribed that information within a dramatic narrative that heightened desire instead of repressing it.

University of Maryland, College Park

Notes

[1] See, for example, Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne and Their Contemporaries* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983); David Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984); and Michael Wilding, *Dragon's Teeth: Literature in the English Revolution* (New York: Clarendon, 1987).

[2] For John R. Cooper, the *Angler* "is at once an imaginative work describing a journey into the countryside outside London and a textbook on angling, giving detailed and largely accurate information;" see *The Art of The Compleat Angler* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1968), p. 5. Anna K. Nardo describes the work as a "mixture of practical instruction, Christian moralizing, and pastoral narrative;" see "A 'Recreation of a Recreation': Reading *The Compleat Angler*," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 79 (1980): 303. M. A. Bond has read the *Angler* as an expression of a view of truth as a reconciliation of opposites; see "'Fishhooks in Amos': Izaak Walton and the 'Real Truth,'" *New Blackfriars* 53 (1971): 327-31. Further references to Cooper and Nardo will indicate these works with parenthetical citations.

[3] *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1958) discusses Ramism in relation to sweeping changes in educational methodology, with some attention to the dependence of these changes on the development of printing. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Methuen, 1982) offers a broad overview of epistemological changes related to the shifts from oral to manuscript and from manuscript to print technologies.

[4] H. J. Oliver, "The Composition and Revision of 'The Complete Angler,'" *Modern Language Review* 42 (1947): 295-313. More recent attempts to demonstrate the *Angler*'s status as an aesthetic object include Francisque Costa, *L'Oeuvre d'Izaak Walton(1593-1683)*. Études Anglaises 48. (Paris: Didier, 1973); and Jonquil Bevan, *Izaak Walton's "The Complete Angler": The Art of Recreation* (New York: St. Martin's, 1988). Further references to Bevan and Costa will indicate these works through parenthetical citations.

[5] Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

[6] Anthony Low, *The Georgic Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 143.

[7] Low, *Georgic*, p. 146.

[8] Cooper (166-184) has discussed in depth the development of *The Compleat Angler* over several editions. He demonstrates a large set of changes from the 1653 edition to the 1655 edition, after which only slight changes were added in all subsequent editions. In my paper parenthetical references using the abbreviation *CA* indicate Izaak Walton, *The Compleat Angler, or the Contemplative Man's Recreation*, ed. John Buchan, (1676; New York: Oxford University Press, 1960). This is a reprint of Walton's fifth and final edition of 1676.

Low places Walton in a category opposed to the georgic whereas Cooper sees *The Compleat Angler* operating at least partially in a georgic mode. The primary difference between the two critics lies in their definitions of georgic, with Low focusing on a specific tradition of seventeenth-century poetic and theoretical interest in husbandry, and Cooper employing a broader sense of georgic that includes any combination of practical instruction in a rural skill with larger poetic themes.

[9] Christopher Hill, *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution*, (New York: Clarendon, 1965), pp. 69, 28. Further references to Hill will indicate this work with a parenthetical citation.

[10] Costa, 293-312. Bevan (119-20) makes the same argument in less depth.

[11] Richard Franck, *Northern Memoirs*, ed. Sir Walter Scott (Edinburgh: A. Constable, 1821), p. 175; quoted in Cooper, p. 52.

[12] W. J. Keith, *The Rural Tradition: A Study of the Non-fiction Prose Writers of the English Countryside* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), p. 24; quoted in Nardo, p. 304.

[13] Bacon's own writing rarely put this method into practice, instead relying heavily on imaginative tropes such as metaphor, as Ronald Leavo has recently demonstrated in "Francis Bacon and the Mobility of Science," *Representations* 40 (Fall 1992): 1-32.

[14] Barbara J. Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England: A Study of the Relationships Between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law and Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 227-242.

[15] Thomas Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society* (1667), eds. Jackson I. Cope and Harold Whitmore (St. Louis: Washington UP, 1959), p. 62; quoted in Shapiro, p. 236.

[16] Sprat, p. 113; quoted in Hill, p. 129.

[17] Julie Solomon, "'To Know, To Fly, To Conjure' Situating Baconian Science at the Juncture of Early Modern Modes of Reading," *Renaissance Quarterly* 44 (Autumn 1991): 523. Further references to Solomon will indicate this work with parenthetical references.

[18] G[eorge] H[ale], *The Private Schoole of Defence or the Defects of Publique Teachers* (London: John Helme, 1614).

[19] For a reprint of the 1577 work, see Gerald Eades Bentley, ed., *The Arte of Angling* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958). The 1653 edition of *The Compleat Angler* retains the name of "Viator," but the 1655 edition and all subsequent editions use "Venator."

[20] Accessible works include Leonard Mascall, *A Booke of Fishing with Hooke and Line* (London: John Wolfe, 1590; rpt. The English Experience. No. 542. New York: Da Capo, 1973), and three works collected in J. Milton French, *Three Books on Fishing* (Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1962). The volume includes Jan Dubravius' *A New Booke of Good Husbandry* (1599), Gervase Markham's *The Pleasure of Princes* (1614), and Thomas Barker's *Barker's Delight: of the Art of Angling* (1659).

[21] Bentley, p. 3.

[22] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), p. 236.

[23] Keith, pp. 25-37.

[24] Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge, 1979).

[25] Ong, *Ramus*.

[26] Anthony Low, "The Compleat Angler's 'Baite'; or, the Subverter Subverted," *John Donne Journal* 4.1 (1985): 3.

[27] *CA* 196; quoted in Low, "Baite," p. 3.

[28] Low, "Baite," p. 3.