“THE CAPTAIN’S BEST MATE”: GENDER, GENRE, AND REPRESENTATION IN WOMEN’S WHALING JOURNALS, LETTERS, AND MEMOIRS, 1823 TO 1915

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Abstract:

This dissertation examines seventy-four journals, collections of letters, and memoirs written by sixty-one different women during their voyages on whaling ships in the nineteenth century, most unpublished. I examine the patterns and anomalies of content, genre, and rhetoric in the writings; by doing so, I reveal how the women perform gender, class, and national identity, and how they adhere to, breach, and/or negotiate these ideological constructs through their writing. I argue that the collage of genres and representations, and consistency in content, rhetoric, and tone make these whaling wives’ journals a unique sub-genre of nineteenth-century literature. As well, my dissertation is the first large-scale examination of how the women employ multiple genres and how elements of travel narrative and foreign commentary inform the whaling women’s journals. Chapter One analyzes the material and ideological conditions that led the women to sail, and also spatially and socially separated them from the sailors and purpose of the voyage. Chapter Two examines the women’s performances of domesticity throughout the voyages; Chapter Three analyzes the women’s travel narratives. Chapter Four takes a closer look at two particular women’s journals and five of the short memoirs.
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Introduction

This dissertation examines seventy-four journals, collections of letters, and memoirs written by sixty-one different women during their voyages on whaling ships in the nineteenth century. The six memoirs were written long after the women’s journeys, in the early twentieth century. These wives, and five daughters, of the ships’ captains sailed around the globe on voyages lasting between one and six years—each one the only woman on board a ship containing twenty or more men. Only a few of these documents have been published; the others are held at archives. I examine the patterns and anomalies of content, genre, and rhetoric in the writings; by doing so, I reveal how the women perform gender, class, and national identity, and how they adhere to, breach, and/or negotiate these ideological constructs through their writing. Starting from Judith Butler’s work on gender performativity, I draw on theorists and critics of life-writing, nineteenth-century women writers, and nineteenth-century travel literature. My dissertation is the first large-scale examination of how the women employ multiple genres and how elements of travel narrative and foreign commentary inform the whaling women’s journals. Chapter One analyzes the material and ideological conditions that led the women to sail, and also spatially and socially separated them from the sailors and purpose of the voyage. Chapter Two examines the women’s performances of domesticity throughout the voyages; Chapter Three analyzes the women’s travel narratives. Chapter Four takes a closer look at two particular women’s journals and five of the short memoirs.

Throughout the nineteenth century, as America developed its highly successful maritime economy of merchant and whaling vessels, through this industry it also engaged
in global exploration and foreign relations in places as far ranging as Herschel Island in the Arctic, Tasmania bordering on the Antarctic, and the West Coast of Africa. American Sea Literature also developed—a large body of work dominated by fiction and memoirs. Following a tradition beginning in the earliest days of western literature, these writings imbued maritime travel with symbolic meaning. The sea was a masculine sphere, a place a boy ran away to and returned from a man, a dangerous and moody challenger that could triumph over the bravest and most accomplished seaman. As well, in the Pacific Ocean in particular, the sea also led to lands and people there to be “discovered” by Americans—places where the new nation could exert economic and religious dominance.

Particularly during this formative period of American history, the masculine symbolism of the sea is so strong that the presence of women is often occluded or entirely forgotten. During nineteenth century, however, hundreds of captains’ wives accompanied their husbands on merchant and whaling voyages. While women had of course voyaged to America since the seventeenth century as immigrants, tourists, and slaves, and while eighteenth century wives had sailed along the East Coast on short trips for trade, these nineteenth century “sister sailors” traveled for a very different purpose. Their motivation was not political or economic necessity; rather, those who gave their reasons for going said they did so to bring comfort to their husbands. When writing their journals and letters, the women anticipated a small audience of family and friends. None of the women appear to write with intent to publish. Many wrote daily entries, although many more do so inconsistently. There is no revision, or for that matter any overarching plot or suspense. The entries are often written without affect. While there is some narrative, it is usually brief and interspersed with other forms of content. Foreign travel descriptions
provide the longest narratives in the journals, and tend not to shift in topic and genre, as
the daily entries at sea often do. With the exception of the first extant journal, which
predates the others by twenty years, the journals written from 1845 to 1910 are
remarkably similar. This common collage of genres and representations, and consistency
in content, rhetoric, and tone make these whaling wives’ journals a unique sub-genre of
nineteenth-century literature, although the women’s individual voices do emerge, and for
every pattern of representation there is an anomalous entry.

These women’s writings are both products and producers of nineteenth-century
American literature and culture. As life-writing criticism and theory has taught us, we
cannot simply read these journals as casual writing, uncomplicated by social, political,
and gender constraints on genre and composition practices. I will consider the women’s
ideological and material conditions, and how their choices of genre, content, and rhetoric
are rooted in and influenced by such conditions. How do the women represent their
physical surroundings and their interpersonal interactions on ship and in foreign ports?
How do these descriptions, in turn, discursively construct the women as subjects? Given
their anomalous positions on board, how do they negotiate their gender and class
positions in the journals? How do they position themselves in terms of the economic
mission of the ship? How do they engage with myths of national identity and empire
building? And in what ways do they discursively authorize themselves as writers and as
voyagers?

Archival Research

This project will focus on the extant journals and letters of American women who
sailed on the whaling vessels. According to historian Joan Druett, 443 women, including
captains’ wives, a few mates’ wives, and four women who went to sea disguised as men, went on 644 whaling voyages in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (“Sister Sailors” 417).¹ My own research has tangentially eliminated one of the women Druett lists and added ten more; nonetheless, 450 women is a strong approximation. My research will focus on sixty-eight extant journals and letters written aboard whale ships between 1823 and 1915, and six reminiscences recorded decades later, all together written by sixty-one women—approximately thirteen percent of all the women who sailed on whaling voyages. I will also look at a letter written by a Pacific Island woman who married a New England sailor—the only non-Euro-American woman’s writing discussed in this study.

These primary resources demanded a great deal of archival research. I examined each of the primary sources, most of them original, hand-written manuscripts, and some several hundred pages long, containing hundreds--sometimes over a thousand--entries. I began with a list of whaling women’s manuscripts and publications compiled by Druett in the 1980s; her bibliography did not necessarily match the cataloging format at any of the archives, so locating the resources often proved to be difficult. Three journals Druett listed I was unable to locate, and another two journals I eliminated after concluding they had not been written by the captain’s wife. Several libraries have acquired additional manuscripts since Druett compiled her bibliography; they are included in this study.

The New Bedford Whaling Museum in Massachusetts holds the largest archive of whaling women’s works: thirty-five journals, collections of letters, or memoirs by thirty-three women. Twenty-eight are original manuscripts, two are available in microfilm only,

¹ There is certainly room for further historical investigation into the number of women on
and five are out-of-print publications. The New Bedford Public Library holds two original manuscripts. The Nantucket Historical Association in Massachusetts holds ten whaling women’s journals: eight original manuscripts and two typescripts of partial journals. The Nantucket Atheneum, a public library, holds one manuscript. Martha’s Vineyard Museum, also in Massachusetts, has a young girl’s whaling journal manuscript, an unpublished memoir by her mother, and a letter written by a Pacific Island woman. The Mystic Seaport Museum of America and the Sea in Connecticut holds six whaling manuscripts written by four different women. Harvard University’s Baker Library has one manuscript, and the Newport Historical Association in Rhode Island has a manuscript also published in serial form in the *Newport Mercury* newspaper. The Providence, Rhode Island Public Library has three manuscripts. I also discuss a journal published by New England Press, one published by the Oysterponds, NY Historical Society, and one published by the Eastern National Park and Monument Association.²

**Scope**

Although many archives also hold writings by women sailing on merchant ships, this project is limited to the writings of women on whaling ships, partially because their set of experiences are generally more similar, and also because they are more extreme. Unlike merchant ships transporting cargo, whalers did not have a specific schedule. The ships returned home when their cargo holds were full—a process that could take up to six years. Daily life on a whaler was also an especially intense experience for all aboard.

² I am aware of, but was unable to study, three women’s whaling journals at the Newport News, Virginia Maritime Museum, and one at the Huntington Library.
greasy, round-the-clock work involved in catching, cutting, and boiling a whale. While a merchant’s wife might be bothered by the smell of the cargo, the stench and the filth of a whaleship during a productive period would have been appalling. A merchant ship also might stop at an international port on its way to its destination, but the extended length of whaling voyages required visits to multiple international ports to replenish food and water supplies. A whaling woman was therefore living and writing under conditions more extreme than most women on ships in the nineteenth century. The whaleship was not just a method for transporting cargo, but a particularly gruesome factory whose functioning lasted many years, yet it exposed the women to many different foreign cultures and landscapes.

**The Nineteenth Century American Whaling Industry**

I have also narrowed my scope to the extant writings of these women because whaling in the nineteenth century became a particularly American industry: “By 1850 the supremacy of American whaling had been established beyond question. In 1847 it was estimated that the whaling fleet of the entire world consisted of about 900 vessels; and of these no less than 722 belonged to the United States” (Hohman 6).³ The whale-fishery thus strongly impacted America’s economy:

The value of the oil and bone brought back to port made whaling, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the third largest industry, after shoes and cotton, in Massachusetts, and according to one economic analysis, the fifth

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³ In contrast, in the merchant marine industry, America was strongly present but not as dominating: “By 1850, fully 47 percent of the world’s merchant shipping sailed under British registry and another 40 percent under the American flag” (Creighton and Norling viii).
largest industry in the United States. At its height whaling provided a livelihood for seventy thousand people and represented a capital investment of $70 million, while whaleships accounted for roughly one-fifth of the nation’s registered merchant tonnage. In 1853, the industry’s most profitable year, the fleet killed more than 8,000 whales to produce 103,000 barrels of sperm oil, 260,000 of whale oil, and 5.7 million pounds of baleen, all of which generated sales of $11 million.

(Dolan 205-6)

As well as contributing to America’s economy, the whaling voyages added to America’s growing presence in the Pacific. As historian Elmo Paul Hohman writes in the preeminent text on American whaling, “The constant effort to open up fresh whaling grounds in unfrequented waters led to much matter-of-fact exploration, unheralded but effective.” A “long and impressive” 1828 naval geographic report, “which covered the Pacific, Indian, and ‘Chinese Oceans,’” had in fact been drafted entirely from “examinations of whaling log-books, journals, and charts, and from first-hand interviews with the masters and mates who had been responsible for the original entries” (7). The whaling captains, officers, sailors, and wives and children on board were therefore some of the foremost “discoverers,” mapping out foreign places and establishing economic, social, and religious relationships.

**Nineteenth Century Maritime Literature**

The maritime industry, its perils, and its engagement with the foreign have all been written about in history books and fictional narratives alike. The participants have produced works ranging from novels now considered American Classics to poems
scratched into sea journals by uneducated individuals with no intent to publish. James
Fenimore Cooper wrote several novels about maritime travel; Richard Henry Dana’s non-
fiction *Two Years Before the Mast* was immediately popular, as were Herman Melville’s
fictional *Typee* and *Omoo*. Edgar Allen Poe’s only novel, *The Narrative of Arthur
Gordon Pym*, parodies a whaler’s adventure narrative for a literary market saturated with
personal maritime accounts when *Pym* was published in 1838. Melville’s commercial
failure *Moby Dick* also commented on this saturation by opening with almost seventy
literary quotes about whales and whaling, over twenty of them written by nineteenth-
century Americans. Prolific Frank T. Bullen published thirty-four books about sea travel
in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth,
including one called *A Whaleman’s Wife*.

A few sea-faring women writers also published in the nineteenth century. Abby
Jane Morrell published *Narratives of Four Voyages to the South Sea, North and South
Pacific Ocean, Chinese Sea, Ethiopia and Southern Atlantic Ocean, Indian and Antarctic
Ocean* in 1832 after accompanying her merchant marine husband. Mary Wallis, after
traveling with her merchant marine husband on two voyages, published *Life in Fee-Jee:
Five Years Amongst the Cannibals* in 1851, although the book mainly deals with her
extended stay with missionaries in Fiji. Though the cover lists the author as “a lady,” a
preface by a missionary stationed in Fiji identifies her as “Mrs. Wallis,” and Mary herself
refers to her husband by name throughout. Both Morrell’s and Wallis’s texts follow the
conventions of male narratives, including sensational accounts of threatening natives and
more empirical discussions of native appearance, customs, and habits. In stark contrast to
these narratives is Lydia Sigourney’s nautical-themed sentimental poetry, published in
four editions between 1845 and 1857. Written after she accompanied her husband to sea, the majority of her poems are for and about sailors. But her poem “Laura” features a pious and devoted wife who insists on accompanying her husband to sea, and dies on the journey. None of the whaling wives’ journals or letters mention Morrell, Wallis, or Sigourney, and they are very different in content and tone to these published works; however, the whaling women do deploy sentimental rhetoric and express concern for the sailor in ways that resemble Sigourney’s poetry, and occasionally include brief ethnographic accounts that follow the generic conventions of published nineteenth century travel literature, much as Morrell and Wallis do.

As far as I can determine, only two whaling women’s writings were published in the nineteenth century: excerpts from Henrietta Deblois’ journal appeared serially in the *Newport Mercury* of Rhode Island in 1885, and Susan Fisher’s letter/journal to her family was printed in the Dover, Maine *Observer* and then republished by New Bedford, Massachusetts’ industry newspaper *Whalemen’s Shipping List (WSL)* on March 27, 1855. Industry and regional newspapers, however, kept their audiences aware of women’s presence on ships. *WSL*, New Bedford’s *Mercury*, and the *Republican Standard* mentioned the captain’s wives who voyaged, along with ship information in the newspapers’ “Marine Intelligence” columns. Identified only by surname, the wives are often listed as “passenger.” *WSL* and the Honolulu-based temperance newsletter *The Friend* both ran several short articles in the 1850s discussing the women aboard whalers. Fifty years later, the Boston *Globe* ran a feature story on June 23, 1907: “Women Rivals Navigate High Line Whalers,” describing a friendly competition between two captains’ wives who were the official navigators of their voyages.
Whaling women’s experiences inspired a published letter by Mark Twain, two religious tracts, and a play by Eugene O’Neill in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Mark Twain’s ninth letter from The Sandwich Islands written for the *Sacramento Union* in 1866 presents a fictional Mrs. Captain Jollopson recounting a trip to the Honolulu marketplace using whaling ship slang; Twain’s “translation” of her terminology is four times as long as her dialogue. Helen Brown wrote *A Good Catch; or, Mrs. Emerson’s Whaling-Cruise*, published by the Presbyterian Board of Publication in 1884; this religious tract was based on interviews and the journal of Mrs. Mary Chipman Lawrence, who sailed from 1856 to 1860. Though not published by a religious organization, Frank T. Bullen’s *A Whaleman’s Wife* (1903) is nonetheless morally didactic. A captain’s wife who goes to sea out of wifely duty finds religious salvation as she endures her husband’s abuse and debauchery. One of the three characters in Eugene O’Neill’s phonetically-named one-act play *'Ile* (1917) is a whaling wife driven insane by the tedium of her voyage. O’Neill supposedly based the play on Provincetown whaling Captain John Cook and his wife, Viola (Dowling 246). On a much smaller scale, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *The Pearl of Orr’s Island* (1862) and Sarah Orne Jewett’s *The County of the Pointed Firs* (1896) briefly reference captains’ wives who went to sea.

**Twentieth-Century Secondary Sources**

Throughout the twentieth century, an interest in reconstructing and narrating the stories of actual women who went to sea led a number of writers to journals, letters, and anecdotes that have then been summarized or retold in small press and museum or historical society publications. Over the past half century, five whaling wives’ journals have been edited and published as monographs, one in three different versions with three
different editors, and a sixth has been published as part of a work entitled *One Whaling Family* (1964). In *Whaling Wives* (1953), a compilation of brief biographies of Martha’s Vineyard’s early maritime women, Emma Mayhew Whiting and Henry Beetle Hough included a few who accompanied their husbands to sea. Joan Druett received a Fulbright Scholarship in the 1980s to identify and research the women who went voyaging and published a comprehensive account entitled *Petticoat Whalers: Whaling Wives at Sea* (1991). Druett has also edited and published Mary Brewster’s whaling journal, with extensive footnotes throughout. Brewster’s entries are juxtaposed with selections from a journal kept by a sailor on the same voyage, and with entries from other whaling wives’ journals. The introductory chapters to different sections of the journal provide informative historical context.

Druett’s research is extensive, and her bibliography of manuscripts was an invaluable starting point for my own project. Her research has also greatly influenced many other researchers. After the publication of *Petticoat Whalers*, almost all texts on whaling in America have included a section or chapter on wives and children at sea, often relying entirely on Druett’s work. Since Druett’s research in the 1980s, however, the New England archives have acquired several additional journals, which I have consulted. Most importantly though, while Druett draws widely from manuscripts and anecdotal information from non-scholarly sources to recount the women’s experiences, my focus is on the whaling women as writers, and their journals as discursive constructs.

One of the first published feminist readings of the whaling women’s representations of their experiences was Julia C. Bonham’s “Feminist and Victorian: The Paradox of the American Seafaring Woman of the Nineteenth Century” in the journal
The paradox refers to why the wives went to sea, and some multiple times, given “the assumption that life on board a ship was close to unbearable for a woman” (218). Bonham draws on a captain’s published narrative, several sources that quote wives’ journals, and feminist critics of the 1960s, but her argument that the women were miserable yet professed “the rare attributes of true devotion” lacks the nuanced approach of later feminist scholars, and assumes a transparency of language that later life-writing critics reject. Her conclusion that the women had “a highly developed sense of self” was, however, prophetic.

The “Victorian paradox” facing whaling women, as Bonham aptly labeled it, has intrigued scholars through to the present day. Lisa Norling’s account of her impetus for her foundational and often-cited Captain Ahab Had A Wife: New England Women and the Whalefishery, 1720-1870, echoes many other introductions to narratives of sea-faring women:

I thought I would look in New England maritime communities for strong, independent women who had withstood the rising tide of Victorian domesticity along with their seafaring husbands’ regular absences. I did not find them. To my dismay, most of the sea-wives I studied (even the strong, independent ones) seemed to have subscribed just as wholeheartedly to pervasive ideas about female character and social roles as any other white, middle-class American women of the period. (3)

Norling’s study focuses on the Nantucket and New Bedford communities when they were the capitals of the whalefishery, tracing ideological shifts across 150 years. Her careful work with letters, diaries, account ledgers, and literary representations such as writing by
Crevecoeur and Melville has made her research foundational for feminist maritime studies since its publication in 2000.

Norling argues that gender roles were complementary, even if the women were marginalized or left entirely out of the historic records for the eighteenth century whaling industry. Religious reform, however, began reconfiguring this social structure at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century. Sentiment came to be emphasized over all else, with particular emphasis placed on romantic love, and maritime women’s “strength and assertiveness, so celebrated by Crevecoeur, was now diverted into a Romantic idiom that set a higher priority on intense feeling than on competence in the prosaic affairs of daily life” (114). The shift was most visible in the rhetoric of letters between seamen and shore-bound wives. Sentimental expressions of longing, loneliness, and romantic notions dominate these extant documents.

This rhetoric of patriarchal dependence was contradicted by the women’s lived experiences, and in her sixth chapter, Norling examines the experiences of the nineteenth-century wives who accompanied their husbands to sea. Her sources include twenty wives’ shipboard journals, both published and unpublished. Norling argues that the documents “dramatically expose the power, the forms, and the contradictions of domesticity in the maritime context” (238). Emphasizing the clear divisions of space and labor, she describes how the women, isolated from the crew and most of the ship, busied themselves with “domestic” tasks. She also argues that women were “absolutely excluded from the work at hand, from anything that was absolutely essential or even just related to whaling,” but does not seem to recognize that women were navigating, keeping the logbooks, and doing other whaling-related work with distinct class implications (248,
Norling seems to hold whaling wives to a higher standard than shore-based women, and finds them lacking:

“Sister sailors” had very little lasting impact on the whaling industry or on society at large; their presence and efforts did not alter either the layout of the ship, the social relations of work in the industry, or gender roles and relations in maritime communities. Wives at sea proved to be, in the end, a failed experiment in combining the maritime work and home life. (260)

Among other things, my study will show that since approximately 450 women sailed over the course of eight decades, and since their numbers increased with each decade, even as the number of ships decreased and the industry dwindled, wives at sea hardly represent a failed project overall.

Like Norling, Briton Cooper Busch and Margaret Creighton explore the social history of the whaling industry. Busch’s “Whaling Will Never Do for Me”: The American Whaleman in the Nineteenth Century and Creighton’s Rites & Passages: The Experience of American Whaling 1830-1870 draw on thousands of captains’ logs and sailors’ journals. After consulting a few women’s journals as well as sailors’ journals describing the captain’s wife, Busch considers the social and economic effects that women visited in port and onboard captains’ wives had on a ship, concluding that “wives aboard whaleships, then, did not substantially transform the world of the average whaleman” (156). Questioning the prevailing assumptions about gender roles and sexual identity of men on ships, Margaret Creighton uses several men’s journals referring to the presence of a captain’s wife and the sailor’s interactions with her, but only consults one woman’s journal. Creighton finds widespread hostility toward the captains’ wives, arguing that the
wives were a distraction, and more importantly, a threat to the men’s asserted masculinity, as “these women exhibited behavior that mariners formally proscribed but secretly still practiced” (170).

I draw on the historical content Norling, Busch, and Creighton provide, but my concern is not with the effect the women had on the industry or even on the ship itself. As a scholar of literature and rhetoric, rather than social history, my focus lies primarily on the journals as journals. I examine the gendered selves the women construct within their journals, and how their constructions affect their representations of the men on the ship, the people encountered throughout the voyage, and their own domesticating influence.

My approach is therefore closer to Haskell Springer’s in his essay “The Captain’s Wife at Sea” in Iron Men, Wooden Women: Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World, 1700-1920, edited by Creighton and Norling. Haskell examines thirty-six shipboard journals of women on whalers as well as merchant vessels as products of socio-historic constraints and expectations about nineteenth century women’s writing practices. My own survey of seventy journals, letters, and memoirs is devoted entirely to whaling voyages, and as a result, my scope is much larger than Haskell’s, but does not include all the journals in his survey. Haskell declares the journals “stereotypically hyperbolic and sentimental” and thus typical of nineteenth-century popular literature, exempting only the women’s expressions of piety: “their sincerity is convincing” (103). Though there must have been “emotional consequences” of the extreme gender divide on the ships, Haskell concludes that the journals are “centered in personal physical experience (primarily the round of daily life) and that the writer’s own emotions come second” (96, 97). He further claims that “just two of the thirty-six [journals] reach ideas and issues” (97), and that the
log data appearing in many women’s journals is “little more than imitative,” though “for others it was integrative” (101).

I agree with his conclusion that “[t]he journal-writing wife was facing her husband’s ocean. But while she was, of necessity, drinking it in gulps, she was all the while converting it, drop by drop, in the ink of her pen, to hers” (117, Haskell’s italics). As will become clear, however, I foreground largely overlooked elements of the women’s letters and journals to argue that this conversion results from their intertextuality with not just log data, but also maritime and religious poetry, narratives of foreign lands and people, and national and imperial rhetoric. Only Anita Joyce Duneer, in a dissertation that includes three whaling wives’ journals, and in her essay “Voyaging Captains’ Wives: Feminine Aesthetics and the Uses of Domesticity in the Travel Narratives of Abby Jane Morrell and Mary Wallis,” considers the rhetoric of travel that captains’ wives employ. My dissertation is thus the first large-scale study of the elements of travel narrative and foreign relations within the broad scope of research into whaling women’s journals.

**Literary Critics and Theorists**

A range of life-writing critics and cultural studies and feminist theorists has informed my methodology. I draw on life-writing critics Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson, Helen M. Buss, and Felicity Nussbaum when arguing that the journals do not simply embody the dominant social, political, and gender ideologies of the nineteenth century. As previous researchers have demonstrated, it is easy to identify patterns of ideological conformity. Piety and religious faith, for instance, appear in various forms in almost all the journals, while sex is not mentioned in any of them. If however we consult gender theory, and more specifically, life-writing theory informed by feminist theory, the
journals become more nuanced and interesting texts that negotiate gender and genre constraints rather than unquestioningly adhering to them.

In examining the relationship between gender, genre, and subjectivity, I refer to Judith Butler’s work on subjectivity and performativity. Reading these journals for insights into nineteenth-century ideologies about gender—what topics a woman would have been encouraged to write about, and the expected daily performance of such writing—enables us to see that the category “woman” was indeed created through ideological forces internalized into daily practices. These various forces, however, were neither unilateral, identical, nor coherent. As Felicity Nussbaum argues, different economic, religious, and social ideologies create “competing discourses” that not only inform and construct women, but that the women themselves enact through their journals (33). Each woman’s identity, as she enacts it through her writing, is therefore a negotiation between these competing discourses. Life-writing theorists such as Philippe Lejeune, Susan Bunkers, and Cynthia Huff encourage identifying how each diary writer encodes topics she feels she cannot speak about overtly. I also argue that writers will often shift into common rhetorical tropes, or quote the Bible, hymns, and poems, as veiled substitutes for their own opinions.

As I read these journals and letters carefully, and consider the constructed, “performed” selves of the women writing them, I also pay attention to the cultural and literary history in which the journals are situated, and the genres the women employ. As Helen Wilcox writes, “Each genre comes with its inherited conventions, contexts and functions: these make possible, but also determine and limit, the expression of identity that might occur within it” (17). I draw on Amy Kaplan’s “Manifest Domesticity” to
present domesticity and imperialism in nineteenth-century America not as separate spheres, but as co-dependent. Mary Louise Pratt’s *Imperial Eyes* has strongly influenced how I understand the travel narrative aspects of the whaling women’s journals and letters.

My understanding of ideology is informed by Louis Althusser’s remarks on how representations maintain and justify dominant power structures, and on Michel Foucault’s arguments that ideology is ubiquitous, discursive, and as much embedded in language and everyday sites as it is in Althusser’s state apparatuses. Stuart Hall’s focus on how each individual decodes and reproduces ideologies to function successfully has influenced me. But Felicity Nussbaum’s emphasis on the importance of considering social and historical relations in understanding the construction of self, and particularly in life writing, has proven most helpful through her description of ideology as “a set of conflicting practices and class antagonisms that legitimate exploitation and its favored modes of production” (35-6). The patterns and conflicts revealed through a broad comparison of the journals, and through the study of each particular journal, indicate that women reinforced, or at least accepted, such ideologies, but also inherently negotiated and occasionally countered them. The journals in short display the tensions and conflicts within ideologies of gender, race, and class.

My study focuses on the genre, rhetoric, and representations of the whaling women’s journals themselves. I perform close textual reading in order to establish ideological patterns of gender, class, rank, race, and nationality; to identify gaps and anomalies within these patterns; and to analyze how women individually negotiate these ideologies as they construct their own subjectivities and those of others. My first chapter is devoted to the material conditions influencing the women’s decisions to sail and their
represented experiences on the ship. I discuss the complex matrix of gender, class, and rank on a ship, and how the women negotiate gendered expectations. While the women perform class and gender difference by maintaining their distance from the men and labor of the ship, they also consciously and rhetorically participate in the business of the voyage by incorporating large amounts of official log data in their personal journals. In the second chapter, I consider the historical context of women’s journal writing, and examine the women’s representation—or lack thereof—of domesticity. I draw on Amy Kaplan to suggest the women’s embodiments of domesticity on the ship, as represented in the journal, allow the women to construct a self that conforms to the gender and class expectations of the community left behind, while simultaneously participating in a much larger imperial project. My third chapter focuses on the women’s descriptions of foreign ports and peoples encountered. Here I draw on Mary Louise Pratt to show how the women participate in the anti-conquest rhetorical strategy prevalent in nineteenth century travel writing. As the women shift between empirical descriptions of flora and fauna and rhapsodizing about the sublime, they also tacitly encourage imperial interests. Even more overtly, the women’s descriptions of foreign people reinforce the missionary project. In the fourth chapter, I offer a close reading of the earliest journal, Mary Russell’s of 1823 to 1824; Eliza Brock’s journal of 1853 to 1856; and several brief memoirs written by the women in the early twentieth century, long after their voyages. Ultimately I argue that through the content, genre, and rhetoric of their journals, American whaling women collapsed the boundaries of separate spheres, participating in both the business of the voyage and American imperialism, while maintaining gendered, upper-middle class constructions of self.
Chapter One: Ideological and Material Conditions

In the first section of this chapter, I argue that while the changing material conditions in the maritime industry enabled the women to sail, the decision—hers, his, or mutual—was inspired by the dominant ideology of wifely devotion. The growing presence of missionaries throughout the Pacific combined with the wife’s status as the pious partner within marriage also influenced her decision to accompany her captain husband on voyages. I draw on published nineteenth century literature and newsletters, as well as social histories, and in particular Lisa Norling’s Captain Ahab Had a Wife, in examining this confluence of ideology and material conditions. I also draw on literary critic Lora Romero’s work to show how published rhetoric encouraged women to be the “civilizing” force within the home and nation. Within these historical contexts and public discourses, I examine the reasons whaling women themselves offer for voyaging.

My second section focuses on the rhetoric within the whaling women’s journals, and especially how the women describe the material and ideological conditions on the ship itself. I draw on Sidonie Smith and Judith Butler to argue that the journals are performances of identity—primarily gendered identity, but complicated by notions of class and race. While women’s descriptions are complicit with the spatial and social divide from the crew that the women’s gender and class/rank require, the women at times negotiate and even breach this divide.

The final section looks at the log data that women generally include in their daily entries, arguing that recording content similar to the ship’s official log is how the women,
though physically isolated from the onboard labor, nonetheless participated in the business of the voyage.

**Part I: Ideological and Material Circumstances of the Wives’ Decisions to Sail**

Women have been voyaging since the early days of human maritime experience, populating new lands and developing new civilizations as immigrants and slaves. American women began sailing with their husband captains in the nineteenth century, but there were a large number of British women predecessors, and especially in the late eighteenth century, when women from a wide range of classes and serving a number of purposes boarded ships. But when looking at mariner women during the British “Age of Sail,” Suzanne J. Stark sharply distinguishes the captain’s wife from the other women: “Their reasons for going to sea were different, and so were their experiences on board” (3). Class distinction thus determined the captain’s wife’s status and permissible activities. In the early nineteenth century, the number of British women passengers increased on ships to India or North America, or to Australia and New Zealand—usually on one-way passages, but occasionally returning. The captain’s wife held a peculiar position in relation to men and women: she was a passenger for the entire voyage, not travelling to a destination, and with no official role on the ship.

The phenomenon of women sailing for the sole purpose of accompanying their husband captains arose from a confluence of historically specific ideologies and material conditions in the nineteenth century. No economic or political necessity drove the women on board. They sailed solely to be with their husbands. A boom in maritime activities in nineteenth-century America also created certain material conditions that led more
captains’ wives to join the voyage. Increases in profits led to the launch of more and larger ships, at the same time as the depletion of whales in the Atlantic drove captains farther from home, and into the Pacific Ocean. Voyages lengthened from three to nine months in the eighteenth century to three to five years in the nineteenth, as captains’ careers also extended from perhaps one decade to several (Norling 6-7). Such lengthy separations between husbands and wives at a time when such ideological apparatuses as government and religion were increasingly stressing the importance of the nuclear family, led to some whaling captains’ wives sailing with their husbands.

An emphasis on the value of romantic marriage and a close devoted family informs newspaper articles, religious tracts, educational literature, and sermons throughout the nineteenth century, and as Lisa Norling explains, “Like their fellow Americans, maritime women and men . . . adhered to the emerging definition of the family as private, nuclear, and founded in marriage, and they similarly loaded the conjugal relationship with expectations of intensive, romantic, exclusive love” (223). Norling shows how this belief system, strengthened through praxis and habitual representation, came to be embraced by maritime families, regardless of how contradictory it was to the separateness of their lives: men at sea, women on shore. Such “emotional bonds” became the “linchpin of the whole system” (164). Rather than engaging with the discrepancy between this ideology and their own lives, “the women’s tenacious adherence to the scripted romantic ideals only allowed them to experience more deeply an unhappiness with the terms of their own individual lives” (212). Through her analysis of letters between sailors and their girlfriends or wives back home, Norling reveals how both the men and the women employed a strong sentimental rhetoric of
longing and loneliness. Rather than adjusting their rhetoric to ease their separation, they in fact exacerbated it. Ultimately the solution to this “dilemma,” according to Norling, was for the wives to sail with their husbands, creating domesticity at sea.

Although the journals and letters of women who went to sea contain very little romantic sentiment, a large number of whaling women assert that not only should they be with their husbands, but their female presence enhances the captains’ abilities, and therefore contributes to the success of the voyages. Such assertions are particularly common in the late 1840s and 1850s. As Henrietta DeBlois wrote in her journal in 1856, which was published in her local paper The Newport Mercury shortly after her death in 1885, “I could not wonder that a woman should want to go to sea when she found what a comfort she could be to her husband” (7/17/1856; Mercury 2/21/1885). Mary Lawrence similarly writes, “I exert all my powers to keep up the spirits of the captain and officers, and I really believe that they are in far better sprits than though Minnie [her daughter] and myself were not here” (7/22/1859). Emphasizing her importance by crossing the gendered boundaries and claiming a role as a crew member, Mary writes in large letters on her journal’s title page: “the Captain’s Best Mate.” The word “mate” is underlined three times, and eighteen months into her voyage, noting with approval that eight women were in Hilo, Mary writes that “I accom[panied] Samuel that my little family might be an unbroken one, and nothing but sickness will cause me to change my view” (6/13/1858). Like the crews, then, the wife serves the captain, who has primary responsibility for the voyage’s success.

Drawing on similar passages on wifely devotion written by other women, Norling uncovers the patriarchal power dynamic implicit in the rhetoric:
Conjugal love and domestic duty were the two most common and the only clearly acceptable justifications for women’s going to sea and thereby breaching the rigid boundaries between home and work, land and sea. Both rationales implicitly or explicitly made the husband the central reference point for the wife’s life—underscoring how important to these women’s sense of self was not only their married status but also the daily practice of conjugal companionship. (239)

Since they controlled the activities, direction, and duration of the voyages, the captain husbands profoundly determined the women’s lived experiences. The journals leave no doubt that the women were living and writing within a male-dominated working environment, even as they struggled to create a semblance of domesticity in the captain’s quarters and in their own daily lives. And yet, the husbands are not the “central reference point” of the journals. Indeed, many rarely mention the captain, suggesting that the women’s widespread use of a rhetoric of domestic duty was chosen to justify their presence on the ship, and to demonstrate their conformity to certain social, religious, and class expectations.

It should be noted, however, that while the woman equated accompanying one’s husband to sea with that dominant nineteenth century ideology of wifely devotion, the practice itself remained controversial. Though “domestic duty” might be a cherished virtue, many did not see wives on whalers as a virtuous or even an economically wise state of affairs. Some captains had their earnings reduced when they brought their wives on board, and some ship owners simply did not allow women to sail. As one letter from a ship owner in Beverly, Massachusetts advises, it would be better to “prepare to board the
captain’s wife at the Tremont House and pay her bill than have her go in the vessel, I have had children born on board of one of my Barks, you must not because [.] Captain [.] the sea is rough” (Starbuck Letter). In one of the earliest published narratives about a wife onboard, Captain Benjamin Morrell Jr. describes the difficulty of appeasing angry owners and maintaining his own reputation. When his wife and several crew members became sick, Morrell refused to sail to the nearest port, confessing that “Had she not been on board I should certainly have borne up for the first port under our lee, as I momentarily expected that every man would be taken down with the same fever. But I reflected that some slanderous tongues might attribute such a deviation from my regular course solely to the fact of my wife’s being on board. That idea I could not tamely endure” (344).

Certain ship owners were more amenable to captains’ wives on board. Several ships carried several captains’ wives over the years. The Uncas carried Mrs. Gellet in 1846, Mrs. Edwards in 1849, and Mrs. James in 1851, and the Charles Morgan carried five different wives, the first sailing in 1863, and the last in 1913 (Druett “Sister Sailors”; “Charles W. Morgan: Captain's Wives”). The owners of these ships were apparently accommodating, and captains may have even accepted the employment because of it.

The women certainly felt they were assets. In a letter to her sister, Lucy Crapo notes that although her husband lost “1bbl [barrel] in 100” because she accompanied him, “that might be considered cheap boarding.” Though the ship owners “seem to think it so dreadful a thing for a woman to go on board a vessel,” Lucy wishes “they could know how much difference it really does make to a voyage. I know I shall never get any credit for the oil I have been the means of bringing to this ship” (10/11/1880). Although Lucy
never states how exactly she assists in the procurement of oil, since as a woman she was entirely removed from the labor of catching and processing whales, the wives did contribute in many ways to the voyages’ success. Like the maritime women on shore, they sewed and mended clothes for the captain, and often for the officers. A few women sewed or mended signal flags, and several briefly filled the position of steward. All this was unpaid and unacknowledged labor, much in the same way as Norling argues that the contributions of the women on shore were economically unrecognized but crucial to maintaining the industry. Several women actually kept the official logbook, and the vast majority of their journals included official log data (weather, rigging, ships sighted, number of barrels of oil procured, latitude and longitude) in addition to their personal remarks, thus supplementing the official log, as I discuss later in this chapter.

Some women faced social and familial opposition to their voyages even when the owners were agreeable. Whaling was a male-dominated industry: the crew was all male, and the vessel was at sea for years at a time. As the only woman among a crew of thirty to thirty-five, her situation did create concern over respectability. “There are many things I can do for them to render the voyage pleasant,” Malvina Marshall writes her family: “which I am perfectly willing to do, and can easily do and yet retain the dignity of my position, which E. was so afraid I might lose. I often think of her advice and profit from it” (10/4/1852). Another objection also arose that although the women might be fulfilling their wifely roles on board, their voyage removed them from other family members and domestic responsibilities on shore. Many women left some or all of their children behind with relatives, as several letters are addressed to children or to relatives caring for children.
Surprisingly though, the only journals that explicitly record social opposition to the wife’s voyage are the two earliest extant ones. Mary Russell, whose journal precedes the next journal we have by two decades, writes that her friends “stated [sic] many objections,” such as “confinement” and “monotony,” rather than impropriety or danger (2/11/1823). This Mary does not explain why she chose to sail anyway, but when Mary Brewster’s family disapproved of her voyage, her first entry, written due to seasickness a month after her departure, is a long defense of her decision to go:

In coming my own conscience tells me I was doing right and what do I care for the opinion of the world. . . . With much opposition I left my native land few had to say one encouraging word. She who has extended a mothers love and watchfulness over me said her consent never would be given in no way would she assist me and if I left her she thought me very ungrateful. and lastly though not least Her house would never be open to me again if I persisted in coming- - (12/4/1845).

Here Brewster not only reveals a widespread resistance to her voyage, but presents her decision to sail as a moral one made with great deliberation. In her first entry she begins an act of self-construction as a moral and devoted wife. According to Joan Druett, such extreme opposition was not uncommon in 1845. The family of Mary-Ann Sherman, who sailed with her husband, Captain Abner Sherman, aboard the *Harrison* that year, disowned her, even erecting a grave marker for her in the local New Bedford cemetery dated the year she sailed. Thus Mary-Ann has two graves. Her actual remains are beneath a gravestone dated 5 January 1850 in Rarotonga [Cook Islands] (*Petticoat Whalers* 29).
Brewster’s use of the word “ungrateful” suggests that by sailing, others feel she is abandoning obligations and deserting her role in the family and community. It should not therefore be surprising that the women stress the importance of their role as wife on the ship, insisting that they have only shifted the location of domestic duties from family/home community to husband/ship. The identity constructed within the journals holds the same domestic position as she held on land, including the same gendered qualities. While these women do occasionally assume the traditionally male role of navigator and/or log keeper, they carefully demarcate themselves from the physical labor of whaling. Though some follow the literary precedent of travel writers and describe the processing of a whale, they do so as on-lookers, apart from this activity. This may have eased the concerns of ship owners, but its primary purpose was to reaffirm the separate gender and class status that kept these wives firmly in the “domestic” sphere.

Such rhetorical affirmations of the patriarchal structure of “domestic duty” did not however leave the wives without agency. Fully aware of social and industry censure, the wives who went whaling actively employed rhetoric to subtly assuage it. For as Lora Romero reminds us, “The cult of domesticity may have become culturally dominant by the mid-nineteenth century, but it is important to bear in mind that, originally, it was an oppositional formulation” (19). In the case of the whaling women, they were deploying wifely devotion as justification for creating a domestic environment outside of the traditional home. Romero explains, “The increasing conventionality of claims for women’s domestic identity would seem to circumscribe their lives completely within that home, but, ironically, making domesticity into an identity gave middle-class women a
surprising amount of mobility. As an identity rather than simply as a fixed location for women’s lives, domesticity could—and did—travel” (25).

In fact, only two women’s journals actually record overt opposition to women onboard ships—one of the many significant silences in their journals and letters. In her second journal, Mary Brewster, the wife who records the most initial opposition, does not report any disapproval encountered upon her return from her first voyage, recording instead how “happily” she spent her time with friends during the three months she and her husband were home between her first and second voyages. She does not mention her mother or if she were received by the family who had disowned her (7/13/1849). The 1848 journal kept by disowned Mary-Ann Sherman’s sister-in-law, Maryanne Almy Sherman—the unrelated young women married brothers who were both captains—does not mention any social opposition to her accompanying her husband. In fact, she does not feel it necessary to offer an explanation or justification for her voyage.

Of course, silence itself can be an act of agency. In “A Feminist Revision,” Helen Buss argues that “besides language’s consciously apprehended referential uses and its function as power discourse, we need to explore language’s ability to maximize some conditions of existence, to make their value real in the economy of a culture, and its ability to suppress and absent other conditions, to repress their existence into powerlessness and inarticulation” (99). The whaling women counter this threat in their journals by declaring that they enhance the voyage, and omitting mention of opposition to their presence. While Briton Cooper Busch and Margaret Creighton have identified numerous sailors’ journals that complain about the women, descriptions of antagonist relationships in the women’s journals are very rare. A notable exception is Elizabeth
Stetson, whose journal is full of complaints about many of the crew. Furthermore, the women frequently downplay the dangers they faced, leaving the records of their trips sharply focused accounts of lived experiences that conform in many ways to the gender and class expectations of the community they left behind.

The wives on whaleships were also supported by an unlikely ally who provided rhetorical models for presenting a respectable self-construction. The two major whaling industry newsletters, *The Friend*, a seamen’s temperance publication from Honolulu, and *Whalemen’s Shipping List (WSL)* published out of New Bedford, both printed several short pieces that advocated for wives accompanying captains of whaling voyages. Since the 1840s, *The Friend*, the *WSL* and New Bedford’s *Republican Standard* had been regularly listing whaling wives as “passengers” in their ship reports. Yet “passengers” suggest a non-functional position and was therefore not a term that seemed to approve of the practice of the captain’s wife voyaging. Yet in 1847, Reverend Samuel Damon, the Honolulu missionary who started *The Friend* in 1843, published the first article approving of captains’ wives on whaling voyages:

> Of late years a very sensible custom has arisen among the masters of the vessels visiting the Pacific, that of being accompanied by their wives. We have heard of some close-fisted and niggardly owners who object to the custom, but everybody knows their objections are founded upon the lowest principle of selfishness. (V.18:23)

Damon not only approves of captains’ wives who sail, but disparages ship owners who resist the trend. In 1858, Damon goes further, producing impressive figures that suggest ships with wives onboard actually increased their catch: “there are now nine ships now
[sic] lying in our harbor, with the Captain’s wives as passengers, and the average of these ships is over 750, while the Commercial gives only 575, as the average catch, for the season so far as ships are reported” (The Friend XV.11:84). Here Damon discounts ship owners’ concerns over production, using his knowledge of the ships in Honolulu, the major port in the Pacific and thousands of miles from most owners, to support his position.

Damon had also published a second article celebrating voyaging captains’ wives in November 1852. Shortly thereafter, the industry newspaper Whalemen’s Shipping List published its own words of support. Quoting two lines from The Friend, the WSL then adorned the act of women going whaling with all the tropes of the ideal wife:

The Honolulu Friend says that there have been at one time enumerated in Honolulu the wives of twenty-five sea captains, and supposes that one in six of all whaling captains is accompanied by his wife. Whether this estimate is correct or not, the number is very large. The enterprising ladies not only preserve unbroken the ties of domestic life that otherwise would be sundered; not only cheer by their presence the monotony and discomforts of long and perilous voyages; not only exercise a good influence in the discipline of the ship, but they make capital correspondents, and through the female love of letter-writing, keep us well posted up in the catch and prosperity of the season. (XI.48:351)

This article could have provided the women with rhetorical justifications for their presence on the ship. For instance, the effect on “discipline” that the article mentions could be understood in terms of religious practice, such as following the Sabbath, or in
terms of the captains’ treatment of their crews. Yet none of the whaling women themselves write at length about accomplishing such ends. As Lora Romero explains, in the nineteenth century, public discourses often praised both the impact and the invisibility of female affluence. Even though “authors of countless speeches and publications began to argue that if women did not exercise a civilizing influence on male household members, society would collapse into complete anarchy,” and even though they “held that women ultimately controlled society, they also stressed that women exercised that power through indirect influence rather than direct force” (15). As I will show in this chapter and the following one, the journals definitely are concerned with this indirect influence.

As for Reverend Damon’s support of the wives, it also benefits his own missionary project. The Seamen’s Bethel in Honolulu, a chapel, depended on donations, and Mary Lawrence records that “While in port, Mr. Damon proposed to me that the wives of captains should contribute toward purchasing a new carpet for the Bethel Church, which was very much needed.” They were able to raise seventy dollars (11/30/1858). Damon’s interest was not only economic. More American women in port also strengthened the growing American communities on the Hawaiian Islands and provided more civilized “role-models” for the Hawaiian people and especially the women. The ships, their captains, and their ladies therefore contributed to the emerging American settlers’ influence in Hawai‘i through a wide range of purchases and trade. The whaling women were a part of the overall colonizing American presence in Hawai‘i, as I will discuss further in chapter three.
Damon’s first article in 1847 about whaling wives had closed by predicting, “it will become more and more fashionable. You, reader, may not think so, well, wait and see!” (V.18:23). Time proved Damon correct. His next article on the subject in 1852 reports that, “At one time, there have been enumerated in Honolulu, the wives of twenty-five sea Captains,” and that “Probably a score of American ladies have visited the Arctic Ocean during the past summer” (IX.10:73). Here Damon estimates that one in six whalers has a captain’s wife aboard—an over-estimation, though one often quoted by historians today. Six years later, Damon states that forty-two wives were on whaling ships that year, and the numbers were indeed increasing. Druett counts ten women voyaging on whalers in the 1820s and 1830s. In the 1840s, the number of women who sailed for the first time on whalers more than quadrupled to approximately forty-three, and over one hundred sailed in each decade between 1850 and 1880 (Druett “Sister Sailors”). The numbers then began to dwindle with the industry, although the percentage of vessels that had captains’ wives onboard actually increased as the fleet itself swiftly decreased.

Damon may have been correct to say that accompanying one’s husband to sea was a “fashion.” With some but not many exceptions, the whaling captains’ wives came from one of several small East Coast whaling communities. Many of them were daughters and sisters and nieces of whaling captains and officers. Many had relatives in the other close-by communities, and many moved from one port town to another upon marrying. Some women knew other women who had already sailed, and several pairs of sisters and sisters-in-law sailed, with the first to go occasionally offering advice in letters to the next. Wives also met each other during “gams” at sea, when two ships pull
alongside each other in the open ocean, or while they were “stopping” in foreign ports. Those who had sailed before came back with tales of the sea and travel narratives about foreign locations and adventures, including meeting kings and queens, and American and foreign Consuls. Letters from whaling women were shared amongst the home community, and the women would have shared their journals with friends and family upon their returns. Many of the captains who brought their wives on later voyages may have gammed with ships carrying wives on previous voyages. (The women’s journals often refer to married captains sailing without their wives as “lonely” or “sad.”) Finally, many women encountered women they knew from home, and were quick to form close bonds with women they met, even referring to each other as “sisters.”

In addition to wifely devotion, long separations, and missionary encouragement, a final reason the women may have decided to travel was their own desire to see for themselves the foreign ports that their husbands, brothers, fathers, and uncles came home talking about, and to see the progress the missionaries were making with the people of these lands. Since the women’s journals were generally constructing the role of a very devoted wife traveling only for the sake of her husband, they never directly state the woman’s desire to travel for its own sake. Yet given that their travel narratives were often the longest entries in their journals, I cannot help but think this desire for adventure was present, even if strategically occluded. The most explicit comment is Elizabeth Marble’s, who nonetheless couches it in a concern about the weather: “There is tremendous sea running, for a while I was frightened but I am seeing the world and like evry body else I must pay for seeing. I think (sometimes) that I shall be satisfied with seeing by the time I get home (if I wer to)” (letter dated 12/18/1859). Clara Wheldon also appears as the
curious traveler when she writes upon leaving Honolulu in 1870 that “I have in mind the prospect of seeing Japan, which adds to my willingness and resignation to depart and leave behind us these scenes of beauty and comfort” (1/1870). Many women’s curiosity in visiting other places and cultures however can be discerned in their detailed accounts of the various ports and peoples they encounter. With varying degrees of praise, dismay, and disgust, the women describe landscapes and agriculture, as well as natives, consuls, and missionaries.

The women’s journals record many excursions in ports, but pay particular attention to social encounters with missionaries throughout the Pacific, and especially in Hawai‘i. The increasing number of missionaries throughout the Pacific in the nineteenth century actually helped to create the material conditions that allowed the whaling wives to sail to this far region and remain there for years at a time. Missionaries made it more acceptable for women to visit certain ports, and to spend extended periods of time on shore in these foreign lands. Whaling wives often came ashore with their husbands for day trips, attending church or taking tea with the missionaries. Some wives remained on shore for longer periods to give birth to babies or recover their health. Still others “stopped” for extended stays in Talcahuano, Peru, Mangonui and Russell, New Zealand, and Vasse, Australia. Honolulu, Lahaina, and Hilo were popular ports in the Sandwich Islands (Hawai‘i). Whaling wives frequently developed strong ties with the missionaries, and helped to create a small community that socialized, and at times cared for each other.

The practice of a woman accompanying her captain husband on a whaleship was certainly a class-based activity. A captain could bring his wife, and even sometimes his children, because he had separate and larger living quarters than the officers and crew.
The physical spaces of the ship, as well as the men’s roles, were divided hierarchically. While subordinate to the captain, the wife was paradoxically both separate from and yet ranked above all the other men on board. Although an ideological concept, class manifests itself through economic and social hierarchies, and a captain’s wife on board re-affirmed the superior rank of both the captain and his lady. This status was reinforced by their accommodations and activities, and how they were treated in foreign ports, as well. Not surprisingly, the women’s journals are very class-conscious, if only implicitly, in their representations of self, ship, and foreign communities.

Part II: The Ideological and Material Conditions of the Women’s Lives On Whaling Ships

Whaling women’s journals reflect and negotiate the gender, class, and racial divides of their home community, even while the wives were at sea. Separate, gendered spheres were maintained even under the most extreme circumstances on the whaling ships, which several historians have referred to as “floating factories.” Removed from society on shore, the women were also entirely barred from the physical labors of sailing, whaling, and processing a whale. Judith Butler writes that “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (Gender Trouble 33). On the ships, the daily fact of women doing “domestic” labor in sharp contrast to the “men’s” physical labor asserted and maintained gender difference for both the women and the men.

Through a complex matrix of class and rank that divided the ship spatially as well as ideologically, the captain’s wife was further prohibited from any social interaction
with the majority of men. Though the wife and any children occupied the largest living
space, the Captain’s quarters, this was generally the only place on the ship they were
permitted. Sharing other privileges usually reserved for the captain, such as larger
portions of the best food, a wife’s interactions with the crew and even the officers were
generally extremely limited. The captain’s wife therefore enjoyed a high social rank on
shore and a level of entitlement on the voyage, but her position on board came with
definite restrictions: social, spatial, and physical.

The women’s journals construct identities that comply with these restrictions, but
at certain moments they also negotiate and cross class and gender divides, making the
journals themselves performances. Applying Judith Butler’s notion of performativity to
the circumstances of life-writing, Sidonie Smith argues that no prior, essential self is ever
being transparently recorded. Rather, the self is manifested through the very act of
writing. As a result, “expressions of interiority” appearing in the journals, “are effects
produced through the action of public discourses, among them the culturally pervasive
discourses of identity and truth-telling that inform historically specific modes, contexts,
and receptions of autobiographical narrating” (“Performativity” 109). In the case of
whaling women, these selves are constructed out of prevailing Northeast American
nineteenth-century ideas of gender, class, race, and nationality. Far removed from social
constraints of their homes, the women replicate the identities familiar to them in their
journals. But not always. Drawing on Butler’s assertion that it is impossible to maintain a
cohesive self, Smith argues that there will inevitably be “spaces or gaps, ruptures,
unstable boundaries, incursions, excursions, limits and their transgressions” with the
women’s performances of self (“Performativity” 110). And indeed, women’s whaling
journals negotiate and cross such boundaries even as they construct them—and not just of gender, but class and racial beliefs as well, given the diversity of the men on the ship. In the following sections, I will closely examine the women’s journals for those rhetorical patterns and anomalies that construct the gender, class, and racial boundaries the women recognize between themselves and the men on the ship, and also for those moments when the women transgress the boundaries.

**Gendered spheres and the labor of whaling**

The most distinct gender boundary is set by the physical labor performed on the ship, and most notably during the processing of a whale. Either in shifts or all together, the entire crew, officers, and sometimes even the craftsmen onboard would have participated in the cutting and “trying out” until the difficult task was finished. Charlotte Wyer describes the scene this way: “I have spent the day in the house watching the operation of boiling it is rather difficult to distinguish the officers from the crew in their whaling dress and some sport to see them slipping about deck amongst the oil” (9/13/1853). Clara Wheldon observes that “Every man has worked all the time their eyes have been open, and such weary men I have never seen before” (September 1869). This job was dangerous and exceedingly messy, with both the men and the deck becoming covered in blood, blubber, oil, ash, and soot. During the process, the women generally remained in their cabins, but a large number did manage to watch while remaining out of the way. Quoted above, Charlotte Wyer watched from her deckhouse. Several women climbed into one of the unused whaling boats raised above the ship’s deck by a small crane called a davit. Almira Almy seems to have done this regularly: “all hand employed in cutting the whales (myself and S [Sissy, her daughter] taking our seats as usual in the
SB [Starboard boat] to watch the work” (5/1/1855). Other women find less dramatic viewing places. Dana Nye “seated myself on a pile of boards, so I could look over the side of the ship and see them cut up the whale” (4/28/1847).

This disparity between incredibly busy men and observing woman is noted by several journal writers, but most poignantly by Susan Fisher: “Every one on board are busy enough except myself, and I have looked on until I am tired, I am not used to seeing so much business carried on without being able to lend a helping hand” (WSL 3/27/1855). Henrietta Deblois also notes that “indeed a ship is a school where everyone is employed but the captain’s wife, who sits with her hands folded and lists to what the wild waves are saying. I do hope I shall grow more industrious soon, for it shames me to see all busy but myself” (7/4/1856; Mercury 2/5/1885 1). Since idleness was a vice, the disparity frustrates many of the women. No suggestion, however, even a subtle one, ever arises that the women should take part in any of the whaling labor.

Rather than complaining about the disparity, several of the women describe the separation of spheres during the processing of a whale as natural. Carrie Turner reports that “the men cut the whales in today & commenced boiling I sit in one of the boats & watched them at work on them & it was quite a curiosity to me & it was fun to see them I am working a motto & the words are forget me not looks quite pretty” (10/23/1878). While Carrie may not have actually brought her needlepoint into the boat, her juxtaposition of the two activities is fascinating. It is “fun” to watch the hard, messy labor, but she also seems satisfied that her own work is “quite pretty.” In stark contrast to the labor performed that very day, her “motto” is neither economically profitable nor of use on a floating factory, but clearly the work brought Carrie a sense of accomplishment.
Lydia Tuck’s description of the men processing a whale during a storm is remarkable for its lack of consciousness not only of the disparity of labor, but also of the difficulty of the working conditions. She seems either very selfish, or completely unaware of the danger the men face:

Sunday 16th [September 1855] . . . Wednesday had a heavy gale of wind, lost twenty or twenty five bls oil off deck. It was the most disagreeable day I ever saw at sea. We were all cluttered up with oil, and blubber- the sea pouring over the rail amongst it, made bad work. I was sick with my head, and I got homesick too, which made matters much worse. Not a person on board ate a mouthful from 9 AM, until 6 PM, and I saw no one during that time but the steward. I kept up quite good courage during the day, but after the gale abated, and Frank came below, and began to pity me, then I could command my feelings no longer. I burst into tears and lay sobbing for some time like a little child. But the tempest of grief, like the gale we had just passed through, though very violent while it lasted was yet very short. After a short time I felt better and an hour afterwards, when I went to the tea table all trace of grief had disappeared, and I was as social and cheerful as usual. I presume not one on board, would have imagined that I had been discontented or sad through the day.

This experience occurred after just two months at sea, and it probably was very frightening to be alone in her cabin as the ship rolled and tossed. She also probably smelt the noxious odors from the carcass and boiling oil. Nevertheless her relative lack of awareness or concern that the crew could slip “off deck” as easily as the oil, especially
given the greasy conditions, a gale, and the men’s exhaustion and hunger, contrasts sharply with her concern for her own self-representation—“no one on board would have imagined that I had been discontented.”

Although most of the journals regularly bemoan the women’s lack of activities to keep themselves busy, none ever consider the possibility of chasing or processing the whales. Women do contribute to the ship’s business in other ways that will be discussed later in this chapter. Yet since whaling was the reason for the entire voyage, the woman’s lack of participation except as spectators continually reinforced a gender difference obvious to everyone on the ship. In fact, this is the only divide never crossed or questioned in any of the captains’ wives’ writings, although there are at least four documented cases of women who dressed as men and signed on as sailors, only to be discovered and discharged at the next port.

**Gender, Class, and the Physical Space on the Ship**

Not just excluded from whaling, the women were also barred from the front half of the ship, where the men worked and lived. The journals acknowledge this boundary as gendered but also as part of the class/rank system found on all ships, even those without wives. Sometimes the whaling women are complicit with this, but at other times they negotiate the divide. To understand just how this divide functioned for the women, however, it is useful to describe how the ranking system conforms to the general layout of the ship.\(^4\)

\(^4\) In discussing the hierarchical ship layout, I draw on Elmo Paul Hohman, Briton Cooper Busch, and Margaret Creighton.
Though the system of ranking the men on ships was very hierarchical, it did not entirely mirror the racial and social class system of those New England seaport towns that were home to the majority of captains and wives. In some cases, African-American men rose to the rank of officers and captain, as did many Portuguese men from the Azores. In terms of what space the men occupied and the respect they were owed by those of lower status, rank on the ship superseded all other identity markers, including race, although Briton Cooper Bush cautions that whaling was not the fully integrated industry that many historians have claimed: “Exceptional [non-white] officers were just that—exceptional.” Busch also argues that for whatever reasons, fewer African-Americans signed onto whalers after 1830, even as racial complexity increased since more Portuguese and Pacific Islanders shipped (34).

The majority of captains and officers were white, American, upper and upper-middle class men from whaling families, and upper to lower class white men were also found amongst the crew, either signing on without connections or “shanghaied” by unscrupulous shipping agents. History texts and literature such as *Moby Dick* note the diversity of the men on board. “Here were to be found representatives of practically every race, nationality, class, type, and temperament,” Elmo Paul Hohman writes: “Specimens of every nationality of Europe and of dozens of South Sea Islands; ne’er-do-well sons of wealthy American families, so popular in period novels; Cape Verde and Azores Islanders; scions of great whaling houses; farm boys and sophisticated city youths” (7-8). While this account of the diversity leans toward racial romanticizing and stereotyping,
although they differ as to how much or little they describe any of the men on board—including the Captain himself—the women’s journals confirm the diversity.

It is unclear how familiar with racial and class diversity the captains’ wives were prior to sailing. Many came from upper-middle class families, and many, though not all, were from whaling families and seaport towns. Those from major whaling ports such as Nantucket and New Bedford could have been exposed to a truly global diversity of people. While the port area, including the segregated sailors’ boarding houses, was distinctly separated from the homes of those who lived in the greater town, at the very least, the women would have encountered foreigners while seeing ships off. The large number of boarding houses, some of them catering to specific ethnicities, confirms that the New England ports hosted large amounts of foreigners. “At least six sailor boarding houses operated during the 1820 to 1860 period when Native Hawaiian seamen frequented Nantucket,” Susan Lebo writes, and “At least one house, near Pleasant Street in Nantucket’s New Guinea section, primarily or exclusively boarded Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, and a sign identified William Whippy’s establishment as the William Whippy Canacka Boarding House.” As late as 1850, when Nantucket women were beginning to sail but after the center of whaling had shifted to New Bedford, the Nantucket census still includes 593 “nonresident mariners or seamen” (Lebo), and as New England’s largest whaling port in the second half of the century, New Bedford would have had at least as many seamen lodgings as well.

The physical space of the ship was primarily divided by rank, which superseded social class and race in determining a man’s daily life. The ships were approximately 100 to 110 feet long, with two enclosed levels beneath the top deck. The lowest level was
where the oil casks and oil were stored, as well as water and other supplies. The middle level contained the living quarters, which spatially observed a strict hierarchy based on the men’s ranks. The captain and his family lived in the most spacious quarters in the aft, or rear, of the ship. Many had a day cabin (sometimes metonymically referred to as a transom) and a sleeping room, as well as a personal privy. Some captains also built their wives a small “house” on the afterdeck, so the women had more space and some fresh air during calm weather and seas. These were the only spaces where the women were freely permitted. Women without a “house” would have been occasionally called up to the afterdeck to see something unusual in the ocean or on the horizon, and some women kept chairs on the after deck in calmer weather. Some women record walking the entire deck for exercise. For the most part, though, these women stayed on the afterdeck, and this is the perspective of the ship offered in the journals: symbolically a place of authority, looking down at the crew working.

The officers, or mates, slept in smaller rooms just forward of the captain’s quarters. These rooms were single or double-berths, and usually surrounded a common dining space called the main cabin. The steward and cabin boy often had berths in this section as well. While captains traditionally ate at the dining table in the main cabin with the officers, on some ships the families ate separately. No woman’s journal indicates if non-white officers ate at the same table as the captain and his wife. Following the mates’ meal, the boatsteerers and craftsmen, including the cooper, carpenter, blacksmith, and cook, ate in the main cabin. This rank of men slept in bunks located forward of the main cabin, in an area called the steerage.
The lowest ranking men, the crew, occupied the area forward of the main mast, and the fact that these men would never have gone aft is enshrined in the title of Richard Henry Dana’s novel *Two Years Before the Mast*. The ship’s most cramped and crowded area was the combined living and eating quarters tucked into the bow of the ship: the forecastle. Including up to twenty-four bunks, the forecastle only had enough additional space for each man’s sea chest, which also served as a bench for sitting and eating meals. The ceiling was so low that many men couldn’t stand upright, and this room was accessible through a hatch and down a ladder. The quantity and quality of food the crew received was several levels below the captain’s and officers’. The women also unselfconsciously record the differences between cabin and forecastle fare. In fact, though perhaps cryptic on many topics, most women’s journals were effusive when describing meals. Detailed descriptions of the food eaten on such holidays as Independence Day or Christmas, or during gams, appear in almost all the women’s journals. These accounts not only confirm a certain level of comfort, class, and lifestyle, but also represent some of the most elaborate examples of description. The women generally did not describe their quarters, clothing, or other material conditions of daily life in such detail. Even when noting the discrepancy between the cabin and the forecastle in terms of food, the tone is matter of fact. On Tuesday July 3, 1866, Lucy Crapo writes “We have little time to think of the ‘fourth’ and what arrangements we ought to make for its celebration. However, went to market found a little choice, decided on roast pig in the cabin and chicken for the other tables.” Underlining “market” emphasizes her joke: it is the livestock kept on the deck of the ship, as the latitude and longitude she recorded five days before puts the *Louisa* in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. This entry
unselfconsciously affirms the culinary hierarchy, and also gives us an unintended
glimpse of its implications. The men who ate the lesser fare worked next to the ship’s
livestock, and therefore would have been very aware of what the cabin was eating, since
a certain animal would no longer be on the deck with them.

One of the most telling and unselfconscious accounts of the cabin’s food
privileges was recorded by Annie Ricketson on her first of three voyages:

December 13 [1871] But the funnyest thing has happened, the Steward and
boy had got everything on the table all ready to sit down, when the ship
gave a roll and over went the tureen of bean soup and stewed pumpkin and
boiled onions and various other things on to the floor. The boy was trying
to hold on to them to keep them from coming of but could not keep from
sliping himself. They had to go to work and sit the table all over. Lost all
the bean soup but they had more in the cooke gally for the second table so
we had that and they had to go with out. It was a very laughable affair.

Annie is not the only wife to laugh at food spilled due to the rolling of the ship, but she is
the only woman to record appropriating another table’s meals. As Seth Peterson points
out, the men at the second table probably did not see the lack of soup as a “laughable
affair” (16 n.41).

The only time a woman writes sympathetically about the forward crew’s food is
in response to the dreaded “duff,” a flour pudding boiled in a cloth bag. “Duff day has
come round again,” Elizabeth Waldron writes: “I dare say that all of them forward
thought of it this morning. I can’t say that I love it dearly” (4/14/1853). While celebratory
meals might include the precious livestock or treats such as gingerbread, even in the main
cabin daily fare was bland. Food stores were limited and often contaminated with vermin. Many women happily record taking on fruit, potatoes, and occasionally livestock at ports around the world. They also note when fish were caught—and when only a limited supply is procured, the Captain’s table is the one served.

Although the women describe meals in detail, few have left accounts of their living spaces. Sallie Smith includes a diagram of her quarters at the end of her journal, but only Henrietta Deblois offers a thorough, detailed portrait of the layout and furnishings of the Captain’s day room. “It is 8 by 10 feet,” she writes, furnished with:

- a Green Brussels carpet with a tiny red flower sprinkled all over it,
- a blk walnut sofa, cone chair, a small mirror with a gilt frame – over this is a Barometer - at the side of this hangs the thermometer. Under the mirror is a beautiful carved shelf which supports a watch and jewel case, a present from our niece at parting and not a little valued by us I can assure you. . . .
- a beautiful little landscape done by our cousin Kate hangs over the Sofa. A Melodeon Music books work baskets and bags, give this room quite a home look. (qtd. in Druett Petticoat Whalers 36)

This room was lavishly furnished compared to the rest of the ship. Nor was Henrietta the only woman to carry a melodeon to sea, as several women mention having them. Captain and Mrs. Baker even had a piano aboard the Gazelle during their voyage from 1857-1860, and Harriett Swain mentions enjoying one during a gam with the ship Metacom: “Capt Woodbridge & wife came & passed the afternoon with us after tea we accompanied them on board there ship & passed the evening with them had music from the piano & singing” (2/7/1854). Although many of the crew brought smaller musical
instruments to entertain themselves and others, pianos were certainly limited to the captains’ quarters.

Charlotte Wyer provides a detailed description of the house built for her on the deck; she is also one of the few women who mention where a child sleeps:

I should advise for you to see how beautiful my accommodations are, they worked all of last season to get ready for us, built a house upon Deck, with a wet sink where I wash, and I have a [sic] that I burn charcoal to heat my water, also flat irons and do not have to go to the galley for anything, I have a stairway by myself, that leads up into a house upon Deck, and our stateroom is so much larger than Harriett Irvings [the ship she travelled on to meet her husband in Valparaiso], that it seems as if we had got home and I certainly feel at home we have Charlotte E in a berth in one room, Samuel has built a nice safe in the Transom, which is just the thing, and together with the carpet and rocking chairs, makes it look comfortable and I am perfectly happy. (6/26/1853)

Charlotte not only touches on the aesthetics, but also the functional use of her “house” as a place to cook, wash, and iron. Several women even had a skylight, and kept plants in their house deck.

Such “houses” are clearly status symbols for the captain’s wife. Charlotte writes following a gam on another ship, “Their ship is much larger than ours, but I would not exchange accommodations because she has no house on Deck” (7/6/1854). Harriett Swain is also quite pleased when her husband builds her one during their voyage, and Lucy Crapo puts a chair on top of her cabin, creating a triple decker space: “I spent two
hours after dinner on deck, that is on top of the house, which is my quarter deck, where I have a large chair a present from Capt. Chase of the Jireh Perry made of a cask of course. ensconced in that I am hidden from the main deck and at my feet is the skylight containing my box of plants” (10/10/1879). Privacy from the crew was important to Lucy, even as she assumed more personal space, and Charlotte Wyer clearly agrees when she favorably describes her personal staircase to the house.

Such houses were not however created with the crew’s privacy in mind. “The Carpenter to work making the house on deck larger,” Joan Druett quotes an officer angrily writing in his journal: “[He] has put a long window in the forward part of the house, so Mrs Hamblin can set down & look whats going on deck, who goes over the bows, or to the Urine barrell [sic]” (Petticoat Whalers 40). None of the women, however, record criticism directed at themselves, although one wonders how the officers felt when they learned Mary Lawrence’s bedroom was to be enlarged while the boat was docked in Honolulu in November 1857. It was, of course, the officers who were losing this space in their own berths.

**Before The Mast**

The women’s journals seldom mention the ship’s spatial divide, or the crew who lived in the forward—an omission that I would argue maintains the expected proprieties of the whaling women’s class and gender on the ship. The divide was somewhat porous, keeping the crew out of the aftermast area, although the captain and officers had full reign of the ship. But the captain’s wife, although equal to him in rank and class, was barred from the crew’s physical space and from social interaction because of her gender. While a practice that conformed to American social hierarchy, it may also have been a
safety precaution. None of the women’s journals mention rape, or even hint at intimations of violence against themselves from the crew members, forecastle or aft. Nonetheless, mutiny was a real threat at sea, and perhaps captains believed that the fewer men their wives interacted with, the safer they would be. This convention held strong. A few women record being left on the ship with only a handful of men while the captain chased whales, gammed, or went on shore in foreign ports, and Lydia Tuck’s husband left her, the ship, and most of his crew anchored for two weeks in the “Bay of Cintra, or Whale Bay as the Spanish call it,” off Morocco, while accompanying another captain to the Canary Islands to receive medical treatment (11/1/1855).

The journals do not explicitly state that the women were not allowed forward of the mast; they simply do not include any descriptions of that space. That the forecastle was off limits to the Captain’s wife is only directly mentioned in a letter by Henrietta Deblois, who offers a detailed description of the living quarters, beginning aft and continuing through the steerage. But that is all she can provide: “For’ard is the Forecastle where the seamen live, I cannot take you there as I have not been there myself but am told it is very nicely fitted up” (qtd. in Druett Petticoat Whalers 36). Only two women’s journals mention the physical space of the forecastle. Charlotte Wyer seems to have peered into another ship’s forecastle during a gam, and noticed it contained “some barrels” (2/3/1984). Since it is highly unlikely that she would have entered the forecastle, even on a tour, she probably looked down the hatch into the Gazelle’s forecastle while standing on deck, as her entry also mentions animals that would have been kept there. Another brief account of the forecastle—although without suggesting she had visited the space—is Clara Wheldon’s entry written during a “particularly cold Arctic summer”:
“The men have looked very solemn, having neither danced nor sung. They have no fire
[in the forecastle] and it is a mystery to me how they can keep from freezing. Captain
says men are more healthy without fire, that they would keep their quarters too warm and
then expose themselves and take violent colds” (qtd in Busch 154). This passage is
unusual because it not only mentions the material and social conditions in the forecastle,
but also because it comments on the disparity between aft and fore, captain and crew.
Mrs. Weldon offers a subtle criticism in wondering, “how they can keep from freezing,”
but quickly neutralizes it by having the disparity “explained” by the captain. It is rare
however for a woman to allude to the forecastle, let alone the living conditions there.

While the captain’s wife may not have gone before the mast, she did spend time
on the afterdeck, where she would have had a full view of the entire deck, and therefore
the crew. The journals, however, almost never refer to the crew by name or describe them
as individuals—another way of maintaining the class and gender proprieties. Many
women record the labor performed on the ship, but their descriptions are often terse and
cryptic, following the form and tone of an official log. Work is recorded with the focus
on the labor rather than the laborers. Many women call the men the “crew” or the
“hands.” Harriett Swain notes: “The crew employed in setting up rigging” (12/30/1852).
Some women write about the “men,” or even the “boys,”—an accurate if patronizing
term, since most of the crew would have been between eighteen and twenty-five years
old. Of course many wives were only slightly older, although some were in their thirties
and forties. The lack of proper names probably prompted Lisa Norling to write that
Azubah Cash “never even mentions crew members at all” (247). Cash does refer to the
work that “they” or the “hands” do throughout the voyage, referring to them collectively.
If the language present in women’s journal entries creates distance between herself and the crew, her silences, or elisions, often make it wider. The subjects of the sentences, nouns like “crew” or “men,” are often entirely missing from many women’s entries, just as they are often absent in the ships’ official logs. In some typical examples, Lydia Beebe writes “Good breeze, painting ship” (12/31/1864), while Susan Veeder records, “one boat went on shore and got a good supply of pigs and fowl Oranges plantins” (10/11/1848). The breeze was not painting the ship; the boat was not getting supplies. Such disembodied descriptions of course alienate the men from their labor. Any self-consciousness of class difference is elided by making the men themselves invisible, even as the women assert their own superior class/rank through their surveillance and knowledge of “the ship’s” activities. By writing, or not writing, about the crew in these ways, the wife aligns herself with the position of her husband the Captain, who occupies the highest rank and class position on the ship.

Though class distinctions between the fore and the aft are maintained by both literal and discursive distance or erasure, there are moments when these boundaries are emotionally crossed through rhetorical strategies familiar from popular nineteenth century sentimental novels. The class/rank and gender of the women may prevent them from crossing the imaginary line drawn at the foremast even in their journals, but their prescribed female role as moral or religious custodians did lead them to express concern for fatally ill sailors, and to pray for any departed souls. In general, the women’s journals express much more sympathy and provide more detailed narratives regarding the illness of anyone on board than do the official logs. Deaths often led the women journalists to reflect on mortality, almost always with religious overtones. On April 1, 1853, for
example, Captain Obed Swain records: “this day Thomas Dohorty of Rochester New York fell oer board & drowned.” Harriett Swain, Obed’s wife, provides a much more detailed account. Drawing a dark black line across the page, a common signifier of bad news in nineteenth century letters and journals, she writes:

“In the midst of Life we are in death” About one o’clock V.M. Thomas Doherty fell overboard & was drowned, Ropes were thrown to him which he grasped with his hand, but immediately get go, it being very cold, the wind blowing very strong with a heavy sea, it is supposed he was so chilled that he had not strength to hold the robe, The boat which was lowered hoping to save him got to him just at the moment he sunk to rise no more until the Archangel trumps shall sound. He was about 19 years, born in Rochester, NY has parents living at Montreal had just recovered from a sickness which he had the most of the passage. (4/1/1853)

Previously unmentioned in her journal, Thomas Doherty is now described to the best of Harriett’s ability. His age, home, and relatives are all documented, as well as his final moments. Such biographical details, as well as the pious phrases that frame them, are typical of the women’s journal entries that record deaths. Harriett’s opening quotation, part of “The Order for the Burial of the Dead” from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, also appeared in many other whaling women’s journals under similar circumstances.

In these records of illness and death, the women’s rhetorical self-constructions shift in what Amy Schrager Lang describes as a “strategy of displacement in which the vocabulary of class yields to that of gender” (20). As Lang explains, this strategy
commonly appears in sentimental novels, in which clearly demarcated class differences are crossed to allow the heroine to display the concern and piety apparently “natural” to women. That this rhetorical shift should also occur in the whaling women’s journals at these same moments of death is not surprising, for as Jane Tompkins explains, “the power of the dead or dying to redeem the unregenerate is a major theme of nineteenth-century popular fiction and religious literature. Mothers and children are thought to be uniquely capable of this work” (128). For this reason, whaling women often do identify sick and dying men by name, and frequently write short narratives and even religious reflections when recording the death of a crew member. As writers, the women descend for a moment from the upper class due to their gender, expressing those qualities of compassion and piety that the nineteenth century attributed to women.

We can see just how gendered a trope this is, when in his 1917 autobiography, Captain Gelett quotes at length from his wife’s journal to detail the death of her nephew, one of the crew on their 1846 to 1849 journey. Her account is highly emotional and also possibly was revised before the book’s publishing. As they noticed he had a fever, the Geletts moved James M. Sever from the forecastle into their day cabin. Mrs. Gelett cared for him. While watching his illness progress, she remarks that “I have been called to pass through one of the most trying scenes I ever experienced.” As she details his symptoms, including delirium, she emphasizes his work ethic and his piety. Her eleventh paragraph concludes his life with a religious reflection (53-5).

5 Though Joan Druett writes in “Sister Sailor” that Mrs. Gelett also cared for six other men who caught typhoid, nothing in Captain Gelett’s autobiography or Mrs. Gellet’s quoted passages indicates she cared for anyone other than her nephew (221 n.15).
While the majority of these compassionate entries are about specific men, two also express concern for the health of entire forecastle. Since both are excellent examples of the women’s rhetorical “strategy of displacement,” I quote them at length. Eliza Brock, the most literary of women journalists, composes the following entry:

Tuesday May the 6 [1856]

This Day begins moderate set all sail, wind light at SW Stearing N.N.E./ E fine weather Noon fresh Breeze at S.S.W. Cloudy weather not so very Cold as it was at 7 AM they struck two Porpoises and lost them the Irons Drew. Sam Orsborn Seamen quite sick. Oh my heart aches with pity for the sick sailor in the forecastle far away from friends and home.

Beginning with a formal tone, Eliza records the same information included in the official log: weather, directions, activities. She mentions the labor of setting the sails, but does not include the laborers; later, the crew appears as “they,” a pronoun without an antecedent, when Eliza writes that the men struck and lost porpoises. Then she notes the sick sailor, providing his name and rank, with her tone shifting dramatically, becoming highly emotional as she expresses concern. What follows shifts the genre of her writing yet again, as she copies out a melancholy poem that depicts a “mother’s” role as one of comfort and love.

An entry by Mary Lawrence similarly and typically begins by describing the weather, listing her own activities (“washing”), and recording the sighting of blackfish “about a mile off. Did not lower for them.” Yet like Eliza Brock, after the mention of labor without laborers, she names a sailor, and describes in detail his illness:
There is one man sick (John Gadson). I suppose he is in a consumption. He raises a great deal of blood, has a pain in his chest, etc. If he does not get better shall be obliged to leave him at the Islands. He was a very smart fellow. I pity him. there are but few conveniences in the forecastle of a ship for sickness. Perhaps there are as many as he has been accustomed to in port. (2/16/1867)

Mary’s tone also shifts as she expresses concern for the young man, but these compassionate sentences contain another self-serving elision, since the actual subject who will be “obliged to leave him” is of course her husband the captain, who will in fact drop the sick man off far from home. The surviving crew list identifies John Gadson as from New York, NY, and notes that he was indeed discharged Apr. 1857 in the Sandwich Islands (Lawrence 252-3).

Names and rank of sailors were not the only identity markers women recorded in their journals when describing the illnesses, deaths, or any other unusual events involving the crew. If the sailor was not a white American man, his race would be identified in the woman’s entry. As we will see, while racism pervades the women’s discussions of natives encountered in foreign lands, none of journals record acts that seem discriminatory against non-white American or foreign sailors. Occasionally the island a man was from, or the island where he had joined the voyage, is mentioned, but most often the men were recorded by nationality—Portuguese, German, French—or by race if they were African-American or Pacific Islanders. This lack of onboard racist commentary in the women’s journals at least points to the possibility of Hester Blum’s proposed model in “The Prospect of Oceanic Studies” that we might “derive new forms of
relatedness from the necessarily unbounded examples provided in the maritime world” (671).

For the most part, the deaths of “kanakas,” the term used for Pacific Islanders, are recorded in the same terms of respect and sorrow that the women use to describe American men. Take for example Elizabeth Waldron:

The last day of July [1853], and the last day of poor Peter Kanaker’s life. He died this afternoon, he has been sick a long time, it is too true that

Death is here, and Death is there
And Death is with us everywhere

none can escape and yet how little we think of it. poor Peter will soon be forgot by his companions, since tea I have heard them laughing and talking on deck, as if nothing had taken place of a serious nature. tomorrow if the weather is suitable he will be taken on shore and buried.

Five years later, Mary Lawrence writes about a Hawaiian who had signed on in the “Sandwich Islands” a year before:

October 12 [1858]. Yesterday a sad event occurred which cast a gloom over our whole company—the death and burial of William Kalama, a Kanaka. He has been off duty some time; did not complain but appeared to be running down. Samuel gave him medicine and tonics. We had no idea that he was so low until they told us he was dead. He was on deck the day before. I went on deck at sunset to hear the funeral service read before he was consigned to the deep. It seemed rather aggravating after being so long from home to die as it were within sight of it.
“William” most likely was a name given to him by Captain Lawrence or another captain if he had sailed previously, since renaming foreign recruits, particularly Pacific Islanders, whose name could not be pronounced by the American captains, was a standard practice. And yet, Mary records the young man’s full name in so far as can be determined.

There were of course exceptions, with some more overtly racist than others. Susan Fisher’s account of three men who died is clearly biased: “those that were lost were the boatsteerer, a Kanaka and a Frenchman. The boatsteerer was a very fine man from Fall River, he was with N. on his last voyage, Oh! what dreadful news for his father and sisters; he had no mother living.” (*WSL* XII.4:26). Yet Susan does not consider the grief of the families of the French or Pacific Island sailors. Even as she sympathizes with sick crew members, Elizabeth Waldron employs the racist terminology widespread during this period. In April 1853 she writes: “Wed 6 Our cook is sick again, poor old darkey” and “Mon 18 One of the kanakers is sick. poor fellow he seems to be consumptive.” Despite Elizabeth’s compassion, her comments clearly mark the men as racialized bodies, and she seems to have passed this on to her daughter. The day prior to mentioning the consumptive Pacific Islander, Elizabeth writes, “Sun 17th Nannie has not been on deck for a fortnight, she is afraid of ‘Sunday’ one of the boatsteerers, she says he looks at her with his mouth open.” Putting “Sunday” in quotes indicates a name given to a foreign recruit, perhaps a Pacific Islander.

In 1871, Harriet Allen also uses national and racial identity markers when describing the rescue of her daughter after falling overboard.
Nov 22 Wednesday Suddenly the men at the wheel (the French Creole) rushed forward to the door saying something in French in an excited manner. I caught the words ‘petit-fee’ & I knew Nellie was overboard. Charlie (Kanaka) who was below, hearing the noise, came on deck & as soon as he knew the occasion jumped overboard. Frank Fayal followed & sometime after Steward. Frank and Charlie just saved her. She saw Frank and clung to his neck. Charlie dove under and supported both while the boat reached them.

Harriet’s use of parenthetical marks is telling: the men’s nationality is necessary to note, though not important to the story itself. (“Frank Fayal” was most likely from Fayal, his home perhaps added to distinguish him from another Frank.)

To summarize, due to the gender and class differences, women were not supposed to interact with the whaling ship’s crew members, who lived and worked solely in the forward space of the ship, and in general, the women’s journal entries reflect this divide. They maintain distance by rarely mentioning the crew, though recording the labor from the perspective of the afterdeck, a symbolic space of authority. The crew of almost every ship included a mix of ethnic origins, and while the wives’ journals reflect racist assumptions of the day, no woman explicitly records discrimination based on race. Rank supersedes all other identity markers on the ship, and gender, specifically self-constructions of concern and piety, supersedes class difference only at the time of illness and death, when the previously unnamed crew member becomes a named individual and his passing is framed with religious significance.
Gender and class divides were more complicated aft of the mast in the main cabin, the space the women shared with the officers, steward, and cabin boy. Within these close living quarters, unless the woman remained in her private room, she and the captain took meals with the officers. Although journal entries about the officers, steward, and cabin boy are far more numerous and detailed than those about the crew, the women maintain a discursive distance. Virtually all of them refer to the men only by their position titles. Despite years of entries mentioning daily personal interaction, the “steward” and “cook” are referred to as such, and the cabin boy is “boy.” Harriet Allen mentions the “steward” frequently during her four-year voyage, and he seems quite close to her and her children, but she never once names him. Lydia Tuck promises the tearful mother and grandmother of a newly recruited cabin boy to look out for him, but never mentions him again in her journal. Only Harriett Swain calls her cabin boy by his name; Manuel was a young Portuguese man, as were many stewards and cabin boys. None of the stewards, cabin boys, or officers on ships with whaling wife journalists were African-Americans or Pacific Islanders.

Unless they were sons, brothers or brothers-in-law of the captains’ wives, and therefore called by their first names, officers, particularly first and second officers, were usually referred as Mister. Sometimes they were designated by their positions, such as “first mate” or “second mate.” Though the journals range widely in how frequently they mention the mates, they most commonly appear in accounts of catching whales, since each was in charge of a boat. Other captains met on gams or at foreign ports are “Captain” followed by last names. If his wife were with him, she was “lady,” “wife,” or
“Mrs.” The formality of Mr. and Mrs. was maintained even when those encountered on a gam were close friends. (Interestingly, friends who remained at home were usually referred to by their first names.) In general, even in the journals of the women who did not gam often, women mention captains met along the voyage more frequently than the officers on their own ship.

Mary Lawrence’s journal aboard the *Addison* from 1856 to 1860 is an excellent example of the contrast between minimal recording of sailors on the ship, and the naming of every single captain with whom she gam. Writing almost daily for three and a half years, her entries are lively narratives about the voyage. In her almost daily accounts—including weather, ship direction, and whales sighted, lowered for and caught—she rarely mentions crew or officers. Yet she and Captain Lawrence were clearly very social, so her journal is full of other captains’ names, particularly during their stays in Lahaina and Honolulu. The proportions are striking. In the first year, November 1856 to November 1857, she wrote approximately two hundred entries, listing dozens of captains, but only ten men on the ship beside her husband. Of those ten mentions four are about the crew, two identifying sick men by name; three are about difficulties with the “cook”; and three are references to mates by their surnames. This almost complete elision of anyone on the ship besides her family undeniably creates a rhetorical distance between herself and both crew and officers.

An entry shortly into Mary Lawrence’s thirteenth month at sea, however, reveals a disparity between journal entries and lived experience, suggesting that at least sometimes the rhetorical distance was merely rhetorical. After detailing one man’s death, complete with the trope of a “watery grave,” she writes the following paragraph:
Poor Antone! He came out as one of the cabin boys and had lived in the cabin for a year and then at his own request went to live in the forecastle . . . I had become quite attached to him. Only the week before I had proposed to Samuel that we should take him home with us and give him the benefit of a little education. . . .

May God in his infinite goodness have mercy on thy soul. (12/28/1857)

In over a year of more than two hundred entries, Mary had never mentioned “Antone” or even a “cabin boy.” Yet this passage, written upon his death, claims a motherly, or at least mentor-like, relationship between them.

That Mary Lawrence formed a relationship with at least one man but did not record it does not however mean that all women had closer interactions than what their journals suggest. Joan Druett compares Mary Brewster’s journal to that of John Perkins, a green hand on her first voyage who also kept a journal. A week into the voyage Perkins writes that “The Captains lady sits on deck sewing every pleasant day. There is nothing remarkable in her appearance. She never speaks to any of the officers when on deck but her husband” (qtd in “Sister Sailor” 18 n.10). Druett notes that following Perkins’ death at sea, his journal became the property of the captain, and Mary Brewster may have read it. Druett suggests that “from that date onwards, Mary took a more active part in the life of the ship: she cooked special dishes, and she nursed sick men . . . This alteration in Mary’s behavior was arguably inspired by the complaints she read in Perkins’ book” (92 n.23).

Another intriguing perspective on the interactions between the captain’s wife and the men onboard can be gained by comparing Lydia Beebe’s journal to the published memoir of Warren Tobey, her cabin boy on her second voyage. Lydia refers to Tobey as
“boy,” and only occasionally records chores they perform together. The following entry is relatively effusive: “yesterday afternoon while the men were all at work I learned the boy how to steer, he is a good boy and is trying to live a Christian life and I pray God to help him” (1/9/1867). This entry appears just two months into Lydia’s second voyage, and her intermittent and ultimately discontinued journal does not detail any further interaction. Warren Tobey’s journal was published as The Cabin Boy’s Log: Scenes and Incidents on a New Bedford Whaler in 1932. Regarding the captain’s wife, he recounts she had spoken sympathetically to me and expressed the hope that I might get along and try to bear the harsh treatment which she knew would continue the remainder of the voyage. She was compelled to avoid her interest in my welfare, being observed by her husband, as it would mean unhappiness for her, and although I had to do many things for her as cabin boy, she seldom had conversations with [me]. (32)

Here Tobey indicates that it was Captain Beebe who strictly enforced the limited interaction rule between Lydia and the men on the ship, and he, as well as other captains, probably did so. But of course, Tobey is constructing particular identities of his own. His very domineering captain raises a sympathy in the reader that even the captain’s wife was unable to show him, although she apparently wanted to. I find it enjoyable to imagine somewhere in the space between the different journals’ constructions Lydia “learning” young Warren Tobey some literacy skills, as well as steering, enabling him to write the very journal that he published sixty-five years later.

Different ships of course had different social dynamics, and some whaling women’s journals are more descriptive. Several women do record anecdotes of
interactions in the main cabin. The most frequent and detailed concern the steward, who cooked, cleaned, and otherwise served the captain and officers. These journals often describe the steward as a personal servant. Elizabeth Morey praises his cooking abilities, “The steward had prepared a fine dinner for us” (8/3/1854), and Malvina Marshall praises his serving abilities, “nice steward who is ever on hand to do his best when we have company” (10/4/52). Carrie Turner’s steward is a part-time nanny—“Baby was 7 months old today . . . she cries most every time when she sees the steward to go to him” (12/19/1881). Harriet Allen frequently describes her steward as playmate and supervisor of her two children. Describing a gam with the South Boston, Eliza Williams notes that Mrs. Randolph’s cabin boy “does everything for the Child” (130). Writing to her sister, Lucy Crapo is clearly happy that on this second voyage she has “quite a good steward and cook. cleaner than we had in the Louisa [her first voyage], it would do you good to look into the galley and see how it shines. I am waited on more than before and I take it as a matter of course. I have not swept any room but twice since I cam away and then from choice. I think I shall after a while. should now if it was not done to suit me” (1/15/78). Responsibilities were at times flexible. Lucy describes herself as supervising the cleaning, while other women seemed to have tidied their own cabins alongside the stewards.

As Lucy’s implied opinion of her first voyage steward suggests, other women were highly critical of the stewards’ lack of abilities and effort. One of a few women who writes detailed descriptions of the men on board, Elizabeth Marble records her disillusionment in her journal and letters. Five days into her voyage, she is quite optimistic: “I think we have a fine set of Oficers they all seam to do thare duty, also the
boat steerers, I think we shall like very well, Our Cooper is a very smart man and understand how to do his work well. Our formast hands are very light and green” (8/30/1857). “Green” references their inexperience, but may also be a pun on the new sailors’ seasickness, which was common in the first days of a voyage. Only five days later Elizabeth complains that, “we have a miserable steward you cant learn him any thing and he is two durty to live, John says he shall get another when he gets to the Island and I hope he will or I shall starve” (9/4/1857). In a letter written to her sister two weeks later, she further details the steward’s incompetence. Captain Marble does hire a different steward in Fayal. Yet conditions remained far below Elizabeth’s standards. In late October she writes horizontally in the margin of her journal, “I dont want it known that this is what I came a whaling for I could live better out of your swill pale at home” (10/23/1857).

Elizabeth Stetson also begins her trip optimistically, writing positively about the officers on the E. Corning. Her opinion quickly changes, however, and she is very candid about her dislike of many of the men on board. One of the mates is “saucy” (7/23/1861), and she frequently complains about the steward: “Steward strange. God only knows what ails the thing. I never saw such a man. He is both. Profane and Ugly. Cursing, & slatting things round; I think he is crazy” (1/1/1862). As for one of the mates, “Davis is half witted” (2/28/1863). Both the steward and Davis were eventually discharged, and Davis left only days after her remarks, perhaps reflecting her authority on the ship, or perhaps simply illustrating his difficulties with the captain as well. It is not clear if she actually does not get along with the boatsteerers, or if she morally objects to their proximity when she writes “I shall not stop in the ship after we get to Talcahuano if the boatsteerers are to
live in the cabin” (1/29/1863). To be fair, Elizabeth’s sharp words are not only directed at those on the E. Corning. She writes that the captain of the Ripple “is the most detestable man that I ever met in my life” (8/11/1864). While Elizabeth Stetson was therefore one of many women who had difficult relationships with the officers and steward, she was certainly the one who complained the most in her journal.

Two other whaling women describe being entertained on the deck by crew members performing music. Elizabeth Marble writes on Christmas Eve, 1857 that “tomorrow night if pleasant we are to have a consirt of some of the hands forward.” These hands evidently performed several times, since they eventually give themselves a name, and ask Elizabeth to sew them dresses as costumes. Harriett Swain also writes “enjoy myself much, especially these moonlight evenings, seated on deck and listening to the music & songs of the crew. Have some very good singers, also several musical instruments.” (1/18/1853). In times of leisure, such as these evenings the deck became a space of mutual enjoyment, providing enough space for the forehands and those in the main cabin to share in the music while maintaining the rank-based segregation. One hopes that more women than these two enjoyed such evenings. Almira Almy did not. Writing in the same few years as Elizabeth Marble and Harriett Swain, Almira reports on the fourth of July that “I suppose all hands have gone to the fireworks this evening, E & G [her children] among the rest, I should like to be there too. I guess they are passing a 4th in the steerage, I hear dancing” (7/4/1855). Despite her wishes, it was not appropriate for Almira to attend the fireworks, presumably held elsewhere, nor to join those who remained on the ship in celebrating.
The Women’s Role on the Ship

Entirely removed from the physical labor of whaling, and isolated socially, the women still did contribute to the economic purpose of the voyage. Yet because the work closely mirrored “domestic” labor, which by the nineteenth century had been subsumed within a rhetoric of wifely devotion to devalue or even occlude it from the public/economic sphere, it went unpaid and unrecognized. Even some “domestic” chores were off limits to whaling women. Generally speaking, the galley was a male domain, though some women did cook treats for the main cabin, and occasionally even for the forward. As Mary Lawrence reports, though, such attempts could be frustrating: “I should have more courage to make knickknacks if I could attend the baking of them, but of course it would not do for me to go into the galley” (4/1/1857). The answer for many women was to have their own small cooking stove in their cabin or deckhouse for personal use, and two years later Mary writes about having enough milk to make her daughter porridge in the mornings. This split in cooking responsibilities could get competitive. “The officers like my bread better than the steward’s,” writes Henrietta Deblois (10/21/1856; Mercury 3/21/1856 7), and Clara Wheldon makes a similar claim: “I have learned to use canned milk very successfully, and with my little coffee-pot I am able to have my beverages just right, and have proved to the steward that there is such a thing as having good tea and coffee instead of the miserable drinks he produces from using twice as much as needed. Capable as he is, I find he needs instructions in some things” (4/1869). Despite the difficulties of performing their domestic role, the women still insist on their proficiency.
Although women kept out of the galley even when they wanted to enter, there were times when they were conscripted into the role of steward for brief periods if the ship required this service. At least five wives and one daughter document acting as steward at some point during their voyages, suggesting that this may have occurred more frequently than it was recorded. Mary Lawrence assumes the role several times, cooking what she can on her personal stove, then preparing larger dishes for the cook to bake:

“Samuel [the Captain] went fishing again today . . . Took the steward and steerage boy with him, so I had the cooking to do. I made four loaves of bread, six pies, six pans of cookies, and stuffed two fish for baking” (2/3/1859). Note, however, that although she assumes responsibility, she prepares the food, but she cannot bake it herself because she cannot enter the galley.

Other women act as replacements while their stewards recover from illness or injury. Lucy Crapo playfully refers to herself as a “stewardess,” and Harriet Allen says the same thing about her daughter, “Nellie was Stewardess” (Crapo 4/19/1866; Allen 3/17/1868). Elizabeth Waldron describes her replacement menu: “our steward was sick all day so I stood cook for the cabin, made a nice oyster stew for dinner and cracker toast for supper” (Waldron 7/24/1853). And after the *E. Corning’s* steward deserted, “I acted for the steward did not sit down all day. very tired” (10/1/1861). Though most of these women took these duties in stride, Almira Gibbs was clearly displeased at being conscripted for three days:

Aug the 24 [1856] ... today the steward is sick and myself and RC G [Richard C. Gibbs, her son] has to be stewards we dont like the station either of us but we cant seem to help it but do the best we can
Monday August the 25 ... as yet steward some better to day I have mad bread and gingerbread done most of the Cabin work hope I shall be released soon.

27 I am released from my stewardship and am very glad so I have been mending old clothes to day and doing sundrys O dear I wish we could see whales I am tired of doing nothing.

Almira did complain more about her living conditions than most women; previously she had described “myself employed in washing this morning and cleaning up my room this is one way of living I cannot say that I like it very much” (10/9/1855). Yet her repeated use of “released” emphasizes her unwillingness to perform this duty, in part because it puts her in a power dynamic in which she is clearly subordinate. Like everyone else, she must submit to the captain.

“Released” also suggests the typical onboard punishment of putting men in irons, or crude handcuffs. While few women’s journals mention irons directly, Busch notes it was “the standard punishment for more formal misdemeanors,” and that “Few voyages avoided one or more instances of such confinement as logbooks testify”—a claim Busch makes after studying “approximately 3,300 such documents” while researching punishment on whalers (20; 19). I am not suggesting Almira’s stint as steward was a punishment. No journal records an instance of a Captain’s wife being punished or scolded. Almira was however candidly unhappy about working as the steward, even as she bemoans her inactivity, although by “doing nothing” she means not catching and processing whales.

While many wives record “helping” the steward clean or make treats, the five women who assumed the official duties of steward do so only for one to three days. Nor
is taking on the role for a longer period or permanently ever suggested. This is all the more striking because the duties of the steward—cooking, cleaning, and serving—were more “domestic” than any other role on the ship, and the steward served only the main cabin, the appropriate space for the captain’s wife to occupy. And no wife ever, even temporarily, became cook for the entire ship. Clearly, although wives might assume the steward’s duties for brief periods in an emergency, longer would have compromised the wife’s position of rank and class, even if the work itself was undeniably domestic.

Women did on occasion fulfill other necessary shipboard functions. At least six wives were the official logbooks keeper throughout the voyage, and the actual number during the late 1800s and early 1900s was probably much, much higher. Normally the Captain or the First Officer, the keeper of the official logbook had to possess high literacy competence, and also the Captain’s complete trust—even if he was only dictating the log to his wife. Women’s literacy is considered more thoroughly in the following chapter, but it is worth noting that while more American women were literate in the nineteenth century, it was still primarily a middle-to-upper class privilege. Addie Potter wrote the entries into the official log for four days while the captain was sick; Almira Almy took over as the official logbook keeper several months into her second voyage.

There is no record of women being paid for their work as steward or official logbook keeper—but then, there is often no record of the women themselves. Despite keeping the official log, like the majority of the wives, Mary Lawrence and Almira Almy are not even named in the shipping list, which includes the name and rank of all the men on board. Elizabeth Waldron is never mentioned in the official log of the Bowditch, kept by the first mate Ambrose Waldron, the captain’s brother, and therefore Elizabeth’s
brother-in-law. One of the rare instances of a woman appearing on the shipping list was Marion Smith, who was actually indicated as the navigator in the official logbook of the California for 1898-1899. Some women, like Charlotte Church and Betsy Ann Tower, identify themselves as the keeper at the opening of the log, referring to themselves in both the first and third person. Almira Almy, who seems to have taken over keeping the logbook prior to her husband’s death, can be identified as the second keeper because the handwriting matches her signed personal journal that she kept on the prior voyage.

Aside from the official roles the wives may have occasionally performed, many record assisting the life and routine of the ship in unofficial, unrecognized, and unpaid ways, documented only in the woman’s own journal. One of the most frequently mentioned of such activities is sewing. Although most often they are sewing for themselves or their family, or to improve their living space, some women do record sewing for men on the ship. Besides writing sympathetic entries about sick men, a few women also nursed them as well. Did the women see such actions as part of the official labor of the ship, or as selfless activities “naturally” performed out of good will?

6 Joan Druett in “Sister Sailors” identifies Maria P. Clark as the logbook keeper of voyages on the Nimrod and Orlando because her name is occasionally written on the page headings. But other names also appear in the same style and handwriting: James M. Clark (the captain) and Susannah B. Clark. There is no other evidence that Maria Clark sailed, let alone kept the logbook. Further evidence that she was not on board is that she is not mentioned in the Captain’s letter that describes the Nimrod being burned by the Confederate Pirate Ship Shenandoah in June 1865, nor is she mentioned in the August 29, 1865 WSL detailing the Shenandoah’s destruction of fifteen whale ships, including the Nimrod. The article does note that the ship James Maury was “bonded,” ransomed, rather than burned “on account of Mrs. Gray, the Capt.’s widow, being on board.”

7 A typed letter pasted into Almy’s journal identifies her as taking over as log keeper after her husband’s death on February 2, but the handwriting actually changes to hers on 1/21/1860.
The first time Mary Brewster tends to a sailor seems to be out of necessity, rather than out of good will, or even in response to the captain’s request. The captain was off in a whaleboat with most of the men when one whaleboat returned to the ship with an injured man. Mary reports that, “one of the men cut his foot and I was left to do it up” (6/27/1846). A few days and whales later, however, she willingly steps into the role of assistant. To determine whether she sees this as work, or actions required by the ship, I quote from several consecutive days’ entries. “Tuesday June 30th [1846] . . . I keep below nearly all the time and in my room as the decks are getting rather soiled and the try-smoke very disagreeable to my olfactory senses. I keep busy and improve the fine weather in fixing up my clothes and various small jobs.” Another whale is caught the next day, and two days later Mary is still trying to stay busy in her cabin. On Friday, June 3rd, however, she records taking part in the ship’s activities: “My employment has been of various kinds, cooking, making poultices for some hands, and numerous small jobs. No chance for idleness here nor for lonesome feelings, plenty of noise and work” (my italics). Mary describes both her personal cabin chores and those she performs helping the men as “jobs”; at least in word choice, she does not distinguish between the two types of activities. “Idleness” is an undesirable quality in many women’s journals, which place much worth on being busy. Yet as mentioned before, there is absolutely no suggestion in any woman’s journal that she “stay busy” by helping with the whaling labor of the ship, nor is there recognition that participating might help ease the “lonesome” feelings aroused by her segregation during the whaling labor.

Tending to sick sailors requires specific sorts of knowledge, and a few wives list treatments for various ailments. Harriett Swain’s journal includes a recipe for medicine to
take for dysentery on the cover page, and several women record what they take for their
own ailments, or how they tend to their husbands or children’s problems, ranging from
headaches to broken arms. The women do not record themselves treating serious illnesses
like consumption, small pox, and fevers, although some journals do record sitting by a
death bed, helping the dying man remain comfortable, and encouraging him to accept the
Christian faith. Only Lucy Crapo explicitly writes about wanting to educate herself
further to assist the ship: “29 March 1880 I think if I should to sea again I would take a
few lessons in medicine. you know I might find time for it while you & my friends were
packing my trucks. Seriously, I would if I could remember, take along a better supply of
remedies for every day diseases, so that the ‘little ills that flesh is heir to’ could be treated
sympathetically if not theoretically.”

The only record of a woman’s deep attachment to one of the men on the ship is
Elizabeth Stetson’s account of not only caring for the injured mate Will Williams, but
also of her growing fondness for him. Two months into the voyage, in January 1861,
William was seriously injured. Mrs. Stetson begins to nurse him, and her entries soon
suggest that she is developing feelings for him, which at first she insists are sisterly. But
when the ship stops at Talcahuano, Chile for a month, and Will is hospitalized, Mrs.
Stetson goes every day, and sometimes multiple times “to see Brother Will, for he is my
brother, no brother could be thought more of next to Charles [her husband] in my regard
comes William. God bless them both” (2/13/1861). As time passes, she hopes “that
Charles does not mind if I do love Willie so much. How can we help liking one another,
he commenced with gratitude, I with pity, both akin to love.” When the E Corning sails
again, leaving Will at the hospital, her entries are full of missing him, writing him letters,
and even dreaming of him. “Sick. heart sick. . . . I should like to hear from William” (3/31/1861). “13 weeks since Willie got hurt poor child how much I pity him He is a good ‘man’ if there ever was one.” On the next day, “Oh William I wish you were here and well. Charles would feel such a relief.” And a week later, “14 weeks since William got hurt I hope he will get better soon.” Almost daily entries about Will appear for months, until she receives word that he has healed and shipped out on another ship. When Will eventually returns to his position on the E. Corning, he and Elizabeth resume their close relationship. She records them playing games, and she mends his clothes and does other favors for him.

Will is not the only man for whom Elizabeth Stetson sews. Her journal is also unusual (if less sensationally so) for how many items it records her mending or making for various men in the cabin. Good will is not, however, the motive. Elizabeth complains even as she records her efforts on their behalf. On Tuesday, December 17, 1861, for example, Stetson records sewing curtains for the steward. A week later on Christmas Day, she calls him a “jackass.” It is never clear why she sews and mends for the men so often when she clearly dislikes them--perhaps she takes on the work to avoid idleness, or perhaps the captain requires her to do so.

Other women sewing for the officers, steward, or cabin boy seem to do so as favors based on specific requests. Mary Brewster reluctantly agrees to one project: “Steward came to me this forenoon and shewed me some white cloth and asked me to cut him a jacket and put it together. in vain I pleaded ignorance. he thought it would be done nice enough. So I took and cut it out and told him I would make it. So this uninteresting job will occupy my time till this week is out” (12/2/1847). Almira Gibbs seems quite
pleased with herself for completing a similar job: “I have been quite smart I have made a pair of pants and a calico shirt for Mr Rogers [the 3rd mate]” (5/9/1857). As mentioned earlier, Elizabeth Marble, aboard Kathleen, fulfills a most unusual request: “I have had an invitation to make two fancy dresses for the company forward thare name is the Kathleen serenade band” (1/11/1858). As for Mary Stickney, she records dozens of items made for the officers throughout her voyage. Even though sewing is often referred to in the same terms that they use to describe the men’s duties—“work” and “job”—none of the women suggest they should be paid for their labor. At the end of the second volume of Mary Stickney’s journal are several notations not written in Mary’s handwriting from a later voyage in 1884. These latter entries list items and prices of the crew’s purchases from the “slop” chest, which contained stock merchandise the sailors might buy: 1.50 for a thin shirt and 2.25 for a thick shirt. This gives a rough monetary value for the many items women like Mary would have sewn.

While some sewing tasks may be seen as good will, women also record doing work for the ship. Almira Gibbs records mending sails (10/17/1855). Mary Lawrence made hats for all the men on the Addison: “I made about twenty-five caps today for them to put on” (5/41860). Made just prior to the ship’s return home, they were probably intended to impress the ship owners with the uniform appearance of the crew. Although the women do not suggest there is any economic reward for their work aboard the ship, these examples certainly suggest their efforts did benefit the voyage.

Besides these traditionally domestic tasks, many women were learning and performing more nautical skills. Several women learned how to navigate based on compass, solar, and lunar readings. Aboard the Catawba, Nantucketer Harriett Swain was
taught “variation of the Compass” by the captain and mate. She then taught “Lunars” to the cabin boy and steward, who taught the blacksmith “to cypher &c” (5/1854). Lydia Beebe’s previously mentioned entry about “learning” the cabin boy to steer suggests she herself knew how, and Sarah “Sallie” Smith proudly writes in July 1876, that she “commenced to learn navigation have most accomplished it.” On her second voyage Sallie also kept the accounting book, as “clothes and tobacco” were distributed to the men from the “Hap Nap cask” (4/16/1882). Annie Ricketson describes looking through the book of flag signals, which were used to communicate with other ships. Augusta Penniman even claims she is “taking care of the ship” while her husband and the officers are whaling: “for a crew I have four potug[use] one Irish, one German. we manage very well, tacked ship once (3/21/1865). For Mary Russell, as night came and her husband’s boat had not yet returned to the ship, she takes charge and “order’d a large fire to be lit on the Caboose [galley] and to fire guns as a direction for the boats” (12/13/1823). Women did therefore acquire nautical skills, and at least two gave orders when necessary.

The women’s journals reveal both the complex shipboard social relations and the women’s own anomalous position within them. Because she shared close spaces and meals with them, the captain’s wife interacted more with her husband, officers, steward, and cabin boy than with the crew, who remained forward at all times. Yet even aft, relations seem limited, and forbidden in certain cases. Women often treated the steward and cabin boy as domestic servants, which their positions somewhat justified, and by referring to them by job title rather than their name, the women asserted this hierarchical relationship. Officers were named but rarely mentioned in the journals, and usually in the context of catching whales, the job for which they were hired.
Part III: Log Data, The Rhetorical Act of Merging the Private and Public

To varying degrees, the women’s journals also include official log data such as weather, rigging, ships sighted, and latitude and longitude. For some women, such information comprises the majority of the content, in addition to the five known official logs kept by women—and I suspect there were many more. Maintaining a journal that in part mirrors the ship’s official log is another way that some participated in the business of the voyage. Recording such data shows that they share the knowledge that the captain and first mate would have, confirming a high-ranking status, despite the women’s anomalous position within the ship’s professional hierarchy. In many cases, the captain must have provided the data, since in the same entry the women often note they did not leave their room all day. Nor does any display an increase in the amount of information recorded, as if she herself was slowly learning and incorporating new information. This exchange between captain and wife may have been a practical matter. The women’s journals act as supplements, or perhaps even back ups at times, to the official log.

Both between and within themselves, journals differ widely on what log data they include. All women open almost every entry by describing the weather, and while this is a convention of women’s shore diaries as well, whaling women often record wind and ship directions and other onboard activities. Some journals record latitude and longitude consistently, others sporadically. The earlier journals begin by recording log data like latitude and longitude, with personal content appearing only several weeks later. Other journals reverse the pattern. About half of the journals follow the nautical way of describing the time of day as “early,” “middle,” and “last,” and several close the entry
with the traditional phrase, “so ends.” All journals record islands or ships in sight, data from ships spoken, and above all, the whales chased or caught, and the number of barrels of oil procured. Indeed, many women’s journals contain the traditional stamp used in the official logs to indicate the capture of a whale. The women’s descriptions of a particular chase or the processing of a whale are often more detailed than the average ship’s log, although not as detailed nor as lengthy as those found in men’s published accounts.

Even if the technical data was relayed by the captain, the wife used it in her own manner. The entries may open with weather, but they often moved back and forth between log data and personal information. Only Emma McInnis divided her entries into two distinct sections: the first half log data, the second personal activities. A comparison of two official ship’s logs to the journals kept by Lydia Beebe and Harriet Swain also reveals distinctly different phrasing and small discrepancies. Obed Swain records in the official log:

First part commences with strong wind steerd South at 6 PM took 2 reefs in the topsails ad hauled up the coreses [sic] at daylight Brava and Fogo at Noon the land 8 miles Dist 2 barques lying off and on (1/31/1853)

Harriet writes,

Very pleasant at daylight the island of Brava 8 miles distant 2 Barks lying off & on, in the afternoon becalmed under the lee of Brava, quite refreshing to see land again.

At times the latitude and longitude recorded by Harriet also differ slightly from the official log, suggesting that Harriet herself was doing the calculations. As for Lydia Beebe, sometimes an entire week of entries in her journal will note the latitude and
longitude, when Captain’s Beebe’s journal has no entries for these days. In these cases, regardless of who was taking the readings, Lydia’s journal was the only one recording that important information.

The women largely follow the overall format and generic conventions of the ship’s logbook. The vast majority of their journals are the same large, leather-bound books with lined blue paper used for the official volumes. The placing of a title at the beginning of the journal is another way the women followed the generic conventions of published sea journals. In print culture, a title announces a purpose and promises coherence and unity to an audience; it is also the writer’s self-reflexive gesture constructing him or herself as an author. Twenty-nine of the thirty-four women’s journals whose first pages are extant and original, including those on microfilm but not those transcribed, have a title that mimics the conventions of a ship’s log. Listed are the ship’s name and its master’s name, the date of departure, the general destination (Atlantic Ocean or Pacific Ocean), and/or the departure port. While twenty-seven of the twenty-nine women’s titles give the name of the ship, only four women name the captain or “master.” Eight titles include the economic purpose: “on a whaling voyage” or “to obtain sperm oil.” Eleanor Baker writes on the front page “Hope to be at home in 40 months with 2000 Sp. oil”; less happily, the end of her journal records, “50 months out 1650 sp.” Eleven of the twenty-nine journal titles include the women’s own names. Though Carrie Turner did not provide a title in her journal, she did write her name and the date inside the cover.

Eight more of the twenty-nine titles appear either on the inside cover or on a separate page prior to the first entry, emphasizing the importance of the title’s
information. Almira Almy writes her title in large letters perpendicular across the first page. Most impressive is Susan Veeder’s cover page, featuring her own watercolor painting of her ship sailing on the ocean with land in the background. Her unusual title frames the top and bottom of the page in capital letters: “ISLANDS SEEN BY SHIP NAUTICON.”

The most detailed title is Eliza Brock’s, which appears on the first page, above a pasted-in poem and a newspaper article:

A journal kept on board, Ship Lexington On her outward bound passage across the N, Atlantic Ocean; Round the Cape of Good Hope, across the Indian Ocean; on the Coast of New Zealand; in 1853, Eliza Brock

Given the geographic specificity, this title was most likely penned in at the voyage’s end. The original title appears two pages later, above her first entry:

A Journal kept on board of Ship Lexington of Nantucket; on her outward bound passage in the north Atlantic Ocean; Bound on a Whaling Voyage to the Pacific Ocean 1853

Eliza’s more comprehensive second title is one of only two instances where women seem to have edited or revised their journals. The briefest title is Mary Stickney’s, who did not provide one for her first volume, but wrote at the top of the first page of her second volume: “Onboard Bark Cicero.” Though brief, the line drawn under this title gives it emphasis, indicating that it is a header, separate from the entries below. Almira Almy does not identify the ship in her title, but like Eliza Brock and several other women, she provides page headings throughout indicating the ship name and direction, such as “Bark Cape Horn Pigeon, Outward Bound.” This is another captain’s log convention that the
women appropriated. Haskell Springer refers to this practice as “intertextual,” noting that for some women it was “little more than imitative, but for others it was integrative” (100, 101). His primary resources include a woman whose journal I did not read, but whom he claims was “an innocent plagiarist” (101). He also suggests that women who include the traditional whale stamp were “knowingly playing off its original and official purpose for personal expression” (102). I would argue this was not solely personal expression. The women were including official log data as exactly that—official—and this content comprises the majority of many women’s personal journals. I suspect critics have largely overlooked this material because it is tedious for the modern day reader, and especially because such records are brief, lack narrative, and for the most part, contain little drama and tension. When I first began reading the journals, I found myself skimming over these parts of the entries that were entirely log data. Only after I read dozens of journals, most several times over, did I come to realize the importance of log data—not only to the voyage, which is rather obvious, but also to the genre and purpose of the journal itself.

I would say the women appropriated log data and official journal conventions intentionally. Though women followed many of these, and large amounts of log data appear in their daily entries, the goal was not to mimic the official logs. Whaling women’s journals form their own sub-genre: one that shifts constantly between the very different content and forms of ship’s logs, travel narratives, and domestic diaries. Through these generic shifts, which can occur from sentence to sentence in single entries, the journals truly merge economic, imperial, and domestic discourses. Though physically
and conventionally separate from the crew and the labor of whaling, through their journals, the whaling women participate rhetorically in most aspects of the voyage.

Eliza Brock’s original title

Susan Veeder’s cover page (watercolor)

Cynthia Ellis’s cover page, including a whale stamp
One page of whale stamps in Eliza Brock’s journal: “Ochotsk Sea, 1855”
Conclusion

The ideological and material conditions that informed the women’s decision to voyage, and the ways the women present in their journals their reasons for voyaging, result in the performance of a strategically constructed self. The women’s lives on the ship, and their methods for negotiating their class and gender by setting distances and keeping silence about the crew until someone dies, conform to dominant cultural expectations of gender also visible in such sources as popular sensational novels. The women’s descriptions of the officers, steward, and cabin boy, with whom they share space in the afterdeck, are more complicated, varying greatly from journal to journal. For the most part, though, these men are also only described as performing their duties. And yet, even as the laborers are obfuscated or minimalized to maintain hierarchical distinctions, by describing the experience of the voyage, the vast majority of women whalers in their journals rhetorically transgress the public/private, economic/domestic divide.
Chapter Two: Gender, Genre, and the Representation of the Domestic

The previous chapter examined the women whalers’ representations of the men on the ship and of their own relationship to the labor/purpose of the voyage. This chapter deals with how the women rhetorically construct domesticity and represent familial relationships. If the last chapter described how the women appropriated the genre of the ship’s log, this chapter explains the ways their journals employed those genres, discourses, and tropes considered appropriate for women to write. In short, this chapter asks how ideologies of gender and genre affect the rhetorical choices the women made when writing their journals and letters, and how they constructed their own subjectivities through these choices. The cultural environment of nineteenth-century America encouraged women’s literacy and self-reflection through such forms of life-writing as diaries and letters—and memoirs, but I will discuss these in the fourth chapter. The diaries were not, however, private journals, as we think of girls writing in today, but diaries often shared, read, and commented on by parents, ministers, teachers—and still later, husbands (Carr). These journals are therefore both producer and a product of the culture in which they are created and potentially circulated.

Moving between the macro (genre) and the micro (tropes, word choices, and a play on signifiers), I again follow Sidonie Smith’s nuanced approach to Judith Butler: identifying gendered performances by identifying repeated patterns as well as anomalies within the constructions of domesticity. In addition to the domestic/personal topics the women write about, I will consider what they don’t write, the “gaps,” as Smith refers to these silences (“Performativity” 110). I also draw on Helen Buss, who argues that such
silences reflect a larger “power discourse” (99). Buss encourages identifying “how the ‘play of signifiers’ in a text can reveal the writer’s locations in the power systems of patriarchal language and institutions” (88). When considering the women’s play of signifiers, I focus on tropes: those words or phrases used in a particular way that produces meanings and associations beyond the literal that are easily recognizable within a culture, and thus convey more significance. Smith emphasizes that “The audience comes to expect a certain kind of performativity that conforms relatively comfortably to a criteria of intelligibility” (“Performativity” 110). Tropes can therefore point to a performativity of self, or identity, as well as a specific audience that will recognize this particular self-construction.

This chapter has four sections. In the first, I consider the format and intended audience of the journals and letters, compare the two genres, and place them within the context of nineteenth century women’s manuals on journal-writing, and also published women’s travel journals. In the second and longest section, I map out the constructions of domesticity the women perform to varying degrees in their journals. Although Smith, Buss, and Felicity Nussbaum are helpful in understanding how the rhetoric provides a gendered self-construction, I also draw on Lora Romero and Vincente L. Rafael to bring more agency to the women’s representations of domesticity, as these literary critics argue that the language of domesticity allows the women to participate in the national project of colonization. The third section deals with the women’s use of tropes and sentimental language for recording emotions ranging from nostalgia to acute grief. I also consider the women’s deployment of poetry, both original and transcribed. In the fourth section, I compare the larger public discourses considered appropriate for women with the often
political discourses that the whaling women actually did perform in their journals. Here I will draw on Amy Kaplan’s notion of domesticity as a civilizing force both beyond and within the nation’s borders.

**Part I: Format and Audience**

Nineteenth-century women’s travel journals range from diaries held in archives and libraries around the country to published narratives like those written by Francis Trollope (1832), Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1837, posthumously), Isabella Bird (1875), or Constance Gordon Cumming (1883). Whether in prose or in the entry format that distinguishes the journal/diary, they are all narratives about a specific journey to a particular destination, the description of which is the journal’s purpose. One significant difference between published women’s travel narratives and the women whalers’ journals is that none of the published writers traveled with husbands, while accompanying their husbands was the reason for the women whalers’ voyages. Unpublished and unedited, their journals lack the coherent narrative found in published travel journals, focusing instead on the immediate experience of each recorded day. Two published accounts of woman’s experience on ships preceded all but the earliest whaling women’s journals. Abby Jane Morrell’s *Narrative of a Voyage to the Ethiopic and South Atlantic Ocean, Indian Ocean, Chinese Sea, North and South Pacific Ocean, in the years 1829, 1830, 1831* is her account of accompanying her husband on his merchant ship. It was published in 1833, two years after her return. Mary Wallis’s *Life in Fee-Jee: Five Years Amongst the Cannibals* was published in 1851 after she accompanied her husband on his trade expeditions. Both these publications follow the daily entry format of a journal, but they
have specific and didactic purposes. Morrell’s preface promises “some observations on a subject which has become an object of no small interest to philanthropic sympathy—I mean the amelioration of the condition of American seamen” (vii), while Wallis’s work is primarily an ethnographic account of Fijian people and their customs, replete with all the racist imperial assumptions of the genre particular to the nineteenth century. Never intended for publication, none of the whaling women’s journals are so coherent, purposeful, or didactic. Though aspects of these two published texts do appear in the whaling women’s journals, it is only to a minimal degree, as I show in the “Public Discourse” section of this chapter and in the following chapter on travel narratives.

By distinguishing the purpose and form of the whaling women’s journals from these published women’s travel narratives, I do not mean to privilege, nor to suggest or deny the whaling women were familiar with these books (none of the women mention them). I draw the distinction only to emphasize how unique the women’s whaling journals are. Each is a collage of genres, continually shifting in both content and style. Together these journals form their own sub-genre of sea narrative. Within this sub-genre the domestic diary is fully integrated or even absorbed by the log data and travel narratives. Indeed, in many of these journals, with the exception of entries describing of foreign ports visited, finding personal comments is like searching for the proverbial needle in a haystack.

The numbers of upper and middle class American women who kept a journal increased as Americans came to believe that women should be educated because they were rearing the future of the nation: boys who would become the men running the polis and the economy, and girls who would be wives and mothers, rearing their own children
one day. Through a journal, and through the discourse with these authoritarian figures that such writing encouraged, the girl/woman could refine herself, becoming—if only discursively—the perfect Lady. Large amounts of educational literature helped women learn to write. *The Teacher’s Assistant in English* was first published in 1801 and reprinted eleven times by 1853. Other titles included *First Lessons in Composition* by G.P. Quackenbos (1851), *The Lady’s Guide to Perfect Gentility* by Emily Thornwell (1856), and *How to Keep A Journal* by W.S. Jerome (1878) (“Primary Documents”). Additional texts on the appropriate behaviors and beliefs of a proper American Lady included overt religious tracts, women’s journals like the popular *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, and the popular sensationalist novels. New England newspapers also frequently ran short parables that instructed women how or how not to behave. Though these newspapers also ran pieces on men’s self-improvement, the gender difference was clear. Men had certain expectations to meet in society. Women had different, domestic ones.

When considering how the women constructed themselves and others, we must also take into account who was the assumed audience. The journals generally speak to an intended audience of family, and perhaps friends, at home. Some women had specific audiences, such as Charlotte Wyer’s, who wrote to her sister, or Mary Hayden Russell, who wrote to her daughter. Particular entries in Azubah Cash’s journal make direct references to an unspecified person: “now Ax [Alexander, her son] is painting some pictures in a book and I am as you see writing” (5/13/1851). The majority of journals, however, are not addressed to anyone specific. Letters, on the other hand, were directly addressed to family members or friends. Letters were dated and the writer’s location was listed, even if simply “at sea,” much in the way each journal entry was dated, the current
latitude and longitude recorded, and ship’s direction given in the page headings.

Journals and letters differ in layout. Most journal entries maintain margins, while often all four margins of a letter were used for additional sentences once the main space was filled. The cost of postage was probably the reason, since many women lament the expense of mailing letters across the world.

The tone in the letters tends to be more personal, and letters also contain the clearest narratives of the women’s activities onboard. But the subject matter is not notably different. Subjects not discussed in journals were not mentioned in the letters. With only a few exceptions, the letters and journals written by more than sixty different women across a century are remarkably similar in content and form, as they closely observe the ideological constraints upon appropriate topics for a nineteenth century Lady. Much like the letters, journals are assumed to be written with an audience in mind, and both genres were likely read by more than just the addressee. But letters often sought a reply. Woman writing home asked for news about family members or friends, or directed the addressee to convey messages. Sometimes the messages are for specific recipients. At other times, the request is more general. Lucy Crapo ends one letter to her sister with the direction “read this to the rest” (1/15/1878).

The generic differences between letters and journals are further blurred because portions of journals were often mailed home. In fact, some journals considered in this study are only pieces of what was clearly a larger whole. All that remains are the pages sent home. Elizabeth Marble enclosed a letter to her mother with the section of her journal she had mailed: “I will send my journal with this such as it is up to this date, but I do not want you to let eney one see that or this out of the family for I have not writen it
for exerbiten” (letter dated 9/15/57). Note also that while Elizabeth may not have wanted her journal shared, the very request suggests that the practice was common.

Several journals reveal a fluid or shifting audience. Martha Brown’s journal opens with a direct address, and a reflection on the activities of her readers: “While you are gradually drawing near and nearer the fire for comfort, I am sitting in my room very uncomfortably warm. I have just come from on deck where the Capt. and myself have been sitting” (10/18/1847). Her next entry, ten days later, closes by playfully asking “Christopher” for “a good drink of cold water from the north west corner of the well,” even though he clearly is not with her. She also signs this entry with her first name, as she would a letter. Several months later, an entry includes a direct address to “mother” (2/1/1848), and later in the voyage, several entries addressed to “you” during the months Martha Brown remains on O‘ahu, while the ship continued to the Arctic, were clearly for her husband. While this shifting of named addressees is unique to Martha’s journal, several others address an unknown “you” in a few or even just one entry over several years. Just as form (genre) and content shift throughout the journals, the audience may therefore also.

While many journals may have been written with the expectation of a small, private audience at home, none directly suggest the women were writing with an eye toward publication. The strongest indicator of this, and what makes the journals and letters most difficult to read, is the lack of necessary context for outsiders to fully understand an entry. Philippe Lejeune calls this “the implicit”: “Very few diarists begin

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8 Martha Brown’s journal has been published, and editor Anne MacKay identifies Christopher as Captain Brown’s brother (34).
with introducing themselves and providing information about their background, milieu, or personality and appearance. For them, these things go without saying” (“Journal de Jeune Fille” 110). Though many women whalers do offer a title for their journals, little other contextualizing information is given, and particularly about their family onboard or at home, despite its obvious importance to the women. Even in letters, people they know and events prior to the voyage are often mentioned, but seldom contextualized. This is particularly frustrating when opaque comments are clearly important to the woman’s experience. Elizabeth Waldron writes, “dear child, how much I want to see her” (4/4/1853) and dreams of “Emily.” She also mentions “Lilly and Gradden” several times. But she never identifies these people, leaving it a mystery whether they are her children or those of close relatives.

One journal that may have had a larger audience than just family is Eliza Williams’ journal of her first voyage. (She would accompany her husband on five additional voyages over the next twenty years.) In this first journal appear unusually long, detailed descriptions of whale anatomy and the whaling process, very similar to those found in published men’s whaling journals. After one lengthy description, she writes without irony, “I expect I have not given a very accurate description of the right whale, but perhaps I may tell more about it when I see another” (12/4/1858). She certainly casts herself as an author. When writing once more after a prolonged absence, the entry begins, “But to return to my story” (10/13/1858). And while her journal was not published during her lifetime, Eliza’s journal appeared as the opening chapter of One Whaling Family, a collection of family tales and manuscripts compiled and edited by her grandson.
Like most women whalers, Eliza Williams gives her journal a title, and a generally informative first entry. There is not, however, a formal introduction—only two women’s journals have them—that shows an awareness of an audience and provides a self-reflexive commentary on the purpose and the practice of keeping a journal. The first writer of a self-conscious introduction was Elizabeth Morey. The Moreys sailed from Nantucket in July, 1853, and Elizabeth wrote several entries dated in August, but the first page of the journal itself is dated September 2, her wedding anniversary, and follows with an introduction:

My husband Has Presented me this Book for the purpose of writeing A journold
but I feel intireley incompetent to the task.
It is gest nineteen years to day since we were marraied, and I thought I would commence from this date.
In the first place it is of no use for me to describe My feelings Previous to My Leaveing My Dear friends an that dear Isle of Sea; where I had spent twenty three years of my life, and my dear friends can better immagin then what I can write We left that dear spot in July the 17 1853 Wednesday Morning I went up on Deck and took my last view for the present of that dear spot and My husband and the Pilot stood by My side and observed there is the Old sand heap, take one more look and I did so
[there are several blank lines]
which caused the tears to flow, but I did not think it was the last for I hope that God will spare us to meet again to injoy as many more Pleasant Moments as we have Here to fore

Elizabeth’s claim of “incompetence” as a writer is a common trope in women’s writing and found in some of the earliest examples. Queen Elizabeth, Mary Sidney Herbert, the first woman published in English, and Anne Bradstreet, the first published American woman poet, all included an anxious self-effacement either in their introductions, or for Bradstreet, within the poems themselves. Critics argue that through such apologies women negotiated the transgression of writing and distributing their work in a patriarchal society and marketplace that did not encourage female authorship (Fay, Hannay, Margerum). Elizabeth Morey’s self-doubt may however have been genuine. Her spelling and syntax suggest that she was not as well educated as some other Nantucket whaling wives, and her journal is less formulaic than most of her contemporaries. Her humorous tone—less refined but neither improper nor ironic—also makes her journal one of the more entertaining to read.

Lucy Crapo begins her journal, a Christmas or New Year’s gift from her husband, on January 1, 1866, six months into her voyage. Here is the opening:

As every book needs a preface or introduction, so my contemplated journal (which is but a continuation of a diary long kept – for reference in after years) would be deficient without one.

This past year – in which commenced this voyage in search of health, which in measure has been granted – has been an eventful one to us, as loved ones have been given and taken, and the New Year finds us actuated
so differently from what we had fondly anticipated, that we can but greet it with saddened hearts, not knowing what it may have in store for us.

Meantime let us “watch and pray”

Her reason for sailing is unique amongst the women whalers. If they include any reason at all, it is usually to keep their husbands company. But Richard Henry Dana, author of *Two Years Before the Mast*, had sailed for his health two and a half decades earlier. The piety and nostalgia that both Lucy Crapo and Elizabeth Morey place in their introductions are present in the majority of women’s journals—and so are the initial debilitating bouts of seasickness that Elizabeth Morey mentions.

In most of the journals whose beginnings are preserved, the first entry describes the ship’s departure, introducing the first major trope. While “took our anchor” or “weighed anchor” appear in five women’s first entries, the most common sign of departure is “discharged our pilot” or “pilot left.” The pilot boat, or tug as some women refer to it, tows the ship in and out of the harbor. Many women record the exact time the pilot departed, and it clearly serves as a symbol of the last connection to land, friends, and family.

Some women had grand send-offs, with friends and family accompanying them as far as the pilot did. Anne Ricketson writes on April 5, 1881, “At 1 PM the pilot left us off[f] Hen and Chicken light Boat. Here two of my Lady friends took leave of me and went aboard the Tug Boat and a number of Husbands friends and others that come to see their friends off.” Writing in the mid 1850s, Almira Almy and Henrietta Deblois describe similar partings. Eliza Nye and her father traveled as passengers on a whaleship to the Azores in 1847; her first entry notes that there was a “party ready to accompany us a
short distance.” Such send offs contrast sharply to Mary Brewster’s and Maryanne Sherman’s experiences of being disowned for their insistence on sailing. But the recording of friends and family accompanying the ship out of the harbor is important, because it testifies to the close relationships and communities the woman was leaving behind, and will be referred to through tropes of homesickness during her travels.

**Part II: Narrating/ Recording the Daily Experience**

This section looks at journal entries that follow the conventions of a domestic diary; that is, how the women represent their daily lives, their experiences, and their familial relationships on the ship. None of the journals probe the author’s internal psyche; instances of self-reflection rely on religious tropes rather than seeking personal insight. Tropes of homesickness and nationalism abound. Through the content and repeated tropes, the women perform and negotiate gender expectations in an unusual environment. Despite the women’s complicity with their gendered role, the log data and other references to the voyage continually remind the audience of the difficulties and rewards of performing domesticity in a foreign space, without complaint or sensationalist/suspenseful narration.

I argue that the domestic duties that some, though not all, women describe in their journals do not place them in a private realm sharply contrasted with the masculine, laboring sphere. Instead, by being performed on a whaling ship, those “floating factories” traveling the globe, domesticity is mobilized. As Lora Romero explains, “making domesticity into an identity gave middle-class women a surprising amount of mobility. As an identity rather than simply as a fixed location for women’s lives, domesticity...
could—and did—travel” (25). And writing about American women in nineteenth century colonized Philippines, Vincente L. Rafael argues that “By making a home away from home, they assumed the role of active agents in the politics of nationalist reproduction, erecting domestic outposts of ‘beneficial republicanism’ on the imperial frontier” (643). Domesticity performed beyond a nation’s borders affirms the co-dependence of gendered spheres, and therefore the necessity of including the domestic if economic and imperial incursions are to be successful. Or as Rafael notes, “Domesticity as a discourse of colonial modernity assumes that the structures of ‘public’ and ‘private’ are mobile and indefinitely reproducible, capable of translation across cultural and bodily spaces” (640). Domestic descriptions in women’s whaling journals therefore construct a self that conforms to the gender and class expectations of the community left behind, yet also participates in a much larger economic and imperial project.

How to Keep A Journal by W.S. Jerome was published in 1878, but his list of appropriate topics for women’s journals seems to have been standardized long before. But what are you to write about? First, the weather. Don’t forget this. Write, ‘Cold and windy,’ or ‘Warm and bright,’ as the case may be. . . . Then put down the letters you have received or written, and, if you wish, any money paid or received. The day of beginning or leaving school; the studies you pursue; visits from or to your friends; picnics or sleigh rides; the books you have read; and all such items of interest should be noted. Write anything that you want to remember. (qtd. in Carr 181)

The personal diary-inflected portions of the women’s journals certainly affirm Jerome’s notion of appropriate conduct: weather, books read, special events, and social visits
appear in the majority of women’s journals. Though some, but not all, of the women wrote explicitly about their daily domestic activities, even if they did not, it was assumed most women busied themselves with such chores. The next section looks at which activities the women did or did not record, and also at the rhetorical community and study of manners that develop through the recording of socializing—“gamming”—with other captains and ladies at sea.

**Material Conditions**

As *How to Keep A Journal* and many instructional manuals confirm, writing was a practice encouraged for middle-class American women. Several whaling women record that their journal was a gift, and ships were well supplied for the activity of writing. Most journals are written from start to finish in the same ink, though Harriett Swain had to use different ink for her last few entries, written mid-way through her journey home after leaving her husband and his ship in Paita, Peru. Elizabeth Morey gives to an English family living on Pitt Island (Rangiauria) “all the books that I could spare and paper and pens and other things that I thought would be useful to them”(1/17/1854), suggesting that Elizabeth not only had enough ink and paper to spare, but that the supplies were hers to give away. Lucy Crapo seems to have shared writing materials with her husband: “W—waiting for the pen” (1/17/1866). But no one is concerned about running out of ink or paper, and only three women—Bebee, Stickney, and Porter—actually complete one volume and must begin a second. Most women only fill a portion of the journal.

Even though paper and ink may have been plentiful, many women skip a week or more, often explaining why when they re-commence their journal or letter. Most often, they state that there was nothing to record or they were ill. Susan Veeder simply claims
“nothing of any note since I last rote” (9/4/1849), while Clara Wheldon blames her health as well: “My previous letters (sent by the Pilot) have been brief and hurried. Brief, because of little to narrate, and my inability to note down even that little, and hurried in consequence of the short intervals between each attack of sea-sickness and the stupid feeling following, and sleeping off the effects” (7/6/1864). The many explanations for missed entries suggest that perhaps due to their education, the women felt obligated to write daily, or on a weekly schedule. Charlotte Wyer for example offers every excuse, yet clearly still feels obligated. Early in her voyage she claims seasickness, and later, “I omitted writing yesterday for the very good reason I had nothing to write, but a repetition,” and in another entry confesses she has no justification: “You will perceive by the dates that I am not as punctual as I thought I should be, and can give no reasonable excuse for not doing so” (3/26/1853, 7/6/1853). Not surprisingly, then, each time Charlotte recommences, she promises to “be more punctual hereafter.”

Though inclement weather frequently affected women’s writing, the journals rarely contain evidence of being written on a rolling ship. Elizabeth Waldron simply reveals that “It has been so rough for a week past that I have not attempted to write” (5/4/1853). Elizabeth Marble describes what she does to compose during rough weather: “I have written this sitting on a box down between John’s chest and George F’s state room dore this is the only place that I could keep steady enough to write the ship is roteing so” (9/16/1857). But very few inkblots, lines, or other marks suggest the women were jolted as they wrote. Most women’s journals were drafted in consistently spaced and sized nineteenth-century cursive. This same elegant handwriting appears in the women’s letters, though the text will often fill the margins with smaller and tighter characters.
Words are almost never crossed out in the journals, but some feature blank spaces that the author may have intended to fill in later, often because a key word or place was unknown. Also, insertion marks (^) indicate missing words written above the sentences or in the margins. Despite all this, no journal suggests that the women revised or rewrote entries.

**Sewing, Reading, and Child-Rearing**

The most informative narratives of the women’s daily routines are often found in letters sent home, or in memoirs written decades later, but the journal entries also confirm that most women spent their days sewing (or knitting, tatting, and crocheting), reading, and taking care of their small children if they were brought—or born—on the voyage. The women usually record these activities in the same terse style they record the crew’s, often listing them one after another with no transition. The captain’s wife therefore distinguishes her experience from that of the others on board, but reminds a reader exactly where her domestic chores actually take place.

The accounts change little across the decades the journals are written. In a letter published in the *WSL*, Susan Fisher tells her cousins, “I spend a great many hours in this little cabin alone during the whaling season, and if I were not fond of reading and sewing, I should be very lonely. N. [Nehemiah, her husband] must be on deck most of the time, for the season is short in this latitude, and every moment, that is clear, must be improved” (3/27/1855). Here Susan presents herself as engaged in domestic activities familiar and acceptable to her family at home, and to the larger audience who read the letter in the *WSL*. Furthermore, she acknowledges the priority of her husband’s work over time spent with her, emphasizing his industry, while downplaying her own activity as a way of
keeping busy. Susan also constructs her physical presence as unobtrusive to the purpose of a whaling voyage. She keeps to her cabin.

The journals vary in how much descriptive detail they include. Many women record sewing, yet some also list the garments produced, mended, or refashioned. Mary Stickney not only documents that she sewed *every day* and what she sewed, but also compiled a list of “Amt of articles finished while at sea” that appears at the end pages of her first journal and the opening page of her second journal for the same voyage. And yet this list does not contain all the items found in her daily entries. Mary sewed a “calico bed puff,” “new sleeves for my black silk dress,” and “1 pair worsted slippers.” She sewed a large number of shirts and pants for the “mates” or “the boy.” Apparently fond of lists, Mary also included a page entitled “Names of Persons I have doctored at sea.” The injuries and illnesses appear next to each name. The inclusion of such lists may have been Mary’s way of emphasizing how she assisted the voyage.

Many women record the challenges of sewing on a ship. Materials were often in short supply. “I shall have to drag my work along,” Sarah “Sallie” Smith writes, “or I shall not have enough to last me I have so mutch time for work” (11/20/1882). The women often cut apart and refashioned their dresses—sometimes from necessity and at others for something to do. Harriett Swain and Adaline Heppingstone mention sewing or “fixing up” dresses before reaching major ports. As they sail from Hawai‘i to the Arctic, the women made warmer clothes and even boots for themselves and their families. Home goods—such as quilts, curtains, and tablecloths—are frequent projects, and Henrietta Deblois announces that “I have covered the cabin sofa with chintz” (9/30/1856). While silk and cotton are mentioned by several women, calico seems to have been the most
available material. Having a place to store it was in itself a privilege, since space and cloth were both precious commodities on board. “I have been helping a little by sewing up some bags to put flour in,” writes Lydia Beebe, “we are crowded for room in the hole, so I have got some flour piled up in the after cabin and some under the bed” (5/9/1865). Even within the captain’s quarters, personal space was always secondary to the purpose of the voyage.

The movement of the ship also complicated the women’s activities. “I wore out my dress and my elbows are sore, yet hanging on that I might knit,” Lucy Crapo wrote to sister in January 1878 while aboard the Linda Stewart. During rough weather, several women were confined to their beds, and unable to work. A letter written by Clara Weldon describes the scarcity of materials, the difficulties due to sea and wind, and to a greater degree than most whaling women, the meaning of what she does:

I trust I am giving you a comprehensive idea of my life here.

Notwithstanding the many fears that naturally come from the dangers of the sea, and the long time away from friends, I am comparatively happy, and busy myself with various little things, among which is the finishing of one of those pieces of worsted work which I brought with me from home. I am hurrying it up by working swiftly, for two reasons. In ice with no swell the ship is quiet, and is much easier to work then when the ship is rolling and tossing about, and men too, as been fearful that I was not going to have worsted enough of one or two shades, and was in haste to know. I have no idea what use I shall have for the work after it is finished, however, my stitches will always be a sort of journal to me whenever I see
them, and remind me of so much that was said and done when I was making them. (4/1869)

While several women mention the nostalgic significance of gifts from friends and family at home brought on the voyage, Clara’s reference to her stitches as a journal is a rare instance of a woman embodying her own work with symbolic meaning.

Although only a few include the titles of the books, many women record reading. The genres ranged from religious tracts to novels and histories. Not surprisingly, many women read the Bible, particularly on Sundays. For the Geletts in the late 1840s, “The Bible was our only book, and we had but one copy of that” (66). For Carrie Turner, reading the entire Bible was an onboard project that she proudly recorded inside the cover page of her journal:

Oct 11th 1878
Sunday June 29th 1879
I commenced to read the bible through

Sermons and religious journals were also appropriate reading for the Sabbath. In January 1892, Emma McInnis recounts reading *The Christian Herald*—though her husband was reading aloud to her from *Nicholas Nickleby* and “Bartelby” [sic].

Lucy Crapo also presents herself as reading sermons and religious texts for self-improvement, and she includes comments on the works. One Sunday in February 1866 found her reading “one of Beecher’s sermons” (2/25/1866); in March, she notes that “I have been reading a book called ‘Promise of the Father’ in which I have become very much interested, as it contains many ideas which I have thought much relating to women’s duties in the church” (3/18/1866); and in July, she is “reading a little book ‘The
Blood of Jesus’ which I trust may be treasured up in my heart” (7/8/1866). Lucy also finds “excellent counsel” in Family of Bethany and a role model in Lighted Valley, the “memoir of Abby Bolton who was good” (7/29/1866). Lucy clearly subscribes to the nineteenth century belief that women should emulate and learn from the books they read.

For the Allens aboard the Merlin, reading was a family affair that extended to the officers and steward. “Have been reading some of Whitters poems to the children,” Harriet Allen writes: “The History fever continues. D has been reading Macaulay Steward appears delighted with Hume” (4/17/1869). The Merlin clearly had an intellectual collection of books, but the following week she also notes that “Henry [her son, then twelve] can always gather a crowd around him by reading a story or ‘spinning a yarn’ Both children read much to the men” (4/24/1869). Harriet does not tell us what stories her son told, or if the men listening included those from forecastle as well as the officers. But several times she mentions that the children’s favorite was Young Folks for 1866, a magazine that featured didactically moral stories by authors such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Horatio Alger, Jr.

Elizabeth Stetson is the most prolific reader, beginning a different book every two or three days for extended periods. Her reading ranges from sentimental literature and religious tracts to Longfellow’s poems and published whaling logs. She is the only whaling woman who mentions reading Godey’s Lady’s Book, noting that her copy is from 1862, although she is reading it in January 1865. She also reads Life of Fannie Fern, or Sarah P Willis. Druett and Cooper Busch claimed Stetson brought more than one hundred books on her voyage; while it is clear she brought dozens, she mentions receiving and exchanging books. Though several other women traded books with other
captains, wives, or mates during gams or at port, no one mentions having an onboard lending library.

Along with sewing and reading, women brought children or even gave birth on the voyage. Only a few entries describe their mothering duties, but unless the children were sons with assigned duties such as cabin boy, the mothers provided their daily care. “I am engaged as usual in that most delightful of occupations, to a mother at least,” Lucy Crapo writes to her sister, “that of ‘minding the baby,’ as the English express it” (8/1/1867). Women with infants frequently note in their journals the child’s weight, number of teeth, or acquisition of abilities such as crawling. Also recorded are cradles or wagons made by the fathers or avuncular officers or crew for pulling small children about on the deck. Mary Lawrence and Charlotte Wyer describe their daughters—five and seven years old, respectively—sewing in the cabin alongside them. “Minnie does not appear to notice the rough weather at all,” writes Mary Lawrence: “She sat in the bed with me a part of the time, hemming a handkerchief for Mr. St. John, and occasionally she would say, ‘Oh, Mother! Ain’t we taking comfort!’” (2/7/1857). Gendered difference therefore is reproduced from an early age.

Several women record overseeing their children’s education. Harriet Allen frequently describes the lessons, including reading and reciting from school readers, learning compound addition, and drawing island landscapes on slates. Two small journals kept by her daughter Helen are extant; they contain the same content, but the difference in the handwriting suggests that ideas were initially written into one, and then painstakingly copied in neat, upper case letters into the second. Helen’s journals do not contain parental commentary, nor do those of the other three daughters whose journals
are part of this survey. Nonetheless, all four girls’ journals closely follow prescribed patterns of content and tone, suggesting instruction and surveillance. In contrast, the journal of Richard Gibbs Jr., who sailed with his parents between his thirteenth and eighteenth years, does contain entries and comments written by both his mother and father, encouraging both moral behavior and more diligent journal-keeping practices.

“Today commenced my school,” Augusta Penniman writes one and a half months into her voyage, “have one scholar, Genia B. Penniman, aged four years and two months old, receive for my labor one hundred dollars per year (with board and clothing included) to be paid at the end of the voyage” (12/1/1864). While “board and clothing” may be added humorously, this mention of a payment suggests that Augusta knows that in other circumstances teaching is compensated work rather than the labor of love that nineteenth-century stereotypes of domesticity suggest upper-middle-class women felt about their role in educating their children.

Further unsettling notions of domestic fulfillment, many women do not list domestic chores in their journals, and some rarely mention their children. Despite writing almost daily entries in a journal from 1857 to 1862, Eleanor Baker never once records sewing, washing, or reading. A decade later, Susan McKenzie is silent as well. And a decade before, Susan Veeder mentions sewing once, and washing only a few times more in her four and a half years of keeping a journal. Since Susan traveled with three young sons, and gave birth to a daughter during the voyage, I suspect she was frequently sewing and mending clothes—but then, she rarely mentions her sons, and never describes how she kept them busy when they needed to be out of the way of the ship’s business. Clara Wheldon’s many letters written during her voyage between 1867 and 1870 only mention
her daughter Laura, who is onboard, three times. During her journey from 1869 to 1872, Rachel Beckerman’s journal only mentions her daughter Sadie twice. Children left at home are also rarely mentioned, even in the journals that frequently confess to homesickness. In short, while enough women describe their daily routines to provide a clear overview, the genre and content of the daily domestic diary is not as prominent in these journals as the genre and content of the ship’s log.

_Husband Captains_

Even those wives who emphasize the daily ship activities over their domestic experiences display a great deal of disparity when representing their husbands. In general, husbands are not mentioned often, and when they are, it is in their official role, completing tasks or giving orders. (The next most frequent mention is when the journals record them helping with the laundry.) Some women refer to their husbands by name, some as “husband,” but many call him “captain” throughout the journal. Though many women claim that they came to comfort their husbands, very little romantic sentiment is expressed. Affectionate teasing appears in only a few journals, such as Harriett Swain’s: “had the misfortune of being made an April Fool at the breakfast table, but had my revenge before dinner time, by seeing Obed look for a hole in his jacket which was never there” (4/1/1853). Harriett is one of the few women who not only mentions her husband frequently, but refers to him by his first name. Yet even here moments of slippage occur between his domestic and official roles. In the entries that describe the chasing of whales, she calls him “captain.”

Lucy Crapo rarely mentions her husband, but when she does, she usually calls him W., an abbreviation for William, his middle name. Yet one journal entry displays a
sentiment not found elsewhere in her journal, or any others: “Sat 15 [September 1866] A calm sunny day. Canned the remainder of the peaches today. Thirteenth anniversary of our marriage day, and tonight in my journal I will whisper to you that each passing year but strengthens the bonds which then united us. Still loving – still trusting – still true.”

What shifts here is not only the content and tone, but also the address—the entry speaks directly to her husband. While several women note their anniversaries, only Almira Gibbs comments on it, and her tone is very different from Lucy’s: “to day is the anniversary of my marriage day seventeen years ago to day it carries my mind back I can hardly think it possible it is so long since I became wife how well I have performed the duties that have devolved [?] upon me is not for me to say” (3/8/1857). Lucy’s emotional dedication to her husband portrays them as “united” and “loving”; Almira thinks immediately of her “performance” as a wife. Together, they employ readily available rhetoric—sentimental and dutiful—to depict their roles.

**Entertaining, Social Protocols, and “Sister Sailors”**

The most prominent domestic subject in the women’s journals is neither the captain nor the woman herself, but food. Meals appear in almost all the journals, and frequently within each one. As the first chapter noted, meals are a signifier of class difference on the ship itself. The third chapter deals with the colonizing aspects of describing plunder and abundance of food. Here, I will connect food and literary culture.

Novelists such as Dickens and Jane Austen craft detailed images of daily life to intensify the *realness* of the created fictional worlds. In *The Cultural Work of American Fiction*, Jane Tompkins identifies “three distinct levels of apprehension: ‘reality itself’ as it appears to people at a given time; what people will accept as an ‘accurate description’
of reality; and novel and stories that, because they seem faithful to such descriptions, therefore seem true” (152). Stuart Hall refines this idea further: “A ‘raw’ historical event cannot, in that form, be transmitted . . . . In the moment when a historical event passes under the sign of discourses, it is subject to all the complex formal ‘rules’ by which language signifies. To put it paradoxically, the event must become a ‘story’ before it can become a communicative event” (508). Coffee and cakes while at sea thousands of miles from home are an accomplishment, a luxury, and a right of the captain’s family. Recording this moment, however, is what fully realizes the ritual and objects’ meaning.

Descriptions of elaborate meals confirm the women’s ability to maintain a certain standard of living despite the extreme circumstance of their location. Such meals are usually prepared for holidays, and especially the Fourth of July and Christmas or New Year’s Day, transforming food into celebratory signs of the women’s religious or national identity. The menus describe such familiar dishes as roast chicken or pig, and such exotic fare as porpoise sausages, taro, coconuts, or pineapples. These unfamiliar foods mark a foreign location, while introducing strange food into familiar dishes—sausages or soup with the ship’s cook, or pies by the woman herself—displays the ability to survive far from home with a certain degree of comfort and “civility.”

In a typical yet heavily laden example, Mary Lawrence describes her daughter’s eighth birthday, held as they sailed from Hawai‘i toward the Arctic for the summer season:

We set the table and called the officers down about half-past 7 P.M. . . . The treat consisted of a plate of sister Celia’s fruit-cake, two loaves of cupcake frosted, two plates of currant jelly tarts, and a dish of preserved
pineapple, also hot coffee, good and strong, with plenty of milk and white sugar. After we had finished, there was an ample supply left, which was sent into the steerage for boatsteerers, etc. (7/18/1859)

Even for a special occasion, the delicacies served at the party are elaborate. The concreteness of the banquet imagery could come out of a Dickens novel, right down to the designated time they sat down to dinner. While time is often marked on ships, 7 PM suggests the formal dining hours that would have been chosen for a special occasion at home. It’s a marker of propriety and thus social class, and so are all the dishes served. Unlike the class disparities highlighted in a Dickens novel, however, there is no satire in the words of Mary Lawrence when she writes, “after we had finished, there was ample supply left, and it was sent into the steerage.” With food, the journals do the cultural work of naturalizing class difference, even as they celebrate achieving a level of comfort that may seem difficult, but is nonetheless possible, even in their surroundings.

Mary Lawrence does not however describe the work of creating such a meal. The milk would have come from a goat onboard, for they had not been on shore since June 19th. Brought from home, the fruit-cake would have been carefully preserved and saved for such an occasion. Always baked by a loving woman at home, these fruitcakes were a tradition amongst men of all ranks in the American maritime community (Creighton 200). The sugar, used both for the cupcakes and the coffee, would have been a special food store opened for the event. Sugar and coffee were both rare and “dear,” and would have been found and purchased during the voyage. In this example, the coffee seems to have come from Hawai‘i. Just prior to arriving in Honolulu in October 1858, Mary notes that another Captain “sent us some coffee from his ship, which was very acceptable, as
we have been without for several weeks” (10/6/1858). The Addison spent two months restocking in Honolulu, and the voyage account books note trading sugar and coffee, amongst other goods, with the Spanish in Margarita Bay, Mexico that January.\(^9\)

The Victorian images of refined female behavior, including detailed descriptions of meals, also appear in the women’s accounts of “gams.” When two whaling ships encountered each other at sea, the ships would “speak.” The captains would communicate information, such as their homeport and oil procured, through a series of raised flags, a bullhorn, and/or hand signals. One captain often would board the other’s ship for social visits, or gam. These could last from an hour, when tea and small plates would be served, to several hours, or even an overnight stay might be involved. The wives acted as hostesses, be it for one captain or several, and they were always happy if the visit included another wife.

The many descriptions of gams display the women’s pride in their skills as hostess, in food they served, and in their adherence to the social conventions for such an event. Although these accounts mimic the Victorian conventions of manners, the whaling women’s journals also construct the specific conventions they created and followed for whaling gams. For instance, although the women rarely describe their daily attire on the ship, their accounts of dressing for company—whether for gams, or in port where other whale ships were anchored—suggest they dressed more simply on a daily basis. Charlotte

\(^9\) The Addison’s account book, held privately, notes that the ship received in “January and February . . . 1,661 pounds of beef, 128 pounds of cheese, 60 pounds of raisins, and 3 sacks of figs, for which she traded 6 gallons of turpentine, 1 whaleboat, 29 assorted shirts, 2 pounds of tobacco, 38 pounds of coffee, 65 pounds of sugar, 1 pound of thread, 2 gallons of paint oil, 4 sheath knives, 556 yards of bleached cotton, 410 yards of blue drill, and 727 yards of assorted calico” (Lawrence 295 n7). Mary Lawrence’s diary places them in Margarita Bay from December 31, 1858 to March 11, 1859.
Wyer records that “about 2 o’clock the Hector Capt Norton ran down to us just as I was in the midst of dressing and I was obliged to put out my fire and dress for company” (1/17/1854). And Emma McInnis writes, “Sunday morning I put on my green dress I made the remark that I had dressed up for company during the fore noon they raised a sail. it was the Schooner “Jane Gray” Capt Ed Kelley they set the colors for John to come on board but as there was no lady on board we set our colors for the Capt to come here” (4/26/1891). The last part of this entry reveals another convention: women did not visit a ship unless another lady was present.

Gams also involved an exchange of gifts, ranging from the supplies a ship was low on, to curiosities that had been collected at foreign ports. If one ship was seriously in need of food, or other supplies, an official trade or purchase was entered into the ship’s log. The gifting during gams, however, was a social courtesy that appeared in the women’s journals, but not in the ships’ logs. Fresh fruit or slices of one’s home cake were some of the more common gifts, but Susan Veeder’s three sons, Almira Almy’s son George, and Eliza Brock’s son Joseph Chase all received monkeys.

Lucy Crapo was an amateur naturalist, and those who visited seem to realize this. She writes, “I had a pleasant ‘gam’ and shall not object to another. Mrs. F [Freeman, Ship Louisa A] gave me some shells from the coast of Africa” (4/5-6/1866). In December of that year she records a more unusual gift: “Thurs 27 Spoke the ‘Callao’ Capt Brown, who spent the day with us, very good company, of genial spirit. I gave a letter to his care for home by way of St. Catherine’s. Mr Monroe, his mate, sent me some cake, peanuts, and bugs.” The following day she comments that, “Mr. Monroe’s present of ‘Brazilian Bugs’ are very curious and pretty.” Clearly an idiosyncratic response, since “bugs” would not
have appealed to the many women who wrote about their endless battles with cockroaches or fleas.

Lucy Crapo also suggests how happy the women were to socialize, and particularly with other women: “Capt F- with wife and child called to see us. It seems quite a treat to have a lady on board, this being the first time I have been thus honored since we left home. Imagine, though strangers, we were quite social” (4/5-6/1866). Many women express similar feelings. Carrie Turner writes, “had a gam with L & his wife I had a very pleasant time I liked his wife very much she is great talker it seemed nice to go aboard & see a lady it had been so long since I saw one” (2/8/1879). Harriett Swain makes an effort to stay up late in order to enjoy a gam with another lady: “Capt Swain & Lady came on board took tea with us, & stopped until 10 o’clock, rather a late hour, but it is not often we have a woman Gam so must make the most of what we do have (6/14/1854). Sophie Porter goes to extreme lengths to visit other whaling wives; after recording the temperature is thirty below zero, she writes, “People at home would think us crazy to go to a party in such weather, but where ladies are so scarce we have to muster in full on all occasions” (12/6/1894). Elizabeth Morey is particularly taken with Mrs. Sayer: “Quite pleasant to day Capt Sayer and Lady and Capt Plasket came on board and took tea with us and we had a pleasant visit together I think she is a very fine woman and appears to be as kind to me as a sister” (7/14/1854).

Elizabeth repeats the term “sister” when she gams with Eliza Brock, a fellow Nantucket resident:

10 Although the captains shared the name Swain, there is no indication that they are related.
Husband spoke the ship Lexington of Nantucket Capt Brock. . . . past the
evening with him and his lady and little boy I injoyed Every moment in
Mrs Brocks society she treated as kindly as a sister . . . Capt Brock
presented us with some potatoes I think he was very kind and his lady
gave me a pair of nice mittens I found them to be very comfortable to day
while walking on deck a viewing the ice for the air is very chilly.

(6/1/1855)

Eliza also recorded this gam, but rather than describe Elizabeth, she lists the many
tragedies the Moreys and others relayed to the Brocks that day. Since Eliza’s journal is
dominated by homesickness, it is somewhat surprising that she does not mention any
happiness in seeing a fellow Nantucket woman. But perhaps the five separate tragedies,
including the deaths of two Nantucket captains whose families were traveling with them,
tempered her delight in the encounter.

The wish to spend time with other women whenever possible is underscored by
two women not allowed to participate in gams with ships that carry other women. Emma
McInnis notes that after seeing the Triton, “John gave the order to clear away the
starboard boat. I asked him if he was going to take me, he seemed to think he could not
and that he was only going to stay a few minutes, he was gone two hours and when he got
back he found me crying like a big baby. . . . I was so disappointed I could not get over it
for a long time” (6/7/1891). But the next day she happily writes, “Triton was not far from
us they signaled for us to come on board as we were boiling and it was so calm therefore
John and I went on board and spent the day. Did it seem nice to see a woman and those
dear little children? Well it did and I had a good time” (6/8/1891).
Similarly left behind when her husband visited ships with women aboard, Jerusha Hawes was also disappointed.

Jon. has gone aboard the Florida—beautiful, pleasant weather and smooth. This is the second time he has been aboard to gam where there were ladies, I would very much like to see, and not so much as invited me to go with him. Twice last week he has treated me the same way, and WHY? I know not. The tears will come as I sit here alone and think of home but my face shall be all smiles when he returns for I have decided that is the way to make him happy and I would not cause him a moment of unhappiness, no God forbid that I should ever be the cause of unhappiness to someone so dear to me. I feel so lonely and homesick but I suppose he does not think—he has never had a wife at sea before—but he does not think.

Mr. Peeling is aboard here—Mr. J. has made Addie a cart and harnessed the dog to draw her.

EROR IN JUDGEMENT

NOT N HEART

(signed) Jessie C. Hawes

SHIP E.C. JONES

NEW BEDFORD, 1859 (12/5/1859)

This entry is all the more poignant because it is the last one of her journal. The transcript at the New Bedford Public library notes that “the rest of original Journal is missing,” although Joan Druett suggests that this was Hawes’ final entry (Petticoat Whalers 51). If
it was, perhaps she decided to censor herself—or was censored by her husband. Or, as with many partial journals, she may have removed this portion and mailed it as a letter home—definitely a possibility given the signature. Jerusha’s layered criticism, disappointment, and expressed devotion to her husband serve as examples of how important socializing with other women and being subservient to one’s husband was to whaling wives.

The emphasis on food and social ritual and the joys of visiting another woman elide the logistical difficulties of gamming. Visitors were rowed to the other ship in a small open whale boat. Drenching or even overturning were always possible, but just getting into the whaleboat required climbing down the side of the ship, being lowered in a “gamming chair”—which usually resulted in a dunking—or crawling into the boat while it was still on deck and then being lowered with it. Though very few women mention these difficulties, Susan Winslow admits “I do not go very often I had rather have company than go” (4/12/1860), and Charlotte Wyer notes Mrs. Upham, “is very timid about going in the boat” (2/2/1854). The problem recurs four days later, “Gazelle coming after us think there might be a visit tomorrow if Mrs Upham is not so cowardly going in the boat” (2/6/1854). One final note: this is a rare example of a whaling wife writing unfavorably about another.

Gender identification and social protocols also shaped the behavior of women who passed at sea close enough to see each other, but without stopping for a visit. Accepted behavior here was the waving of one’s handkerchief, a symbol of femininity and class. Carrie Turner “passed a merchant man just before sundown the name was Bertha there was a lady aboard & waved my handkerchief to her & she returned it I could
see her quite plain we passed very near them it seemed nice to see a lady aboard it was a splendid looking ship” (12/27/1878). Annie Ricketson describes a similar encounter: “We spoke the General Scott this afternoon about five oclock I see Mrs. Tabor on deck she waved her hanker chief and I waved mine. It seemed most bad that we were so near each other and could not enjoy each others society but It was so rugged I could not go aboard nor she get aboard us” (10/8/1871). Mary Lawrence records the same experience: “About 10 A.M. spoke the Speedwell, but as the wind was increasing and every prospect of a coming gale, we did not gam. Mrs. Gibbs and I shook handkerchiefs to our hearts’ content. We were both much disappointed” (5/24/1859).

In accounts of the gams, women construct themselves as capable hostesses under any circumstance, and the examples of their desire for companionship, especially when prohibited or disappointed, suggest a community of shared values and identities. Conforming to gender and class standards as practiced at home, these encounters also authorize each woman’s presence on the ship and at ports around the world. Finally, in the ultimate domestic gesture, the women claim each other as sisters. In addition to Elizabeth Morey, Martha Brown reports meeting in Honolulu “Mrs. Gillet, Mrs. Gray, Mrs. Young, and Mrs. West— all sister by profession, or Brother whalenmen’s wives rather” (9/27/ 1848). Mary Brewster “Called on Mrs. Grey [in Lahaina] with whom I was very happy to meet. She was a sister sailor, had been absent 27 months” (10/7/1846). Joan Druett even argues that Mrs. Slumon Gray of New Bedford was the woman who coined the term “sister sailor,” since Martha Brown and Mary Brewster use the term shortly after meeting her (“Foreword” 9).
Nineteenth century gender expectations suggest why sex never appears in the journals, and while women do talk about their bodies’ ailments and weight gain or loss—the former referred to as becoming “fleshy”—menstruation is not mentioned. As for prostitution and pregnancy, references are never explicit, though rare and subtle hints can be found. Elizabeth Stetson is most likely referring to prostitution when she reports that “five women came onboard last night William [the first mate] drove them off” (11/27/1863). Mary Brewster’s anecdote comes close to being overt: “I see I am not the only female in the bay. report has told of three which are kept on board of the same number of ships. two I credited, one I could not think was the case till I saw a female in a boat passing our ship bound to a neighboring one with the skipper by her side. Oh shame, shame is not felt here” (1/30/1847). Joan Druett sees Elizabeth Waldron’s comment that “so much company kept me from going on deck” as a tacit acceptance of the sailors engaging in onboard sexual activities, though nothing in the full entry suggests Waldron was referring to anything other than the usual commotion of trade. (“Sister Sailor” 146). It was common for the wives to avoid large crowds of trading natives who came onto the ship for trade (not sex) by staying in the deckhouse or their living quarters.

The women are virtually silent about their own sexual lives or desires. Only one journal coyly suggests intimacy. Describing a room in a boarding house in Tombez, Peru, Lucy Crapo notes that “The bed only wide enough for one and we one wanted very much to be two just then. It is so seldom we get on shore for ‘Liberty’” (9/27/1870). Yet despite the silence regarding sex and the hint in Lucy’s entry that intimacy was perhaps difficult onboard, the captains and wives certainly did have sex, as fifteen of the sixty women
gave birth, three women twice, during the recorded voyages. (Several women gave birth during multiple voyages, but none who kept multiple journals.) The women also record meeting many other whaling wives with newborns. Only one woman, however, overtly refers to her pregnancy in journals or letters. More commonly, the birth is recorded even though no hint of pregnancy appears in prior entries. Susan Veeder’s entry displays the matter-of-factness—and the strangeness—found in many others: “Nothing of any note occurred until the 29th, and then I was confined with a baby daughter weighing 9 lbs which was very pleasing to us both” (1/29/1849).

Two women subtly refer to their pregnancy; a third is more direct. “Sunday April 6st Strong breeze and rough today,” Lydia Tuck writes: “We have seen nothing. I am sick, and very homesick. I have learned something of late, which although it fills my very soul with joy, yet makes me exceedingly anxious to get home, and I fear me I shall not be as well contented the remainder of the voyage as I have been” (4/6/1856). Her journey ended six months later, but she never again mentions the “knowledge” referenced above. Though not every woman who “stopped” on shore was pregnant, some did remain in a foreign port during their pregnancy and to give birth. Annie Ricketson was pregnant when she began her voyage on May 2, 1871, but she does not mention this until August 26, when she and her husband arrive at Corbo Island in the Azores. Writing about Mrs. Tabor, another whaling wife staying at the same hotel, Annie says, “She was in a very trying condition as well as myself and was feeling bad that her husband was not going to stop ashore with her.” On August 29, Annie writes that she “had a poor night’s rest and cannot get up. Daniel called for the doctor. About 9:26 am, our little girl was born. I am very proud of it. A lady, Mrs. Graham, who was stopping at the hotel, came in and
dressed the baby. She stayed all night which was very kind of her for Daniel was very tired.” Mrs. Tabor’s “condition” was resolved two weeks later, with a daughter.

Martha Brown is the only whaling wife to write at length about her pregnancy in a portion of her journal written as letters addressed to her husband while she is staying in Honolulu. Writing of her new friend, Mrs. Grey, Martha concludes, “if I was not in the family way, I think we would spend but little time here for we could travil about the Island much cheaper than we can board in Honolulu. But we must pay dear for the whistle this time love, and it is my earnest Prayer that the little stranger may be permitted to live” (7/5/1848). Mrs. Grey assisted Martha during and after her son’s birth. Unlike the other women who often provide news of a birth midway through an entry, Martha reveals hers in the first sentence. After a one month and three day silence, she writes in her journal on September 27, 1848, “The boy is one month old today.” She then summarizes her recent social activities and new acquaintances, returning to the birth circumstances mid-entry: “Mrs. Grey was with me dureing my confinement and did for me and my child, as an own sister would have done.”

Mrs. Grey and Mrs. Graham were two of the many Euro-American women who assisted at birth or in caring for a newborn. It is unclear if native women ever assisted. Charlotte Dehart remarkably found assistance in the middle of the South Pacific. “My baby was borned on the 23 [January, 1857],” she writes: “we had not seen a ship for a number of weeks that day two came in sight spoke one there was a Lady on board she came to our ship and spent two days with me thankful enough was we.” That both ladies willingly put such trust in each other suggests how powerfully mutual recognition of a female Euro/American identity worked upon these women.
One woman mentioned in several journals is Mrs. Butler, the wife of the harbormaster in Mangonui, New Zealand. She seems to have helped with several newborns. The Deharts arrived two weeks after Charlotte had her baby, and Charlotte writes of meeting two other captains’ wives—five by the time she left—as well as Mrs. Butler. All lend their assistance, and Charlotte even spent her second week in the Butlers’ home. Two years later, when Eliza Williams arrives in “Monganua” with a five-day-old son, Mrs. Butler “came every day and washed and dressed the Baby. She did everything she could for me, till I was able to go to her house” (1/10/1859). Charlotte Dehart was back in January 1861, only days before giving birth to a second son on her first son’s birthday. The day before, she had a “nice gam” with Mrs. Butler, though Charlotte could not have received Mrs. Butler’s care for long, since she records that the ship was in port “1 week and took our anchor.” Only Lucy Smith describes assisting during a fellow whaling wife’s delivery, while at port in St. Helena in 1870:

Mrs Davis was confined this afternoon and for the first time in my life I assisted the Grannies Mrs Shermin and Mrs Carroll. Mrs Shermin acted as Doctor and has instructed me in the Mysteries so that if I should ever be obliged to assist I should be more capable of doing so. Mrs Davis has a nice large boy and was sick a very short time not more than an hour and a half from the time she sent out it was all over with (10/27/1870).

Haskell Springer writes that “Her words ‘sick’ and ‘it’ to cover the entire birth process signal the Victorian attitudes accepted by virtually all bourgeois women of her time and place. Perhaps, given the restraint felt, the view of birthing as an illness to be gotten over permitted even this limited a narration of the process, for illnesses and their treatment are
repeatedly dwelt on” (104). The majority of women who refer to labor do use the word “sick”—the term “confined” also appears, but less frequently. The duration of labor, or the “sickness,” is the only detail of the process that was recorded by the women, and then only by a few, including Sally Smith. Springer implies, but it is worth stating, that the euphemisms and silence are with regard to the sexual act and sexual anatomy specifically, but not to the body in general, which is frequently discussed.

Though much less is written about them, native women were occasionally employed to help whaling wives with newborns. After giving birth and recovering in Talcahuano for several months, when Susan Veeder returns to the ship she notes that “i have taken a Spanish girl out with me about 15 years old to take care of the babe as my health is not very good” (3/25/1849). By “taken,” Susan probably means, “hired”; in any case, the young Spanish woman is never mentioned again. Martha Brown is more informative: “I have a very good native woman who assists me about taking care of my child. Does my chamber work and my washing, for which I pay her 11 shillings a week.” Explaining such expenses, Martha adds, “I could not get my washing for less than a dollar, and it would be almost impossible for one to care of my child night and day. He is rather wakeful nights and evenings” (9/27/1848). Both whaling women feel the need to justify acquiring the help: Susan is in poor health and Martha must sleep. Gratitude is therefore the appropriate response toward the other Euro/American women who assist, but necessity is the explanation of native help, pointing to a very different power dynamic, based on both race and economics.

I have mapped out daily life as many wives represented it, but also discussed topics they elide through omission or word choice. The patterns of silence across a half
century testify to the influence of those generic and gender constraints that the women internalized. Though the daily activities they describe may seem domestically stereotypical, we must remember the fact that many women may not include daily accounts because the diary was not necessarily the primary genre the women felt was authorizing their writing. The hybrid ship’s log/domestic diary often forces the reader to look closely for women doing mundane tasks or even giving birth. In these journals, domesticity is mobilized, reproduced, but often observed in commercial and foreign spaces.

Part III: Tropes, Sentimental Rhetoric, and Poetry

The women’s daily accounts are always in the past tense and there’s never a sense of suspense. The women’s writing displays surprisingly little affect. Some entries are emotional, but recorded through an abundance of tropes—what today strike us as clichés actually were powerful signifiers within the nineteenth-century culture of sentiment. Jane Tomkins writes that nineteenth century stereotypical characters embody “strong emotional associations”: “Their familiarity and typicality, rather than making them bankrupt or stale, are the basis of their effectiveness” (xvi). I argue that tropes have the same impact. The phrases’ availability, their multiple permutations, and their overuse did not make them less powerful or accurate as vehicles for the authors to communicate their emotions in their journals. Sentimental tropes worked as trigger phrases for an array of meanings and associations. The two subjects that most inspired such tropes were the death of a child or husband, an especially fraught experience for a whaling wife, and nostalgia or homesickness.
Many babies born to the whaling wives died, and sentimental and religious tropes recorded the tragedy. Although some older children also succumbed to illness or disaster, the women journalists lost only babies delivered during the voyages. Four of these eighteen babies died within the first months of their lives, and Eleanor Baker, Lucy Crapo, and Annie Ricketson use similar religious tropes as they tried to find comfort in their grief. “Now that my little one is an angel in heaven, she is much better off than she would be in this wicked world of ours. I must try to be reconciled because I know that Jesus has her safe with him,” writes Annie (9/1/1871). Lucy also calls her child an “angel,” and addresses God directly: “keep me from murmuring, I pray, for thou father deemed it best that we should have this trial” (11/6/1866). Eleanor writes as well that she cannot “wish him back to this world of sin,” and that “with out doubt he was taken from this wicked world for some good purpose” (6/11/1861).

In a manner consistent with the lack of religious rhetoric throughout her journal, Susan Veeder does not employ such tropes when writing about her bereavement. But in perhaps the most poignant entry of any journal, she does employ some common sentimental tropes:

March the 5th Ship Nauticon at Tahita
tuesday morning our babe did not seem very well and as we expected to go to sea the next day we thoat we would call in a Phisician as she was teething and have her gums lanced So we Called on a Dr Johnson he came and said nothing was the matter but a little cold, and he gave her a powder to take then and left one for me to give her at bed time which i did and put her in a warm bath but at 3 oclock in the morning she was taken convulsed
and we very soon see that they was no hope for her recovery, we sent immediately for a Phisician and every thing was done that could be done but all in vain she was poisoned by the second powder what can be done what can be done was all that we could say the thoat of losing our babe was more than we could bear to think of she was a fine child to good to live, and at 11 oclock am she breathed her last.

what shall be done with our darling was the next question with us both, could we think of burying her at tahita no we could not we must take her with us away, so we have had a lead coffin made and the corps embalmed to take home with us (3/5/1850)

This is one of only a few entries in any journal that convey the drama of the moment and record raw emotion. Yet such phrases such as “more than we could bear,” “to[o] good to live,” and the dramatic “breathed her last” speak to the philosophical understanding of death that the women had been taught throughout their lives. Thousands of miles away from their home communities and under extreme conditions at sea, the women still draw on this familiar rhetoric in their journals. It is also useful to consider the gap between the trope and the emotional experience it conveys—what is not written. Unlike other grieving whaler mothers, Susan Veeder never again mentions her daughter, even when the Veeders return to Tahiti the year following her death. The other three women do recall their losses on the anniversaries of the children’s births and deaths. Lydia Tuck records the fourth anniversary of a child’s death years before she went to sea, employing the religious rhetoric of that child being in a better place (7/13/1856). And Annie Ricketson records visiting her daughter’s grave during her second voyage in 1881.
Captains and wives also died on whaling voyages. In the few journals that include this information, the rhetoric is specific to the author and purpose of the writing. None of the women who kept journals died, but three lost their husbands during the voyage. Annie Ricketson’s third and final extant journal is unhelpful, ending inexplicably in mid-sentence six months prior to Captain Daniel’s death. But the rhetoric within the other two journals varies dramatically. Almira Almy became the official log keeper two months into the voyage of the *Roscoe*, her second with her husband. No entry appears on February 2, 1860, but a large blank space marks the absence of the daily record. No mention of the captain’s death follows, but the log does record that the ship turned around two days later. A week after arriving at New Bedford, The *Whalemen’s Shipping List* announced the deaths of Captain Almy, his eighteen-year-old son George, and six other men when the whale they were harpooning resurfaced underneath their boat, crushing it (4/17/1860). Despite these losses, Almira continued to keep the official log; in content, form, and tone, entries following the tragedy mirror those that were written before. Whatever her emotions may have been, they did not affect her duty as official logbook keeper.

The first mate, now acting captain, of the *Roscoe* apparently did not object to Almira maintaining the logbook. Elizabeth Marble, however, writes that she refused the acting captain’s request for the official log she kept. Two weeks after John Marble’s death, she writes that “Mr. Cleveland came to me today for the ship’s books but I told him John told me to keep them I don’t think he liked it but I don’t know what to do” (11/5/1861). Elizabeth’s entry suggests that she may have taken over the role of official log book keeper, but her personal response when her husband died of dysentery off the
west coast of Australia recalls Susan Veeder’s account of her daughter’s death: both emotional records contrasting sharply with all other entries—their own, and those of other women. Elizabeth writes: “midnight Oh how can I write tonight for John is gone and I am alone yes he is gone the best of husbands and my all is gone he died at 10:30 this evening he has been sensible he should not live for three or four days but I have tried to hope against hope he was perfectly resigned and sensible to the last he is been a great sufferer.” She closes the entry, “but I cannot write any more” (10/22/1861). When the third mate, George Bowman, also recorded in his formal log the death of Captain Marble, his rhetoric is actually very similar to Elizabeth’s. Captain Marble was “very sensible” and “resigned (oh what a comfort to his wife and child)” (10/23/1861). Commended by Bowman and Elizabeth, other whaling wives, and sentimental literature generally, the qualities desired in a dying nineteenth-century adult were awareness and acceptance. Bowman also draws on another familiar trope to describe the scene: “the hand of death was near.”

As for accounts of domestic happiness, Harriett and Obed Swain’s relationship is celebrated fondly and often in her journal, and while his captain’s log only mentions Harriett occasionally, when she was sick, after leaving her in Paita, Peru, from where she would travel home to Nantucket alone, Obed waxes conventionally poetic about his wife.

Dear wife at the House of Capt Hillmans feeling as I never felt before the look she gave on parting I never can forget but am in hopes this parting will be for the best she will leave Paita on the 15th for Panama where I hope she may not have to stay long having the best wishes of an affectionate husband for a short and pleasant passage to her dear home and
that our heavenly father wil permit us again to meat in health once more

is the wish of her dear husband . . . so ends feeling very lonesum.

(4/12/1855)

Harriett’s own journal expresses similar regret about her premature departure from the voyage. Writing while waiting for a northbound steamer, her last entry is on April 30, 1855 in Panama. She arrived home in Nantucket in May. Obed returned two years later, but Harriett had died three weeks before his arrival.

Tropes also inform the women’s frequent accounts of nostalgia, loneliness, and longing for friends and family back home. In many of the journals, homesickness is the dominant emotion. Even journals that are silent about daily routines express nostalgia and varying degrees of melancholy. Women wonder what those at home are doing, and wish to return soon. I do not wish to question the truth of such homesickness and loneliness. I do want to note that the expressions of such feelings were often couched in tropes that had appeared in sailors’ letters home for centuries. Lisa Norling’s own study of letters sent between home and ship focuses on the sentimental rhetoric of longing that dominates these letters. I would note that whaling women were therefore sustaining a rhetorical practice that predated their own presence on ships.

While the words “homesick” and “lonesome” appear frequently throughout the journals, women writing in the 1850s repeatedly introduced the specific trope “home sweet home.” This trope comes from the song “Home! Sweet Home!” adapted from John Payne’s 1823 opera, with music by Sir Henry Bishop. A very popular song in the nineteenth century, the repeated allusions indicate many whaling women knew the song
well enough to use it as a trope for their own homesickness. Elizabeth Waldron, Elizabeth Morey, and Harriett Swain all offer variations of the song’s lyrics:

Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam,
Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home;
A charm from the sky seems to hallow us there,
Which, seek through the world, is ne'er met with elsewhere.
Home, home, sweet, sweet home!
There's no place like home, oh, there's no place like home! (Payne)

Loneliness was a very real emotion to the women, but the repeated references to this song suggests that it corresponded closely to what the women felt was specific to their situation: that the comforts offered by home were mourned the further the person traveled from them.

Eleanor Baker drew heavily on nostalgic tropes to express her unsurpassed feelings of homesickness. Almost every single journal entry features her nostalgia for home, friends, and family, or a prayer for her swift and safe return. Eleanor was one of several women who numbered their entries; a tallying that in her case emphasized the extended length of her voyage—unfortunately, four and a half years. Eleanor’s melancholy began early. She and Captain Michael Baker III departed New Bedford aboard the ship Gazelle on August 18, 1857. Her first entry is dated September 30. Like many other whaling women, perhaps she was too seasick to write for several weeks. Her first mention of home appears at the end of her ninth entry: “This disagreeable weather makes me feel as though I would like to look in upon them at home and enjoy their company for a while just for a change” (10/8/1857). This longing becomes more
pronounced as the entries continue. Ten months later, entry number 312 is particularly
direct in expressing her frustration: “Nothing in sight. Tedious & tired of such Happy
indeed shall I be if spared to see the end of this voyage to once more be placed on terra
firma Apponagansette so Home is home if ever so homly” (8/31/1858). A couple of
weeks later, she writes “This is my birthday the second once since I left home. Hope I
shall not have to spend many more on board ship but soon to see our home on land”
(9/7/1858). Three years later, in entry number 1111, her sentiment is the same: “This is
my fifth birthday since I left home and I hope we may arrive there before another one
comes and find all our friends alive and well” (9/7/1861). In June 1863, the Gazelle
returned to New Bedford, but if Eleanor was ecstatic, she left no record. Her last entry—
number 1,165—was written on October 31, 1861, and no explanation has ever emerged
for why she stopped writing. What is remarkable is not Eleanor’s recurring nostalgia, but
her ability to sustain her feelings as hopeful rather than despairing. Throughout her
journal, the desire for “home, sweet home” is almost overwhelming, but in the particular
entry each day, she first expresses her desire then translates it through tropes into hopes
or prayers.

If Eleanor Baker is the most extreme example of homesickness, Harriet Allen is
the opposite. Even in rough conditions, “Sultry, squally & uncomfortable,” Harriet
writes:

Yet I do not wish my self at home. Through all discomfort & as long as I
see my children happy I cling to this life with them. I think I realize that
they are mine now, as they can never quite be again. Home is something to
look forward to by & by No one needs me there. I am content - a wonder.
If every body was happy & agreeable I should thoroughly enjoy this roaming life. If D & I could have a ship of our own & go where we pleased!” (4/13/1870)

Harriet’s love of travel is a rather unique sentiment within the journals, but her claims of being content are not. Many women present themselves as content once and sometimes twice in the journals, including ones who confess to homesickness in other entries. Settling into her new surroundings, Charlotte Wyer writes, “I am perfectly happy” (6/26/1853). Other women include their family in their satisfaction. “I am perfectly contented,” Mary Lawrence writes, “and so is Minnie” (6/24/1857). In many cases, the explicit cause of this well-being is the woman’s husband. “I feel contented and happy more so than I could at home without John” (1/18/1864), reports Lydia Beebe, and Azubah Cash alludes to a popular poem, “a life on the Ocean wave a home on the rolling deep with my husband is preferable than being on shore without him” (5/11/51). In essence, many women present their ship as their homeport. Clara Wheldon describes the process this way: “Ship cooking, sea-sickness, rolling and tumbling about does its work in process of time and one grows calm, then contented, and finally happy” (5/15/1868). And in a letter home dated October 4, 1852, Malvina Marshall boasts: “You would no doubt be very much pleased if you could look in on us, and see how pleasantly situated we are.” Such assertions of contentment are not antithetical to the repeated laments of homesickness. Both claim an allegiance to the same cultural norms. Yearning for home and those left behind affirms the values encompassing comfort, love, and security within the house itself, and extending out to the larger family and community. Those who claim to be content and even happy at sea are honoring the same values of home, finding
similar comfort and meaning through wifely devotion, while nonetheless redefining “home” as onboard a ship.

Many of the women combine nostalgia with piety, observing almost every Sunday over several years as the Sabbath, and therefore a time for reflecting upon home, church, and friends left behind. “Begins this sacred Day,” Eliza Brock writes on Sunday April 15, 1855,

with a light wind at SE Ship headed N by W. This of all other days is the most lonesome to me, here upon the side ocean there is no sound of the church going bell, calling to worship and prayer, my thoughts are at home with my dear Children and Christian friends and, oh, will the time ever roll round that I shall meet them again? Shall I ever go home again and renew the associations where for so long a time have been sundered?

On Sunday, April 23, 1865, Lydia Beebe also confesses that “There is not a Sabbath passes but I think of the loved ones at home enjoying the privileges of the sanctuary, and I believe if I live to get home I will improve them better than I used to, but I pray God to help me here to glorify Him.” These two examples represent hundreds appearing in most of the women’s journals. The Sabbath’s importance as a link to community affirms the women’s religious upbringings and the centrality of their home communities in their lives. Such entries are also a moral display of the women’s sturdy identity constructions.

**Poetry**

Poetry, hymns, psalms, and other passages the women find meaningful feature prominently not only in the women’s journals but in nineteenth-century women’s writing and men’s sea journals as well. Both men and women often kept commonplace books,
and whalenmen’s journals included poetry, songs, and other forms of creative writing.

Patricia A. Miller’s *And The Whale Is Ours*, a study of literature in sailors’ journals during the height of the industry in the 1840s and 1850s, reveals that “many whalenmen copied poetry into their journals, and others practiced their handwriting by copying from well-known writers and from newspapers. Some transcribed songs they heard during gams . . . or in their own forecastles.” While Miller’s focus is on identifying “authentic,” original writing, the widespread practice of reprinting, transcribing, and exchange is what interests me. “Even if a work was not clearly a copy of a well-known poem or a popular parlor song or ballad,” Miller writes, “it was still sometimes difficult to determine its authenticity. The mass of facile verse and fiction published during whaling’s heyday, in yearbooks, albums, storypapers, and newspapers, was far too great to make positive identification certain” (4). Poems copied into the women’s journals, credited or not, show us not only what the women were reading, thus expanding our knowledge of books and pamphlets brought to sea or acquired on the voyage, but also how the women habitually turned to published literature for the words to describe their emotions and experiences. Learned as part of their childhood education, they maintained this practice even in this most unusual—and no doubt unanticipated—experience years later. Finally, the poems penned into the women’s and men’s journals comprise an exchange literature compiled at sea, since several women copied poems by other women into their journals or even into their husband’s official logs.

While Lydia Beebe enters quotations into the back of her journal, in the manner of a commonplace book—several women put recipes there as well—verse appears throughout the journals. Short or partial poems or hymns are often just below a daily
entry; longer poems have their own page and title. Not surprisingly, the topics are religion and sailing, and the sources, almost never attributed, are usually hymns and psalms, though several poems by well-known poets appear. (Betsy Ann Tower, for example, includes a stanza from a Robert Burns poem.) These untitled poems and hymns often express the women’s emotions. In 1853, Harriett Swain copies a poem published in *Journal of the cruise of the United States ship Ohio* in 1841 about a deceased sailor, after one on her own ship dies. She rewrites the opening words, changing “Our Burke” to “Our boy.” Almira Gibbs also turns to poetry for solace. With “the ship all in a flutter,” she copies out three stanzas of the hymn “Come Let Us Pray” and on the facing page “Look Aloft,” a poem written by J. Lawrence, Jr. and published in *The Poets of America* in 1840. Her following comment, “This is very poor writing from a poor pen and a porer writer” refers to her own penmanship (8/30/1855). In a less solemn moment, Almira copies the poem or song “Be Up and Doing” because “I have made a mistake and turned over two leaves so I have written lines of poetry” (2/5/1857). Almira’s choice of how to fill space shows just how common the practice of copying was, and also how popular identifying with sentimental poetry was in the mid-nineteenth century.

Most often, poems are transcribed because they express emotions particular to whaling women. Eliza Brock, Lucy Crapo, Emma McInnis, and Harriett Swain also copy anonymous poems into their journals, but the sources are almost certainly the many small nineteenth-century maritime and sentimental publications that they would have shared. Different versions of some of the transcribed poems appear in various sources, and the hymns have often been reprinted in multiple hymnals. A ten-stanza poem appears at the end of the journal Emma McInnis kept from 1891 to 1892. A different version of the first
two stanzas, entitled “Whaling Song,” was published in volume sixteen of *The Ladies Repository* magazine in 1856, where they function as an opening to “Our First Whale,” a short story by Charles Nordhoff. A version close to Emma’s, but only eight stanzas long, appears in *From Forecastle to Cabin*, a sea journal by Joshua Fillebrown Beane published in 1905—thirteen years after Emma transcribed her poem whose source remains unknown. For the women, however, exchanging and transcribing these songs and poems was far more important than determining the source.

Original poetry by people encountered on the voyage appears in the journals as well. Though poems and hymns are prominently featured throughout Eliza Brock’s journal, the last seventy pages include dozens of poems, as well as transcribed letters, essays, and newspaper clippings. At least two poems were by people whom Eliza met while traveling. “The Nantucket Girl’s Song” Eliza credits to Martha Ford, of Russell, New Zealand, and another was a poem “composed by Mr. G. H. Nobbs of Pitcairn Island” at the request of Mrs. Palmer “as a farewell to her husband” (n.d.). Another Nantucket whaling wife, Mrs. Palmer died of consumption while waiting for her husband’s ship to return. One of three poems included in the official ship’s log kept by Betsy Ann Tower appears in a different hand with the inscription: “‘To Mrs. B. A. Tower’ by Emma J Messill San Francisco, Alta California.” Betsy Ann writes her own name below another poem, but she is probably not the author of a poem so strikingly similar to “The Sea” by John Albert Wilson.

Poetry in the ship’s log is not unusual. Two captain husbands’ logs have poems on pages between official entries, but the handwriting is different. Since both Samuel Wyer and Harriett Swain were travelling with their wives, most likely Charlotte and
Harriett copied in the poems. Yet Charlotte’s appears on a page before she joined Samuel, and Harriett’s comes after she prematurely left Obed’s voyage. The women were probably leaving messages on open pages. Almira Gibbs also wrote poems in her son’s journal during their voyage.

Several women composed original poetry. Two poems by Jane Gelett later appeared in her husband’s autobiography, *A Life on the Ocean*. Both recall events on the voyage: “Lines to a Snow Bird” records when such a bird flew onto the ship, and “There She Blows” commemorates Jane’s first chase and catch. Each poem contains nine four-line stanzas with an alternating rhyme scheme. A few of the eighty-five poems and hymns penned in Eliza Brock’s journal may be original, and one of the five poems Harriett Swain copied down may also be hers, although the poem is so packed with tropes and phrases common to religious poetry that “original” is a rather blurry term (4/29/1853). Certainly devotional and sentimental poems profoundly shape Swain’s and Brock’s possibly original works.

The most noted journalist-poet is Elizabeth Morey. Different from published devotional and nautical verse, or from poems found in other whaling women’s journals, her short, playful poems are original. Elizabeth is the only woman included in Pamela Miller’s study of creative writing in whaling journals. Calling Elizabeth’s poetry “naive” and “quaint,” and her spelling as “eccentric” (16, 174, 124), Miller also notes that Elizabeth’s “fresh and untutored” journal “contains few of the more conventional effusions that lard the journals of most whaling wives” (16). Haskell Springer remarks that the “barely literate” Elizabeth “brought a freshness of response to her experiences that transcends audience-consciousness and makes them memorable.” In a decidedly
backhand compliment, Springer claims the poems are “naive and funny enough to have come from Emmeline Grangerford of *Huckleberry Finn*” (105), though of course Mark Twain’s Emmaline was a parody of the sentimental female poet, while Elizabeth obviously was not. In her dissertation, Anita Joyce Duneer takes issue with Springer, claiming that Elizabeth “is quite conscious of creating her persona for an imagined audience” (*The Steamboat* 70). I agree with Duneer that most of Elizabeth’s journal follows the common conventions of whaling women, and while her spelling and grammar are weak, several other journals are equally uneven, and spelling is hardly standardized across the journals. Finally, Elizabeth copies two hymns and a psalm into her journal, which calls into question Springer’s judgment of “barely literate.”

Elizabeth Morey’s verse often lacks the solemn tone and structure common to nineteenth-century poetry. Unique among the journals, a few of her poems also express sympathy for the whales and livestock killed. Local Nantucket historian Betsy Tyler concludes that “Betsey Morey may have been the first person on a whaling voyage to record a sincere respect and sympathy for the prey” (39). Each of twenty-three whales caught during her voyage is named, and several short poems commemorate a catch. The third whale, or the “Sea Queen of Russia,” a name alluding to the ship’s location, received the following tribute:

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It was cruel to Disturb thee,
Lovely monster of the deep
When I saw them thus approach thee
It caused me for to wail and weep      (5/28/1854)
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When a pig was butchered, Elizabeth similarly memorialized him:
Poor Mr. Hogg is dead and Gone
I shall never see him more,
Or hear him begin me for Corn,
His loss I do deplore. (10/22/1854)

Similarly short, whimsical verses honor other whales and the places she visited. Yet two more solemn, multiple-stanza, original poems remember her late friend Ellen Aria, and Elizabeth’s time in the “Blessed Ochotsk” Sea (7/2/1854; 10/20/1854). The header to the former, “a poem of sorts to Ellen,” is another example of the self-effacing preamble that was common in women’s writing for centuries, and the tropes found in these poems confirm that while many of her original verses do not follow conventional form and phrasing, Elizabeth was familiar with them.

Her journal also includes several rudimentary drawings—Mr. Hogg, several rocks, shorelines as seen from the ship, ships, clouds, and a coconut tree. Though she writes that one “sketch is drawn by Mr Lindley the second Oficer” (18/2/1853), the rest appear to be her own. Betsy Ann Tower also includes pencil drawing of islands as seen from the ship, and of other ships in the formal log she kept during her voyage. Images of ships and ship ensigns, in ink, pencil, and occasionally watercolor, appear in the margins of Harriett Swain’s entries. The ensigns are those of ships the entries record seeing that day. These drawings, however, may have been done by her husband, Obed, since the journal of his previous voyage, which Harriett did not accompany him on, contained similar pictures. Jerusha Hawes’s partial journal features some full-page landscape drawings of islands, and Susan Veeder has similar full-page watercolors.
Part IV: Public Discourses

Several public discourses were considered appropriate for nineteenth-century American women to take part in: religious reform, temperance, and abolition—what Nan Johnson refers to as “parlor traditions of rhetoric” (2). Whaling women were in a unique position to advocate for various reforms, since they were models of domesticity not only for foreign cultures encountered, but also for the whaling ship itself—a culture with a reputation, deserved or not, for licentious and intemperate behavior. As Amy Kaplan writes, “domesticity not only monitors the borders between the civilized and the savage but also regulates traces of the savage within itself” (“Manifest Domesticity” 184). Kaplan identifies *Godey’s Lady’s Book* as a force encouraging women to assume the role as civilizer in the dual arenas of the “domestic”: the nation and the home. Writing in November 1858 about whaling women, Reverend Samuel Damon similarly argues that “The happy influence of this goodly number of ladies is apparent to the most careless observer” (*The Friend* XV.11:84). In fact, by 1832, women at sea already had a public reformer, when Abby Jane Morrell published a journal of her voyage on a merchant marine ship captained by her husband that argued for the education and improvement of sailors. Poems published by Lydia Sigourney, another merchant marine woman sailor, also called attention to the sailors’ spiritual health. Nonetheless, despite the whaling women’s belief that their presence onboard were beneficial to their husbands and others, their journals contain few gestures toward reform, and when they do engage with such published discourses, their own rhetoric is more subtle than overt.

The women write most directly in their journals about their influence, or lack of it, on practices of religious piety. Whaling on the Sabbath was a major topic, because of
its political and economic implications. Discussed by ministers, and debated in newspapers, religious tracts, and other publications like *The Friend*, this issue affected whaling women directly, and they discussed it at length in their journals, voicing opinions that they support with personal experiences. Some take a clear, strong stance; others rhetorically negotiate and vacillate. All must deal with what Felicity Nussbaum calls “competing discourses”: conflicting ideologies that encourage women to be pious influences on the ship, but also submissive wives who support their husbands—and their business practices. Some women, like Annie Ricketson on her first voyage, recognize with regard to Sabbath labor that things are different on a whaler, but there is no explicit condemnation: “Another Sabbath day has come round. It does not seem much like the Sabbath here for the men are jest as busy as can be boiling out and everything is so greasy and durty they have got through with oil at last” (7/23/1871). Even extremely pious Martha Brown recognizes the disparity but justifies it with economics: “Will be under the necesity of boiling tomorow, Sunday, but I do not see how whaleman can in evry way keep the Sabath. They can truly not go off in the boats and take them, but if they have one alonside or in the bluber room, it appears necessary they should take care of it” (12/15/1847).

Most women, however, vacillate positions. Though she notes the day in her entry, Harriett Swain describes watching the men cut into the whale on Sunday, November 20th, 1853 without condemnation. December 4th, however, when the men catch four whales, she writes, “I should have enjoyed seeing them get so many had it been any day but the sabbath.” The following week her inner struggle continues: “Afternoon lowered boats & caught 4 blackfish, wish I could influence them to remain on board ship on the
sabbath, but if they see the fish they fel that they must go after them & it is hard for them to think they are doing wrong. I hope they may feel differently.” Yet six months later, she not only describes boiling and chasing on the Sabbath, but she laments the whale that got away: “all the boats returned, having lost the whale, who went down with the line. Thus are our bright hopes blasted on the brink of being realized. May we have grace sufficient to subvert to our hard fortune & not to murmur or despond at evils which we cannot prevent, but in all our afflictions, trust in God” (6/5/1854). Whether wishing for Sabbath observation, or offering wifely support to industry, Harriett deploys religious rhetoric, revealing gaps between the identity discourses she performs, but also her conscious attempts at negotiating between the two.

Only a few women remain constant in their condemnation. “O! how thankful we ought to be, for God has dealt wonderfully with us,” Lydia Beebe writes, “we have now 1150 Blls of sperm oil, some of it has been taken on this Holy day, much as I would like to go home yet I would rather stayed here much longer than to have whaled it on the Sabbath. But I pray God to have mercy on us and help us all to see what is right and do it regardless of what men may think of us” (6/25/1865). Since Lydia was very homesick, her claim that she would have prolonged the voyage to avoid whaling on Sunday is especially potent. She is one of the few who did not negotiate or modify her position.

The women’s journals also reveal their writers at times exerting a pious influence by distributing or reading the Bible to the men. Religious organizations often supplied captains with Bibles for their crew, and the Port Society of New Bedford gave some to Captain and Harriet Allen for their 1868 voyage on the Merlin. Mary Lawrence had her five-year-old daughter, Minnie, distribute the Bibles and Testaments on their ship: “she
filled her little carriage and went forward. She came back very quick with an empty carriage, had it reloaded, and went again until she gave away every one that we had” (4/2/1857). That same year, Henrietta Deblois oversaw a similar distribution:

Testaments to the steerage and forecastle to-day, they were put on board for the sailors’ use and they seemed very glad of them. I have enjoyed this day very much we read and sing on deck and take a great deal of comfort. . . . Oh! may not the time on this voyage be spent in vain, but may we all this ship’s company be benefitted. May we be made better by this voyage. (7/6/1856)

Eliza Nye, who was a passenger on a whaling ship for several months, records reading the Bible to “all assembled” on the deck on her first Sabbath at sea (7/11/1847), but this very public act is made easier because she and her father left the ship at the Azores after a relatively brief trip. The wives travelled for much longer periods, and as we have seen, avoided contact with the men, even for purposes of reform. “I have been asked why I do not exercise a missionary spirit among those just about me,” Clara Wheldon writes: “My answer has been that I do not consider it the part of wisdom for one in my place to attempt to[o] much. The dignity of reserve seems to be better understood than any kind of freedom beyond civility” (1869; qtd. in Busch “Whaling & Missionaries”). The necessity for this “reserve” permeates all the journals.

Whaling women can also be rather ambiguous about temperance reform. Several women who disparage alcohol’s effects occasionally drink wine themselves. Pious passenger Eliza Nye reports that
As all the men had worked so hard . . . after breakfast the Steward brought up a pail of rum and a tumbler, and they could all go and help themselves, but he soon found that would not do, as they were inclined to help themselves too freely, so he limited them to a wine-glass at every meal. I am sorry that Captain Gardner did it, for I think they will expect it now whenever they take a whale, and it may give them the idea that whenever they are tired they feel better for taking something. I think it better for a ship to be strictly temperance. (7/2/1847)

“Strictly temperance” does not, however, apply to the passengers. A month later, Eliza records that “Today is Sarah’s birthday, and we shall drink to her health in a glass of wine” (8/5/1847). A decade later, Jerusha Hawes describes entertaining two gaming mates on her ship while her husband was on their ship visiting: “I entertained them with whiskey almost against my principals but find that we are apt to be slave to custom” (11/27/1859). Two decades later, Lucy Crapo expresses the frustration of many women when the men become intoxicated in a port: “what an awful destroyer of peace and comfort the miserable stuff is under whatever name it is known its nature still the same” (10/11/1880). Writing of men put into irons as punishment for drunkenness, Lydia Tuck notes that “‘rum in, and wit is out’, is the old, and very true saying” (5/13/1856). And yet, despite the women’s frequent statements about their abhorrence of alcohol, few argue for, or even suggest the possibility of prohibition.

Abby Jane Morrell’s early published journal is undeniably more didactic than the whaling women’s journals in arguing for reform. Yet even here, the preface, rather than the journal entries (which are presumably polished revisions of the originals), most
emphatically makes her moral observations. Here the act of revising and publishing comes under consideration. Did the revisions strengthen a platform of reform that Abby Jane’s preface claims is hers, or has this platform been demanded by her publishers? The answer is unclear, but certainly no whaling wife’s journal so overtly champions reform, education, and the plight of the sailor, though many may offer stray comments.

“I felt an irrepressible desire to make some observations on a subject which has become an object of no small interest to philanthropic sympathy,” Abby Jane Morrell states in her preface: “I mean the amelioration of the condition of American seamen. I believe that their habits can be reformed” (vii). Morrell’s argument, as Anita Joyce Duneer points out, was published seven years before Dana’s *Two Years Before the Mast*, which also depicted the horrible living conditions of lower ranking seamen (“Voyaging Wives” 194). But Morrell’s preface also engages in obsequious posturing and referencing of her gender. Having lived on a ship and yet outside the industry, as a woman she cannot “be suspected of wishing to effect promotion or of seeking employment.” In fact, she asks that the reader “consider me in the capacity of a child.” Her sense of inadequacy does not however diminish her resolve: “I should be proud to be one of the humble instruments in improving the condition and raising the moral and intellectual standard of that race of men which has ever and ever will share in the prosperity and glory of our country” (vii-viii). Aligning the maritime industry with nationalism, Morrell subtly asserts the importance of her message: if America is to truly have “prosperity and glory,” it must also have “moral and intellectual standard[s]”—and these standards can be set and monitored by women.
This message of improvement, however, appears only intermittently in entries stretching over a several year time period. For Morrell, the reform must go beyond religious conversion. In Chapter X of her *Narrative*, Morrell warily praises the faith-based societies dedicated to sailors’ reform, but cautions against extremism: “I believe this good work has been begun in many of the seaport towns in this country. Provision has been made for mariners’ churches, and with no doubt some fanaticism, much good has been done in many respects. In the navy there are now some chaplains who can both preach and pray. I would not have a ship a conventicle; but much may be done without any overstrained piety” (199). While advocating missionary work in the Pacific, she does not encourage proselytization on the ships: “I would introduce a few well-written epitomes of moral and religious duties. . . . They should be without sectarianism, or anything that had a bearing that way.” Her primary message, however, is transparency: “If [a sailor’s] duties as a seaman were clearly laid down, he would learn them in half the time he now does by curses and floggings” (202).

The need to improve seamen’s lives at port and at sea was a common cause for charities and aid societies in the mid-nineteenth century. Often founded and run by women, Seamen Aid Societies operated in many American ports and in Hawai‘i. Religious tracts and publications such as *The Friend* and the *Whalemen’s Shipping List* also took up the cause, and in its February 1, 1853 publication, *WSL* identified women as agents who could “cheer by their presence the monotony and discomforts of long and perilous voyages,” and even “exercise a good influence in the discipline of the ship” (XI.48:351). The wives’ journals and letters, however, tend not to mention such efforts. As noted in the first chapter, the women are almost entirely silent about the crew’s living
conditions. They do not plead, even to themselves, for improvement; at most, they express sympathy for hardships that their experience onboard reveals to them.

Such an expression of sympathy pre-dates Morrell’s. In the earliest extant whaling woman’s journal, Mary Russell comments not only on the seamen’s difficult life, but also on how little those who benefit from his labor appreciate his efforts. Following a description of her husband whaling during a rain and lightening storm, Russell writes:

This, thought I, is the way that these ‘Sons of Ocean’ earn their money that is so thoughtlessly spent at home. Could some of the ladies whose husbands are occupied in this dangerous business have been here this few hours past, I think it would be a lesson they would not forget. It would teach them prudence and economy more powerfully than all the books ever written on the subject since the invention of printing. (11/12/1823)

Speaking from experience rather than from lessons read in books, Mary chastises the women onshore. And yet, while she extends her sympathy toward all “sons of ocean,” her convictions arise out of concern for her husband. Similarly, Elizabeth Morey’s sympathetic statement, “no one can have any idea of the anxiety of the poor seaman until they go on voyage and see for themselves,” arises out of personal fears: “it makes me almost sick to see husband so anxious he came down and says to me I have ben up to Mast Head . . . I says to him I thought it was to rough for any one to go up to Mast head to day O no he says and that anxious look in him I shall never forget” (11/18/1853). As for Elizabeth Waldron, she echoes Elizabeth Morey’s concern, but ties it to economic compensation: “I think whalemen who risque their lives to come to this place ought to be well paid those at home who are enjoying all the comforts of home know nothing of a
seaman’s life” (5/12/1853). And Eliza Brock’s concern is for the loneliness felt by the crew members: “Oh my heart aches with pity for the sick sailor in the forecastle far away from friends and home” (5/6/1856). Such expressions of sympathy are however never repeated in these journals. With the exception of Mary Russell’s, all appear in the 1850s, when the rhetoric of female influence was at its height, as suggested by the 1853 edition of WSL mentioned above, and the poems of Lydia Sigourney, discussed below.

If concern about living and working conditions is rare, expressions of sympathy regarding punishment are almost nonexistent. Only one journal comments on a wife’s influence upon punishment on the ship. In 1848, after cataloging one crew member’s list of offences—fighting, gambling, and disrespecting others—Martha Brown describes his punishment, and discovers an earlier one:

The Capt.’s patience was clear gone--he went on deck and gave him 5 or 6 lashes with the end of the topgalent bowlin. Then for the first time I learned he had flogged a man several weeks before. What will come next I do not know. You who live on land do not know half the trials a sea Capt. is subject to. . . . Of course there must be some rules and regulation on board ship. When a man is made acquainted with them in the first of it, what can he expect but abide the conciquences if he does not abide by the rules. So Mother, you see I have very little influence so far. (2/1/1848)

Given Martha’s emphasis on her husband’s difficult position, the “influence” she hopes to have must be on the crew’s behavior, not on the captain’s punishments.

Elizabeth Stetson does disapprove of an act of corporal punishment, but significantly one executed while her husband was not onboard. “Sylvia [the first mate]
flogged Jose Solas for getting the ship aback,” writes Elizabeth: “I do not think it was right” (8/21/68). This unique disapproval of corporal punishment also testifies to Elizabeth’s lack of influence on anyone but her husband. She does influence him, for he speaks with others when they displease his wife. After complaining about the steward for some days, Elizabeth reports that “Charles gave him a lecture about swearing last night and today, on door slamming” (12/30/1861).

In a very different example of the women commenting on corporal punishment, Lucy Crapo, writing to her brother-in-law, also a captain, is almost gleeful in sharing her knowledge: “Query Do they put salt on the men’s tails to catch them? William says tell you that I am not supposed to know the method of catching runaways but this I do know, that they require considerable ointment after they are caught” (undated letter). Lucy, however, never records such a punishment being inflicted, and the women’s journals rarely record corporal punishment. Harriett Swain elides the punishment of the cook—This morning had trouble with the cook, but thank God greatness is again restored & he has gone to his duty”—while the captain’s log records “whipped the cook for his insolence” (9/24/1853), suggesting women either chose not to record the punishments, or were unaware of them. And when the women do record punishment, whether corporal or other forms, they often use the same matter-of-fact tone as they do for daily ship activities. Eleanor Baker reports that “Mr. Shepperd left the cabin and gone into the steerage on account of misconduct as an officer” (8/25/1860). Eliza Brock records that “at 6 Pm Capt give the Cook a thrashing for striking and other misconduct to the Steward” (6/20/1865).
Though these omitted or muted accounts of punishment do not appear to be constructed to create idealized portraits of the captains, the women thought about how they depicted their husbands. When considering Abby Jane Morrell’s published journal, Duneer writes that she “must have been conscious . . . of her duty to uphold her husband’s public reputation.” Duneer also quotes Vanessa Smith, who “observes how Morrell softens the implications of her husband’s exploits: Captain Morrell’s ‘activities clearly involve plunder rather than trade: they are referred to in [Abbey Jane’s] narrative simply as ‘collecting’” (“Voyaging Wives” 203). Such “softening” of various aspects of the journey, including the captain, is common, but the journals generally do not work to glorify or idealize the captains. Though mentioned to varying degrees in the different journals, they almost never dominate any single journal, letter, or memoir.

Perhaps most significantly, the journals do not comment on the captain’s abilities, as all outcomes are attributed to God or “Dame Fortune.” Discussing the failures of her voyage, Susan Fisher rhetorically asks, “Did you ever think what a deceitful create dame fortune was? To-day she holds the cup of prosperity to our lips, to-morrow it is dashed to pieces” (6/21/1855). Elizabeth Waldron reports that “the officers and men are getting discouraged so long from home and no oil. I hope dame fortune will deign to smile on us before long” (3/19/1853). The women conform by praying—or resigning themselves—to God for the safety and success of the voyages. On the first day of the new year, Harriett Swain writes “Hope that this year may be a more prosperous one than the last, if it be God’s will” (1/1/1854). When attempting to enter Bima Bay, Lydia Beebe does not focus on her husband’s skill in accomplishing the maneuvering, but rather expresses her “hope if it be God’s will that we shall get in there tomorrow” (7/27/1865). God also determines
the catch. Carrie Turner reports: “now they are boiling hope we shall get another [whale] tomorrow if it is the lords will for we need all we can get” (7/29/1880). Charlotte Church’s comment is especially striking, as it is in the official log: “Joseph Borgin raised a right whale at 7:35 PM lowered three boats – Larboard Boat struck and killed the whale instantly – too whale to ship made him fast – furled sails – set the watch for the night at 10 PM – So ends this day – Thank The Lord for this great blessing” (1/7/1910). Here credit is given, as it commonly is, to the sailor who spies the whale and the boat that catches it. But the overall praise goes to the higher power, not the captain. Such moments occur in almost all journals. God is the master controller; no journal praises the captain’s ability to navigate, survive storms, or catch whales.

This rhetorical strategy has a literary precedent in the nautical poems of Lydia Sigourney. “While these poems offer readers a way to understand maritime experiences within a particular religious context, the hermeneutic Sigourney offers ignores the facts of sailors’ labor and occupational knowledge,” Bryan Sinche writes. In “Icebergs,” Sinche notes, “the captain neither navigates, nor gives orders, nor steers; he just stands there. The ship survives thanks to ‘[t]he Great Deliverer’s power’ while the brave and immovable captain is but an impotent spectator subject to God’s dispensations” (69-70). Similarly, the whaling women grant God credit for all successful endeavors, passing over their husbands’ skill or efforts. Some women however do praise their husbands. Most women record storms or other dangers at sea, and a few report how their fears were calmed by their husbands. “A sea washed over and took the ‘gang way board’ and at the same time the water came rushing down into the forward cabin,” Emma McInnis writes: “Then John came and asked the steward if the water came down in the cabin the tone of
his voice drove all fear away and I laid quietly” (2/28/1892). Two women even turn disagreeing with their husbands into a sophisticated form of praise. While in the Arctic Sea, Clara Wheldon describes how “The ice was rapidly coming down upon us. In haste they took up the anchor and sailed south of the Point. The next morning, looking from mast-head the place we left was a field of Arctic ice. I remarked, we were fortunate to get away, but the Captain said, ‘oh, that is nothing.’ I did not, however, agree with him.” Clara’s “disagreement,” is of course, an affirmation of the captain’s own experience and modesty. Harriett Swain disagrees with her husband’s decision “to leave without [seeing] the [ship] Constitution Wish I could be Capt a few days & I would run over the grounds & try to fall in with them, but as I am not, I must submit” (9/8/1854). Disappointed that she cannot see her friends on the Constitution, Harriett also acknowledges her husband’s obligation to the economic purpose of the voyage, rather than to pleasing his wife. While not idealizing the men, then, the wives do give credit to certain aspects of their actions as husbands and captains.

Given the physical and hierarchical nature of life on board, the whaling women are not exactly in the ideal position to participate in gender and racial reform movements of their time. Though the women claim solidarity of sorts within the emerging community of sailing wives, only one overtly feminist remark appears in the journals—and that a moderate one. After reading English newspapers, Harriet Allen comments on various foreign affairs, then writes, “From all I can gather, I think that women are decidedly making great progress towards equal rights in this age” (9/26/1869). If Harriet felt she was helping with such progress, she does not say. Nor does she clarify what equal rights would mean for her.
Although most whaling women do not blame themselves for hindering their husbands’ success—a tendency Vincete L. Rafael and and Helen Buss both find frequently in their surveys of nineteenth century women’s letters—metaphors rooted in chauvinism do occasionally appear. Complaining that the lack of wind is slowing the voyage, Elizabeth Waldron writes “we are having an old woman’s time now a flat calm” (4/20/1853). Lucy Crapo insults the ship, *Linda*, by comparing it to a woman: “We are drifting or rather rolling along towards Talcahuano with a succession of winds which vie with the Linda for contrariness. She is recommended to that so often that I venture to suggest that she might safely be classed of feminine gender” (3/29/1880). But such stereotypes are often contradicted by those same writers. In another letter Lucy claims, “the ladies are stronger and the last to complain, we make the best of it” (4/17/1879).

In addition class and nationality also condition the women’s recognition of “sister sailors.” Susan Veeder writes, “to day Captn Hoxi and his lady has been here to spend the day It seems very pleasant to see some American lady” (2/22/1848). Lydia Tuck agreed: “Spoke brig William L Nash, from New York, for Cadix. From her we got New York papers, up to Aug 30st. These were very acceptable. The Capt, had his wife on board. I saw her walking about deck, and felt almost as if I had seen company. To see an american lady, even at that distance, seemed very good” 9/16/1855). And Lydia Beebe records, “I am in a hurry to see the Swallow for Capt. Hocam has his wife with him, and it will be so pleasant to see an American woman again” (3/15/1864).

Such nationalism does not however include discussion of national politics. Though seven women voyaged at some point during the civil war, for example, only one mentions it. On March 8, 1865, Lydia Beebe records “Light winds, seven sails in sight
Mr. Brown boarded three of them got some English papers, we saw by them that Abraham Lincoln is president and that the war is still going on, God grant haste to the day when the truth and right shall be firmly established and war cease.” Such an entry testifies to the isolation of ships at sea. President Lincoln had been reelected four months before, and gave his second inaugural address four days before Lydia wrote her entry. On the Fourth of July, 1865, she writes, “Tues the 4th Strong wind but pleasant. I hope this fourth will find America once more at peace with all the world, and all nations living there be free. I pray God to have mercy on us as a nation and speed the right.” Lydia seems to be aware that the war is ending, or even may have ended, but no entry indicates how she knows this. As a Northerner, she would have supported the Union, but her entries elide any political position. She prays for “truth and right,” but never suggests what that might be. This paradox of nationalist sentiment without political discourse had a well-known literary precedent: Godey’s Lady’s Book. Thought the magazine never once mentioned the Civil War while continuing to publish regularly (Kaplan 34), it routinely praised America, since years before editor Sarah Hale had launched a campaign to declare Thanksgiving a national holiday to “unite our great nation, by its states and families” (Godey’s 45: November 1852, qtd. in Kaplan 35). Regardless of political sentiment, the vast majority of whaling women’s journals recognize Thanksgiving, the Fourth of July, and Washington’s Birthday as days to honor.

If mentions of the civil war are rare and subtle, references to the abolition movement are nonexistent— even though over half of the extant journals were written prior to the civil war. The women’s quarterdeck view of the daily working and social behaviors of a racially diverse group of men certainly would have granted them examples
for a discussion of racial difference—either through prejudiced attitudes, or their debunking. Even though a non-white crewmember’s race is almost always mentioned, a large silence extends across the journals with regards to racialized behavior. Like gender reform, racial attitudes are a subject both too distant and too close for the women to address directly, leaving them to fall back onto the dominant ideology of appropriate topics and opinions for women to discuss within journals.

Conclusion

I have mapped out the material conditions of whaling women’s writing, and the ideological constraints that shaped the women’s constructions of their daily experiences and their family relationships. I have paid close attention to how ideologies of home influenced not only what topics the women chose to discuss or to avoid, but also the particular rhetorical and generic choices the women made. I have identified many of the published texts that might have provided models or authorized discourses for the women. In particular, I have argued that incorporating elements of the domestic diary—the recording of the women’s own daily activities—is not simply complicit with the ideology of separate spheres. By reporting these domestic activities while constantly reminding the reader they are occurring on a floating factory in international waters, the women assert the mobility of domesticity and therefore their own agency. The result is a subtle model of civilized behavior offered to the men onboard, and to the foreigners encountered. The women’s sentimentality when depicting overwhelming homesickness and nostalgia is a common rhetorical strategy found in sentimental novels and in men’s letters home for decades before women began sailing. Incorporating poetry into the journals follows the
direction of women’s writing manuals, but also the examples set by men’s narratives, published and unpublished. In fact, the women seem just as likely to turn to published maritime literature as to religious hymns. Finally, I have suggested why these journalists do not draw on their experiences to overtly advocate for reform, even within the semi-private context of their journals, and despite their unusual locations and social conditions.
Chapter Three: Travel Narratives

This chapter examines the travel narrative entries written by the whaling women that describe flora and fauna encountered at sea and on land and comment on foreign people, cultural practices, infrastructure, and landscapes encountered at foreign ports. I begin by identifying the genres, topics, rhetorical models, and word choices the women employ. Observations at sea entwine with the diary and log genres and contents discussed in previous chapters. Visits to foreign ports, however, provoke long individual entries, or even a series of entries when women spent several days ashore. Such narratives tend to produce the longest entries in the women’s journals, sometimes filling several pages. Many women stopped at the same ports and visited the same points of interest — emerging tourist attractions. The tone and styles shift between touristic sublime responses to landscape and clinical descriptions of flora and fauna, although such specimen notations become briefer in the final decades of the nineteenth century. What remains remarkably consistent in the personal journals, however, are condescending judgments of natives, informed by Euro-American values and standards. While the women visited many ports around the globe, I focus on two locations: The Azores Islands in the North Atlantic Ocean, because they were the first foreign lands most wives encountered, and the Hawaiian Islands, since most women wrote about them, and some spent many months boarding there while their husbands and ships continued on to the Arctic.

Many voices are absent from this chapter, and most obviously those of the people encountered and written about. These voices lie outside this project, and recovering them is a major initiative in Pacific scholarship. Tellingly, in the various archives I consulted
for this project, only one letter, written by a woman from Ponape (Pohnpei, now part of the Federated States of Micronesia), who had married an American sailor, emerged at Martha’s Vineyard Historical Association. But the letter was addressed to her Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts in-laws, and perhaps not surprisingly, it performs full complicity with the missionary project and nineteenth century gender stereotypes.

Like so much work devoted to narratives of encounter, this chapter is heavily informed by Mary Louise Pratt’s *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. I employ several of Pratt’s terms, and interrogate the whaling women’s journals to identify how “travel and exploration writing produced ‘the rest of the world,’” in this case for an American readership. I try to answer two of Pratt’s central questions: how do “the signifying practices of travel writing encode and legitimate the aspirations of economic expansion and empire? At what point do they undermine those aspirations?” (4). I also recognize that large groups of people were affected by their interactions with voyaging westerners, including whalers, and these indigenous people may have resisted the representations forced upon them. And yet, while I look for moments of native resistance in the whaling journals, the women’s visits to foreign ports were so brief, and their accounts so self-focused, that the descriptions of the port’s native peoples are inevitably superficial, or even fantastic.

Pratt’s famous terms—“contact zone,” “anti-conquest,” and “seeing man”—are especially apt for dealing with women whalers. Contact zones are “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (7); the whaling women not only “meet” and sometimes “clash” with the people they encounter, but also at times “grapple” with their
preexisting notions of foreign people and places that so heavily shape their perceptions and descriptions. Anti-conquest refers to “the strategies of representation whereby European [here American] bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European [or American] hegemony” (8). The whaling women never mention empire or colonization, a form perhaps of “innocence,” but their assessment of natural resources, when juxtaposed with their condescending descriptions of the natives, targets the resource potential and the need for “improvement”—a word the women use frequently. “The main protagonist of the anti-conquest,” Pratt explains, is someone “whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess”: this is the seeing-man (9). Though the whaling women’s descriptions are supposedly benign and passive, entire journals, and all the journals and letters considered together, lean toward further American involvement abroad. Though the whaling women’s writings do not follow the post-1860s generic conventions exactly as Pratt describes, nor do they display the independence or the revisionist writing strategies that Pratt finds in the women’s travel literature (100), nonetheless her work has proved highly relevant and useful to my analysis.

This chapter is also informed by Amy Kaplan’s *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*, and particularly by her concept of “Manifest Domesticity.” This term “introduces the double meaning of ‘domestic’ as both the space of the nation and of the familial household and shows how these notions are inextricably intertwined with shifting notions of the ‘foreign’” (18). Kaplan sees the emphasis on the home as a separate, gendered sphere during the 1830s-1850s as an ideology contributing to American nationalist expansion into Mexico and Indian lands (24-5). The whaling
women’s journals extend this grasp into the Pacific and to the end of the nineteenth century. Like Kaplan’s subjects Catharine Beecher and Sarah Josepha Hale, the whaling women’s journals reveal “how domesticity worked as both a bulwark against and embodiment of the anarchy of empire.” Arguing that “domesticity is a mobile and often unstable discourse that can expand or contract the boundaries of home and nation, and that their interdependency relies on racialized concepts of the foreign,” Kaplan labels this expansion “traveling domesticity” (26). Anita Joyce Duneer applies Kaplan’s terminology to Abby Jane Morrell’s and Mary Wallis’s published work. “For voyaging women, ‘traveling domesticity’ is more than a metaphor, since the ship is literally a traveling home,” Duneer writes, claiming that Wallis and Morrell “both emphasize the responsibility of all voyaging Americans to project the domestic values of American ‘civility’ on a global scale” (“Voyaging” 196). In the previous chapter, I argued that the whaling women’s journals are not as didactic as Morrell. But their descriptions of foreign people and places certainly assert a need for Euro-American influence--legal, moral, and governing.

I had anticipated making greater use of Paul Lyons’ *American Pacificism: Oceania in the U.S. Imagination*, and it was especially helpful as a source on the historical and literary narratives of the islands in Oceania that the women visited. But while Lyons describes how Oceania played a very specific role in U.S. self-fashioning through myth-making, the women’s journals display remarkably confused and undifferentiated understandings of where they went. Their “benign” and “anti-conquest” travel narratives certainly evaluate the people and land through American value-systems, and they identify their locations as precisely as possible through latitude and longitude,
but they do not seem to recognize historical/political differences between regions. Islands colonized by Europeans for centuries in the North Atlantic are approached with the same expectations of the exotic as locations in the Pacific “discovered” by Euro-Americans less than a century earlier, and often yet to be colonized. “In Oceania, as evidenced in numerous self-conscious attempts to perform U.S. culture for natives, self-fashioning involved the creation of that [national] masculine subject as ‘civilized,’” Lyons explains: “To invoke Judith Butler, such performances . . . were not so much imitations of a coherent subject as attempts to constitute that subject through contradistinction” (17). I would argue the whaling women were focused more on their own self-constructions than the cultures they encountered, performing U.S. domesticity/civilization in the same way regardless of where they were or whom they were visiting, and therefore emphasizing binary difference far more than anything that might make a culture distinct.

To select perhaps the most notorious example from many, cannibalism is one of the supposed cultural practices that Lyons identifies as ubiquitous within nineteenth-century publications about Oceania. Yet a survey of the whaling women’s journals and letters finds the stereotype of war-driven cannibals to be almost entirely absent. Within my research, only four mentions of cannibals or cannibalism emerged. When Mary Lawrence describes the customs of the people of Fatu Hiva in the Marquesas, she includes the sentence, “When they kill an enemy, they take his body up to a taboo house, and the god-men go there and eat it” (2/11/1858). She does not elaborate beyond this, nor does she ever return to the subject. Eliza Williams, who seems to anticipate publication more than any other woman, includes an anecdote she learns from a New Zealand settler
family we’ve already encountered: “Capt. Butler came to Monganua to live 19 years ago. The natives were then in an uncivilized state. The Maoris, as they are called, were at war together, and in some parts they ate human flesh” (1/1859). In 1859, then, Eliza Williams suggests that cannibalism has been so eradicated that only an “old-timer” would recall it. Like Mary Lawrence, Eliza does not elaborate, and neither claim to be witnesses. In a newspaper article published many years after Helen Jernegan’s voyages in the late 1860s, Helen claims that an old man was pointed out as a cannibal to her in Nuku Hiva, again suggesting that the practice was obsolete by the second half of the nineteenth century—perhaps worth noting, but not to be elaborated on (“Interesting Viney whole”).

The final example is not only the most far-fetched, but also the most disturbing given the circumstances. A collection of letters Captain and Hannah Allen wrote to their children contains the following story from the captain: “Now I am going to write you a little story about some children whose parents know not of God and then about some little children whose parents did not but now do know God.” According to this fable, the fathers of the godless children “return from a fight with another tribe . . . [and] take home pieces of the flesh of some one whom they have killed in battle, and distribute it among their little ones for food” (11/5/1871). Here is the cannibalism stereotype at its most extreme—a racist and primitivist atrocity narrative fueled by the supposedly benign goal of religious conversion, cultural assimilation, and parental instruction.

**Describing Nature**

The women’s travel narratives shift between empirical and sublime accounts of nature, and they often begin writing such descriptions long before reaching their first port. While land and seascapes are frequently romanticized, fish, birds, and other sea life
tend to be recorded empirically, with unusual creatures receiving longer, scientific
descriptions. This impulse to classification in travel literature, Pratt argues, has roots in
Linnaeus’s *Systema Naturae* (1735). For example, shortly into her voyage, Mary
Brewster writes,

> Whilst sitting by my stateroom window watching the flying fish one flew
> into the window which gave me a fine chance to examine it. This was a
> small but perfect fish in shape resembling our mackerels with the
> exception of its fins or wings which are quite curious. They are composed
> of a thin membrane which seems to be strengthened by ligaments which
> extend from the top to the bottom which serves to make them strong. They
> fly in flocks like birds and are a most excellent pan fish. . . . Two flew into
> the boat a few nights ago which were saved and cooked for my breakfast.
> (12/10/1846)

Mary is not only inclined to describe the fish, but draws on biological terms such as
“membrane” and “ligament.” A familiar fish, the mackerel, becomes a point of reference,
and Mary’s shift to the human uses for this fish (food) is what Pratt calls anti-conquest,
“an utterly benign . . . appropriation of the planet” (37). Lydia Beebe similarly records
and assesses the physical properties of a bird her husband traps, and its consumption
value: “John caught two Albatrosses or Gonies as the sailors call them. they are beautiful
looking bird, look something like a goose but larger and their wings were about a yard
long. he let them go again for they taste fishy and are not very good to eat” (12/29/1863).
When Almira Gibbs describes albatrosses, she considers their aesthetic rather than their
use value: “the water is dotted with large birds called goonies they are as large as our
geese and resemble them very much they make a very prity appearance sitting so gracefully on the water I think present quite a scene for an artist” (12/9/1855). While most women impassively record whales killed and dismembered throughout their voyages, the death of a dolphin could often incite sympathy. As Eliza Nye writes, “It looked most beautiful changing its colors, and yet I could not bear to stand by and see it die” (8/8/1847). Although dolphin liver is occasionally served onboard, perhaps the women’s sympathy is raised because the dolphin does not serve the same crucial economic purpose as the whale, the reason for the voyage.

Lucy Crapo’s journal, written between 1865 and 1868, includes many empirical descriptions testifying to her interest in the scientific study of nature. Her entries reveal that she had even brought reference books. She writes of a flamingo found on Sal Island, Cape Verde:

Captain C’s [Cornell] 2nd mate had been ashore and shot a bird which they call flamingo. It was very large measuring 5 feet, from bill to the feet, as lain on deck. For further description see Webster’s extract from Partington’s Natural History. I hope we shall get one. Capt. C calls them soldiers as they march along the beach in single file and are nearly as tall as men. (3/28/1866)

A later entry describing a cuttlefish further shows Lucy’s dedication to studying life forms. “W- saved a cuttlefish’s bill from the stomach of the blackfish,” she reports, and she goes on not only to include the class and order of the cuttlefish, but “from a ‘Manual of Mollusca’ I learn they have arms, suckers attached to accelerate their speed” (7/31/1866). Penguins, seals, and insects are also described in Lucy’s journal, and in
addition to physical descriptions, she collects natural specimens—the skin of a fur seal, “[i]ts head looked like that of a great rat,” and also “a ‘teredo’ or ship borer, which is very curious. I have saved a specimen for home inspection” (12/28/1866, 10/23/1866). Lucy’s interest in collecting and recording natural specimens results in the most scientific descriptions found in any whaling woman’s journal, and they seem to have been for herself. While her letters to her sister on her voyage in 1878 mention animals encountered, such as dolphins playing near the ship, her narratives here are not scientific in tone.

The women who kept personal journals in the three decades following Lucy Crapo did write of encountering new and unusual species, but they do not include the detailed descriptions found in most journals written before 1870. Though Cynthia Ellis notes, “2d mate called me to see a White Grampus,” she does not provide any details (10/5/1877). Sallie Smith writes, “I went on deck and saw them get a Sunfish on board and dissect him had some of him for dinner,” but the anatomical details are not recorded (2/25/83). By 1891, Emma McInnes is blasé about new species even before encountering them: “saw my first Porpoise, we caught one. after they got him on deck I went forward and looked at him they look much as I thought they did although not as large” (12/26/1891, my italics). Here McInnes anticipates the ennui of twentieth century travel writers, when everything new is already known, and a disappointment. Significantly, in Sophie Porter’s 1894-1896 journal, the entire medium for recording unusual animals has changed. Sophie does not write detailed physical descriptions; rather, she photographs the animals.
Romantic descriptions of land and seascapes continue into the mid-1880s. Though the last few personal journals by Adaline Wicks, Emma McInnes, and Sophie Porter mention the sun and moon only briefly, and without sentiment, in the preceding decades, sunrises, sunsets, and moonlit nights are described superlatively and poetically. Mary Russell’s 1823 journal is the first to use the adjective “sublime,” but so does Mary Brewster in 1845. Shortly into Dana Nye’s 1847 voyage, she writes that “I have seen beautiful sunsets at home, but I have never seen anything equal to this,” confessing that, “it was truly a beautiful sight to see it sink slowly into the water looking like a ball of fire” (7/25/1847). A decade later, Lydia Tuck reports, “I did enjoy the glorious sunset tonight. I do not think I ever witnessed a more beautiful scene. I was forcibly reminded of those beautiful, soul-inspiring lines by Moore.” She then copies out the second through fourth stanzas of Thomas Moore’s hymn “Thou Art, Oh God!” (9/14/1856). Even Lucy Crapo, the empirical recorder of foreign species, describes the sun “setting long enough to say good night before sinking into his watery bed” (10/11/1880). This sentence appears in a letter to her sister, but her journal also frames empirical descriptions with romantic and devotional rhetoric. After clinically recording a water spout—“a phenomenon I had desired to see”—Lucy ends by exclaiming, “truly the wonders of the sea are great, and the Hand that made them Divine” (11/4/1866). But by 1885, while still describing evenings as “beautiful and moonlight” (4/26/1885), Annie Ricketson’s rhetoric in her third journal is more restrained, and generally natural descriptions remain pragmatic and brief in the journals written during the last years of the nineteenth century.
Inside the Contact Zones

The women’s experiences inside contact zones are more complicated, as their journal entries reveal. Whether reveling in a touristic sublime or revolted by cultural differences, their travel narratives hardly offer discerning portraits of the places and people encountered, but instead reveal the women whalers’ cultural aesthetics. In this way the women draw borders that create identities, but their own rather than “foreigners’.” Even as other journal entries admit to languor or to losing the battle against dirt and bugs in their cabins, the whaling women’s expressed abhorrence of disorder, filth, laziness, and nudity assert a counter identity informed by order, cleanliness, industry, and propriety. Underlying each description and encounter is therefore that unquestioned sense of Euro-American moral and intellectual superiority that pervades nineteenth century travel literature.

First Encounters: The Azores

Ships leaving New England usually stopped first at the Azores, which were directly West across the Atlantic Ocean toward Portugal, or the Cape Verde Islands, further Southwest toward Senegal. Both groups of islands were colonized by Portugal. Here the ships would restock provisions and often hire, or “ship,” several men. Some ships visited two or more of the islands in the Azores or Cape Verde, others only one. The most frequented of the Azores was Faial Island, where an American Consulate was established in 1806, as the United States became the dominant whaling nation. This was the wives’ first experience with a foreign country, and the first land they had seen since leaving New England. Several women describe the islands as viewed from the ship. These accounts are often both empirical and romantic—what Pratt identified as the
“poetics of science” in early to mid nineteenth-century travel literature (197). Seen from the ships, the islands become panoramic views available for private consumption and sentimental regard.

Eliza Nye’s 1847 description of approaching Flores Island in the Azores is the earliest extant, and appraises the natural beauty and the infrastructure:

We could see the fields of corn and wheat separated by stone walls, which were covered by vines that concealed them entirely from the view, besides making them look so much prettier than the bare walls could. The mountains were steep, and we could see the winding paths cut out on one side of them, so that people could ascend and descent with safety. On the East side of the Island is a very pretty little town; the houses are small and are build of rough stone. (8/10/1847)

Eliza also spends a week on Faial Island, and then several months on St. Michaels Island (Sao Miguel) with her mother’s family. Though a first-time visitor, because she had connections to the community she is predisposed to assess positively the relationship between the aesthetic and the functional, the potential and the prevailing.

Clara Whelden’s brief portrait of an unidentified Azores Island, seventeen years after Eliza Nye’s, also notices the natural and the man-made. While describing hills and valleys, features familiar to her New England audience, Clara emphasizes the foreignness of the view:

The sight was picturesque and beautiful, but it did not look like home, nor like anything I had ever seen. The island is perpendicular for quite a height above the level of the sea, and then gradually slopes to a much greater
elevation. This grand slope is covered with little hills and valleys all bright and green and have appearance of being cultivated. I can just distinguish two small settlements with buildings very low. (7/6/1864, my italics)

Wheldon thus marks with the exotic what would otherwise be common, encoding the place with mystery and difference, even though, and perhaps because, she does not go ashore. Her later descriptions of Hawai‘i, discussed below, are similar.

In a much later first encounter with the Azores, even though Sallie Smith seems committed to write neutral landscape descriptions, the results are clearly framed by a specific Euro-American history through observation. Writing in 1875 of an island near Flores, she “saw the peak of Pico it is covered with snow while at the foot it is quite green. the place is 75 miles foot high and goes up in almost a true peak like a Sugar loaf” (11/30/1875). Smith’s failed attempt at correction speaks to the Euro-American desire for scientific precision in natural description, even though the highest point on Pico is actually just over 7,500 feet. Here is a seeing-man appropriation, or “knowing” through empirical observation, a travel writing tradition Pratt traces back to Linnaeus in the mid eighteenth century. Referring to the land as “quite green” may seem innocuous, but it suggests rich soil with potential for cultivation, a value-laden trope within anti-conquest travel narratives. Smith’s comparison of the mountain to a “sugar loaf,” the cone shape in which sugar was originally sold, invokes a familiar domestic item with its own history of cultivation and commerce. Smith is certainly not the first Euro-American traveler to employ this simile. Sugarloaf Mountain in Brazil, another place colonized by Portugal, was so named in the early sixteenth century, and a peak on Corvo, another island in the
Azores, also holds that name. Again noting elevation, Smith’s account of Trinidad on her 1882 voyage once more unites failed precision with colonial appropriation:

yesterday passed between Trinidad and some small ones that are called Martin Van Pletts there is three of them they look like three rocks sticking up out of the Sea the largest is 800 miles high that has a little earth on it nothing grew there nor Trinidad but very little there is not water on either of them Trinidad was once used of a convict land but was discontinued because of Water it is a desolate looking place. (10/19/1882)

Smith’s portrait views the islands solely within the context of western imperial history, without specifying the European powers that contested the territory, or even acknowledging an indigenous history. And her “facts,” while present, are again uncertain, Trinidad and Martim Vaz are 2,000 feet at their highest point, but seventeen degrees latitude to the North are the Fernando de Noronha islands, which roughly match both the height and the history Smith provides.

If Pratt’s notion of anti-conquest applies to the landscape descriptions found in women’s whaling journals, the recorded interactions within the contact zone of the Azores reveal the narrators’ own proprieties and adherence to the values of home in that dual familial/national sense that Kaplan identifies. Visiting her mother’s relatives on St. Michael’s Island, Eliza Nye predictably responds positively to her family and the friends she makes. When referring to those people, or evenings and afternoons spent with them, the word “pleasant” appears regularly in Eliza’s descriptions. A few entries, however, distinguish her own national and religious identity from the larger Portuguese population. For example, Eliza writes that “After taking a hasty tea, we went to see a dance that there
was to be at the Baron’s house. One of the servants was to be married, and this was her last ball. . . . They form a double circle and take a very simple step, weaving in and out, and dance with very little animation. They invited me to join the dance, but it being Sunday evening I declined” (9/5/1847). Criticizing the enthusiasm of the dancers, yet refusing to participate due to her religious beliefs, Eliza doubly distances herself from the setting and also assures her audience that she observes the Sabbath. Another clear cultural difference grounded in class and propriety is asserted a few weeks later: “I do not like to go alone very much as the Portuguese are very often impertinent to a lady if she is not accompanied by a gentleman” (9/17/1847). Once again, a distance appears between the American “lady” and the “impertinent” and clearly not gentlemanly Portuguese culture. In actuality, Eliza almost exclusively describes sightseeing and social events. The former remind us that she is, above all, an outsider visiting. The latter remind her audience that she is always insulated by her family’s domestic space when facing the larger Portuguese culture.

Several other women found their stays in Faial “pleasant.” Three years after Eliza Nye, Azubah Cash, her husband, and son, were onshore for three days. Upon her arrival, she begins recording her social encounters. She had “pleasant conversation” with U.S. Consul Mr. Dabney, his wife, and their daughter. At the boarding house she has a “first rate supper,” providing the details of the menu for both supper and breakfast. The following day she takes a donkey ride to the Dabneys’ gardens: “rode in fine style . . . was received very politely by Mrs Dabny a very lovely and interesting lady . . . their garden which was the most beautiful I ever saw and very large all kinds of plants and flowers and some fruit. such as oranges, lemons &c She gave me flowers that made a
beautiful bouquet to take on board of the ship” (10/25/1850). Azubah’s activities are repeated by Elizabeth Morey in the 1850s, Clara Wheldon in the 1860s, and both Carrie Turner and Sallie Smith in the 1870s. All the women rode donkeys to sightsee, and Captain and Annie Ricketson even “ordered a hack and we went for a ride” several weeks after the birth and death of their child. Annie comments “I don’t know when I have enjoyed anything as I did that ride” (9/26/1871). They met the Dabneys; three generations of the Dabney family became U.S. Consuls, so they entertained whaling wives for several decades. The Dabneys’ gardens receive special praise, written in the typical tourist tropes described earlier. Elizabeth Morey called Faial “the most romantick place I ever saw” (8/8/1853), and twenty years later, Sallie Smith found the experience sublime: “impossible to describe the Plants and flowers I have seen” (12/2/1875). Clearly on Faial, the cultivated garden of the equally cultivated American consul was a very popular place for those privileged enough to visit and record their aesthetic appreciation.

If the U.S. Consul and the modernity of Faial made whaling wife visitors comfortable, those stopping at other islands within the Azores found them less pleasant, and the result is commentary laced with racism and condescension. Visiting Flores Island in 1853, Eliza Brock offers no panoramic landscape, focusing instead on the town, “dismal lonesome place the Houses mostly built of stone and Whitewashed out side streets narrow and plenty of Hogs running loose through them.” Put off by not understanding the language, she finds the local population equally strange, “the Ladies all Barefooted with short Cloaks and no Bonnets, only a Handkerchief tied over the head.” (Indeed, most whaling women show varying levels of disapproval for barefooted people.) Eliza and Captain Brock eat with the English Consul, and she predictably lists the dishes
served, as well as the foods purchased for the ship. She closes the entry with some truly odd praise for the inhabitants: “They seemed to be very kind to Strangers; the Women flocked around me the same as a swarm of Flies round a Molasses Hogshead, I could think of nothing else” (6/17/1853). Eliza’s unflattering portrayal of the Flores infrastructure and its kindly fly-like people affirms her own propriety as well as her perceptions of the United States, which apparently does not have loose hogs or barefoot women. Her emphasis is on difference and relative development, as her visit to the more modern Faial three days later confirms. Eliza “saw some very handsome Buildings it is far ahead of Floras in appearance; the Ladies wear Pico Hats, and long Cloaks.” While clearly an improvement, in Faial Eliza also “saw a great many Beggars about the streets” (6/19/1853). Better, but no Nantucket.

Two years later, Lydia Tuck is offended by Flores Island even before landing: “We have any number of Portuguese on deck trying to trade, and such a footering I never heard. It is complete Babel. Frank was very anxious that I should go ashore with him, but I felt as if I could enjoy myself better on board, than I could ashore, as I could not understand the language.” Like Eliza, the different language seems particularly offensive, but eventually Lydia does go ashore, where she describes herself as a minor celebrity:

the people had collected on the rocks, in great number to meet us, in spite of the rain. Some had fruit they wished to sell, some eggs, some vegetables, and some pigs. After sitting in the boat a short time, ‘the observed of all observers,’ I accepted the invitation of a man who could speak english, to go to his house. . . . Wherever we stopped, the people collected in crowds. They seemed to consider it a great honor, even to be
allowed to look upon me. They are a kind, hospitable people, but they are
extremely lazy, and ignorant. (9/2/1855)

Though more detailed than Eliza Brock’s account, Lydia echoes it. The women visit the
island only briefly, yet their narratives presume absolute synecdoche. The part seen
represents the whole; what they describe is all there is to see, and to see is to know. The
writer appreciates, judges, and reproduces her conclusions for others, but no other
perspective or understanding is possible. Lydia even sustains this seeing-man perspective
while serving herself as an object of scrutiny, but dictating the value of her own
objectification: it was “a great honor, even to be allowed to look upon me” (my italics).
Surely this must be the people’s reaction, even though she is only there “a couple of
hours” and “took a short walk about the village” alongside the only person with whom
she can communicate. Her description of the “lazy and ignorant” residents of Flores is
therefore more informed by racist preconceptions than any actual experience while there.

Many women similarly project preconceived judgments onto foreigners after only
brief contact, or even observations from a distance. Huge differences in geography have
little effect on the rhetoric. As Lydia Tuck sails by the other Azores Islands, she writes
confidently that “The inhabitants are generally, an ignorant, indolent, though a peaceable
set of people.” (9/22/1855). Though Mary Chapman’s ship also sailed past Cape Horn
she writes that the “rough and storm-beaten shores” are “a fitting country for the rude and
savage inhabitants who dwell there” (2/10/1857). A one-day visit to Salt Plains, Mexico
reveals to Susan McKenzie that its people “are a very indolent race and do not work
when they can help it” (2/12/1870). Occasionally, disparaging remarks accompany
evidence to the contrary. Writing about the people in Mangonui, New Zealand, Eliza
Williams concludes “They are mostly indolent, but raise beautiful potatoes and onions” (1/1859). To be sure, foreign islands and ports could be dangerous for various reasons, so it was not unwise to be wary. But for the most part, whaling women did not alter their judgments, regardless of their actual experiences.

The common terms “lazy” and “indolent,” are not only racist projections, but also signs of a framework of perception that makes imperialism possible. As Pratt points out, “Subsistence lifeways, non-monetary exchange systems, and self-sustaining regional economies are anathema to expansive capitalism. It seeks to destroy them wherever it finds them” (151). The women almost always pragmatically list the food growing and/or acquired at every location they visit. Fertile land not being cultivated to Euro-American standards is a common justification for imperialism, and though none of the women even mention American expansion, they assess foreign land from a capitalist perspective, judging what is produced against what could be. Since missionary involvement is also justified by the natives’ lack of “civilization,” terms such as “lazy” and “indolent” are hardly descriptive, but tropes that negate differences between individual places and people, all the while steadily asserting the superiority of Euro-American imperialism and evangelism, and ultimately the desirability of their dominance.

**The Sandwich/Hawaiian Islands**

Many islands the women visit after the Azores are also represented as romantic examples of beauty, often within seemingly benign (anti-conquest) accounts of natural resources and natives. The Hawaiian Islands, also known as the Sandwich Islands, were popular Pacific stopping points for restocking provisions and hiring recruits. While whaling wives “stopped shore” at several ports, the ports of Hilo on Hawai’i, Lahaina on
Maui, and especially Honolulu on O‘ahu hosted the greatest numbers of women. If they were pregnant, or if their husbands chose not to take them to the Arctic during the summer, many wives were left on shore—often unwillingly. In the November 17, 1852 issue of *The Friend*, Reverend Damon states that twenty-five captains’ wives were currently in Honolulu, and they joined with the many missionaries settled in Honolulu, Lahaina, and Hilo to create a social network of Americans calling on each other and sightseeing.

For some women, disorientation and shock were their initial response. Since Mary Lawrence had not stopped at either the Azores or Cape Verde Islands, Lahaina was her first foreign land, and her initial impressions stresses difference: “I looked in vain for resemblance to my own dear native land” (4/17/1857). But for those women who had stopped elsewhere, the beauty of Hawai‘i is invoked through the same sentimental rhetoric applied to the Azores. (And in fact, most women remained remarkably consistent stylistically throughout their voyaging.) For instance, Clara Whelden’s account of the Azores closely resembles her portrait of Lahaina. Long, romanticized descriptions of the “flowery” and “tropical” landscape never once mention the Hawaiians living there: “The more I attempt to picture the scenes and loveliness of – shall I say fairy-land – the fragrance of its air and blue of its sky, the more incapable I feel. But what has been done by literature of the world towards describing one day in the tropics?” (3/29/1868). Here, Clara not only deploys the common travel trope of “indescribable,” but locates the islands outside of reality. Honolulu is ahistorical, apolitical, and unpopulated—a fantasy. She fully becomes a “seeing-man,” appropriating and refashioning the city into her own dream world, while erasing everything and everyone else in the process. This reported
Honolulu is totally unaffected by decades of economic and religious Euro-American influence, because uninhabited Honolulu remains a paradise, offering itself, untainted, to visitors. And to writers. Placing her touristic fantasy within literary history paradoxically elevates Clara’s own status by suggesting the impossibility of her task.

Eliza Brock’s and Azubah Cash’s Hawai‘i descriptions include and omit the same details as their Azores entries. Eliza notes the markers of civilization encountered in “Mowee Harbor.” She counts sixty ships and lists the fresh provisions already acquired by sending a boat to shore. She describes native commerce—“two canoes alongside with watermelons and other things to sell, the harbor full of Canoes, going from one ship to another”—and a sentence records the “beautiful appearance” of the landscape complete with infrastructure—“huts along the shore” (11/8/1854). Azubah Cash jumps immediately into her social interactions in Hilo. Like the Dabneys of Faial, the missionaries Mr. and Mrs. Lyman and Mr. Coan, and Dr. Westmore as well, are “pleasant people” (4/20/1851). She had listed all the flowers and trees in the Dabneys’ gardens; in Hilo she notes the local fruit trees. Eliza Brock and Azubah Cash would follow the same pattern when describing the Bay of Islands, New Zealand, suggesting that the women not only had preconceptions about what they would encounter, but also what they should record.

As Azubah’s comments above suggest, the women tend to be very approving of the missionaries they met in Hawai‘i and throughout the South Pacific. New England’s missionaries and its whaling industry arrived in the Hawaiian Islands at almost the same time. The first whaling ships, the Balena of New Bedford and the Equator of Nantucket, arrived in Kealakekua Bay on the island of Hawai‘i in 1819; the first company of missionaries arrived nearby in 1820. In 1846, when Mary Brewster wrote about Hilo,
Lahaina, and Honolulu in the oldest extant whaling wives’ account of Hawai‘i, twelve companies of missionaries had arrived to the island chain, and that year alone 596 whaling ships visited (Gulick; Kuykendall 306). The women recorded their judgments of the missionaries and their works, including their preaching abilities. In this way religious meditation, a common subject in the journals, becomes a yardstick for measuring the benefits of missionaries, conversion, and general American “influence.”

Although not the first wife to visit, Mary Brewster’s journal entries are not only the oldest extant, but also the most extensive writings by whaling women about the Sandwich Islands. Her entries are often several pages long, and I will explore them at length. Much like Lucy Crapo, Mary describes natural phenomena with both romantic and empirical language. Her first comment, written in April 1846, frames her topic within Western exploration and “discovery”: “Early this morning we made the Island of Hawaii at which place Capt. Cook was killed” (4/19/1846). The next morning her journal entry begins with the landscape: “As far as my eye could see the Island was green and even down to the shore were trees. A large number of canoes were off, fishing quiet near whilst many were paddling round the ship examining the Tiger with great interest” (4/20/1846). On shore she quickly meets missionaries Mr. and Mrs. Titus Coan, Mr. and Mrs. David Lyman, Miss Marcia Smith, and Daniel Dole. The latter two are “both school teachers and belong to Honolulu. Mr. Dole has charge of the missionaries’ children Miss Smith attends to the domestic department. They are both agreeable in conversation and are well informed. so are all with whom I have met” (4/23/1846). But very soon, Mary is recording tensions between missionaries and their complaints about various settlers, while also praising and criticizing the different reverends as preachers.
The Brewsters remained in Hilo for a week, where Mary visits a missionary school for Hawaiian boys. “I should judge from what I saw that they had made considerable advancement and were quick to learn,” she writes: “as to their understanding I can only judge from what I see. Their apartments are very convenient and neat. Order reigned within and without” (4/22/1846). Mary not surprisingly praises the cleanliness and order, common ideals of the whaling women. Her assessment of the students’ education is, however, rather guarded. Though learning usually implies understanding, Mary does not seem so sure, leading to a subtle questioning of the Hawaiians’ cognitive abilities. This is the first of many paradoxical remarks Mary made during multiple visits to the Hawaiian Islands over three years, and while each entry on its own may not express her intended meaning clearly, when considered as a whole, the journal shows her negotiating between her preconceptions, and the conclusions she draws from a variety of experiences and interactions.

Mary’s first opinion of the Hawaiians is disappointment that the missionaries had not altered them more. On her first full day in Hilo, she “took a walk to see the country,” but is soon irritated by becoming an “object of curiosity to the natives” who gather in large numbers to see her: “I could bear it no longer for to me they are very disagreeable. I had expected to see them much farther advanced or sufficiently so as to be covered but instead of that not more than half seem to think dress is of importance” (4/21/1846). Like many other whaling wives, Mary staunchly objected to nudity and judged the people accordingly. But at church in Lahaina the following year, she condemned the native women for wearing too much: “They think much of dress and show and will indulge in sin and licentious conduct to procure articles of dress. Satins silks and the like are as
common here as calico is with the poorer classes at home. On a Sabbath every color may be seen” (5/9/1847). Clearly, one should not only be dressed, but in clothes appropriate to one’s gender and class. Many whaling wives strongly believed that outward appearance reflects the inner person. On the final page of the formal log kept by Betsy Tower (who gammed with Mary Brewster in December 1847), she wrote “‘be as you appear to be,’” and Betsy and Mary both believe that all women should adhere to this.

Mary’s contradictory responses to the Hawaiian people extend beyond their attire to include industry and piety. Several days after her first walk, Mary remarks that “Fruit and vegetables are easily raised and the constant rain affords them rapid growth,” leading her to conclude that “Hilo with a little labor could be much improved” (4/24/1856). But not apparently by Hawaiians. After viewing “some of the native huts and their inhabitants,” Mary writes that “sleeping, eating, and drinking is all they attend to. They are very indolent and do just enough to live from day to day. They are very filthy” (4/25/1846). With one glance and a long sentence, Mary dismisses a Hawaiian culture that unknown to her has multiple forms of art and entertainment, a stratified class system, and its own complex forms of government and regulations. Mary’s problem is clearly with subsistence, non-excessive production. Remember that she notes “a large number” of canoes fishing in the harbor, and in later visits she even praises the ingenuous watering systems for taro patches—without crediting Hawaiians for their designs. She also enjoys the berries natives assure her are safe to eat and a turkey cooked in an imu—an underground oven—yet never recognizes Hawaiian knowledge or industry. Her assessment of Hāna, Maui is capitalist—“I was astonished to see so much land uncultivated . . . they have no chance to sell produce if raised”—yet oblivious to the
contradictions produced by projecting her own standards: “They are a poor miserable set and their wants are few” (6/24/1847). As the seeing-man creating anti-conquest narratives, Mary does not advocate Euro-American imperialism, but she nonetheless justifies it by constantly describing resources as ignorantly unexploited, and by not recognizing native knowledge systems.

Not surprisingly, Mary endorses the missionary project. One Sabbath during her first trip to Hilo, she attends a “native meeting under the charge of Mr. Coan”:

The number present was about 600. The usual number is 1000 . . . . I could not help comparing their situation now with what it must have been when the missionaries first commenced the laborious task of trying to enlighten such depraved minds. Before me I could see that his labors had been blest and from heathen many became civilized and worhipers of God. I enjoyed the meeting much and felt it was delightful to meet with christians in a foreign land though of a different color and language. (4/26/1846)

Mary’s racism endures: the day before she had described as “indolent” and “filthy” the formerly “depraved minds” she now observes. But today she generously delights in meeting these “christians,” although their “different color and language” and their residence in a “foreign land” temper any sense of equality. Mary therefore disparages the Hawaiians for what makes them Hawaiian, and praises them for what comes closest to realizing the goals of the missionaries.

Mary’s egalitarian impulses are not on display, however, during a return to Hilo six months later. The clash between her pre-conceived ideas and what she actually encounters leads her into contradictory judgments—this time regarding an interracial
marriage. “A native wife spoils the whole and leaves a dark side to the place,” she observes before explaining that Mrs. Pitman, or Hawaiian Chiefess Kinoʻoleoliliha, “was educated by Mrs. Lyman and whose father was a chief in high repute with the king’s father and who had the burial of his bones and to this day it is not known where they were put. Her lands probably took his eye as much as her person which is very good looking.” Mary concludes that “By his marriage Mr. Pitman has great influence over the native population. . . . It is said they live happily together” (9/17/1846). Oscillating between cynicism and grudging approval, Mary herself seems to be struggling to reconcile her thoughts on interracial marriage with the couple she meets. But any hope that Mary is reiterating racist tropes as part of a progress toward a new opinion is dashed in Honolulu a year later, when she emphatically rejects interracial relations. She will not attend a ball thrown by Mr. Reynolds, because he is raising three Hawaiian-Caucasian girls, and Mary is “not much pleased with society of this kind and above all don’t like half caste individuals” (9/13/1847). Mary’s racial prejudice and her continued praise for missionary work inform all her accounts, displacing the paradox of the “empire of the home” that Kaplan identifies—a compulsion to expand a nation’s borders that coexists with a fear of foreign impact/association.

Though Mary’s refusal to attend the ball may seem to contradict her statement “when amongst romans do as they do,” the circumstances are very different. Mary did become Roman by agreeing to ride in a car pulled by Hawaiians, “it being the fashionable way for the ladies in this country.” Nor does she simply enjoy this custom of the dominant/colonizing class, but actually asserts that “my escorts seemed pleased with the privilege of drawing me” (4/30/1846). Readers troubled by the missionaries’ and the
whaling wives’ clear misuse of their position may perhaps find some comfort in the acts of resistance Mary describes, even when she does not recognize them as such. During a prolonged stay in Lahaina, Mary travels with her hosts Dr. and Mrs. Winslow and six American missionaries across the island of Maui to the eastern town of Hāna. On the journey’s second day, the natives refuse to carry Mrs. Whittlesey in her “mānele,” or sedan chair, any further, and simply leave, although the group is far from any town. An additional act of possible resistance involved the group’s extra clothing. Put into calabashes, it was supposed to be transported to Hāna by natives in a canoe, but it did not arrive in time, and the group saw it again only shortly before they returned to Lahaina.

Despite these actions, Hawaiians made it possible for Mary Brewster and the group to make the journey at all. The difficulties were formidable. It took a week to reach Hāna and ten days to return. Though they traveled on horses—including Mrs. Whittlesey after her carriers’ revolt—they often had to go on foot and at one point on “hands and knees” while leading their own horses, due to the terrain and weather conditions. They slept in tents, and one night in a traditional Hawaiian home, which Mary found “by far the best and neatest one I had been in . . . very large and clean for a kanaka” (6/29/1847). And yet, Mary does not acknowledge the extraordinary hospitality of the couple who let a group of foreign strangers sleep in their home at a moment’s notice, nor does she express any gratitude toward the natives aides who guided them throughout the journey, or the many strangers encountered along the way who helped them traverse difficult geographical features.

By the end of her final visit to the Hawaiian Islands, including multiple visits to Hilo, Lahaina, and Honolulu, Mary Brewster could almost have written a travel guide for
future whaling wives—and in fact, many of her descriptions read like one. On Hawai‘i, she visited “the farfamed Hiluwani Volcano” (Kīlauea) and “rainbow falls,” which she describes as “a beautiful spot and often visited by the missionaries and strangers are always directed to it” (9/24/1846; 4/24/1846). Like an informative tour guide, Mary not only describes the natural beauty, but also the geological forces creating rainbows and sulfur banks. A year later, Jane Gelett also wrote of visiting Kīlauea, and Azubah Cash frequently visits the Wailuku River and Rainbow Falls during her seven-month stay with the Lymans in Hilo in 1851. Although she did not visit the volcano herself, Azubah records that her thirteen-year-old son did during their stay in 1853. In Honolulu in 1847, Mary Brewster writes about hiking to the top of “punchbowl hill” for sunrise; in 1865, Augusta Penniman also reaches to the top of what she calls the “Devils Punch, bowl” (12/3/1865). Several whaling women record riding horses to the Pali lookout, and took day trips to Waikīkī, which, like the islands themselves, is spelled many different ways in the journals.

Just as they visit the same tourist attractions, many whaling women meet the same missionaries and other Americans living in Hawai‘i, and sometimes with different reactions. While Mary Brewster was very critical of Mr. Pitman’s interracial marriage to high chiefess Kīnoʻoleolili, neither Azubah Cash nor Elizabeth Morey seem disturbed by it. Azubah records going horseback riding with Mrs. Pitman in Hilo, but mentions neither her companion’s ethnicity nor her physical appearance (4/20/1851). And while Elizabeth Morey notes that Mr. Pitman “married a native for his wife,” she praises their children and forms a particular bond with Mrs. Pitman’s orphaned nephew, also of Hawaiian-Caucasian heritage (3/19/1854).
Mary Brewster’s disappointment with the missionaries’ progress is, however, echoed in later journals. “I have been much amused to see the natives swim in the surf, it seems as though it was their natural element,” Marianna Sherman writes of visiting Lahaina in 1849: “I also saw some sitting on the beach eating their poi and raw fish the Canacas are a lazy indolent class of beings, I expected to find them more civilized than they are here” (5/22/1849, her underline). Marianna’s condescension is typical of the whaling women’s journals. Eight year later, Mary Lawrence explains why the women held certain expectations regarding the missionaries’ progress.

I confess that I am disappointed in the appearance of the natives. They are not nearly so far advanced in civilization as I had supposed. Why, the good folks at home pretend to hold them up as a model from which we would do well to copy. I do not doubt but that there has been a great deal done for them, but there is a vast deal more to be done to raise them very high in the scale of morals. From what I saw and heard of them (and I made many enquires) they are low, degraded, indolent set. (4/20/1857)

While racist tropes abound here, Mary makes it clear that the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and other religious organizations back in New England were trumpeting the “success” of the companies they had sent abroad.

Mary Lawrence’s criticism actually circles back to her in print—both surprising and upsetting her. Fifteen months after her first visit to Hawai‘i, while gamming in the Arctic Ocean, Mary sees an article Reverend Samuel Damon published in The Friend that “purports to be my testimony in regard to the influence of missionaries. I recollect of telling Mr. Damon that I was very much disappointed in regard to the natives when I first
arrived at the Islands; they were not nearly so far advanced as I expected to see them.”

By the time of her next visit to Honolulu, her position had changed, “since I had been to the Marquesas Islands and seen the natives uncontaminated by missionary influence, I was compelled to acknowledge that, after all, the missionaries had done some good.”

Mary claims the article, “made me sad and caused me to shed a few tears because I think it places me in a false position” (7/25/58). Published April 1, 1858, the article had not stated Mary’s name, following instead the Victorian era’s standard elision: “Mrs. _____, wife of Captain ______, from _______ Massachusetts.” Furthermore, since the article states the same opinions as Mary’s clarification in her journal, it is hard to say which part of the article Mary felt to be false. And one final note: both Damon’s article and Mary’s journal entry use the peculiar term “uncontaminated” to refer to pre-missionary society, which from a post-colonial standpoint may be considered a parapraxis.

**Missionaries throughout Oceania**

Whaling ships visited islands with missionaries throughout the Pacific, Indian, and Atlantic Oceans. The missionaries would invite the captain and his wife to tea or to share a meal. The journals praised the piety and devotion of the missionaries; if there was a church, it would certainly be visited. Descriptions ranged from the “rude building set apart for the worship of God” that Susan McKenzie saw on Wellington Island (Mokil in Micronesia) in 1873 to Eliza Brock’s entry on Rarotonga (Cook Islands) in 1854: “went to see Mr Buzzacott’s new church; just finished built by the natives a very nice one, not quite equal to the Churches in America.” The application of America as a standard asserts the writer’s values and her nationality, without undermining her support even in the most unpromising cases, such as what Lydia Beebe encountered during a visit to West Papua:
Left Mansinam or Manasoury early this morning and I enjoyed myself better while there than in any of the other ports that we have been in.

There were missionaries there. Two of them had their wives, they were on board the ship a number of times and took tea with us and we also were at their homes they were very kind to us and I never shall forget them, my prayer is that God will be with them continually and that many souls may be saved through their labors, they feel at times most discouraged, one of the men has been there for ten years and as yet but one soul has been saved, but I pray God that “their faith fail not.” (5/27/1865)

Even as the travel entries became more concise in the last few decades of the nineteenth century, the women’s encouragement of missionaries continued. In the spring of 1895, Sophie Porter describes how the captains and wives were writing letters to raise money for establishing a mission and Mr. Stringer’s appointment as a permanent reverend on Herschel Island. Her entry describing the visit of Reverend Bishop Reeve, to whom the letters were sent, is cut out of the journal. Perhaps Sophie, or someone else, deemed the entry inappropriate.

While the length and detail of the women’s accounts of natives around the world vary, obfuscating the natives’ history and culture is a constant. Even when the women state they will describe customs, they do not. “Every place has its own way of doing things and I thought you would like to know how they do it at Tombez,” Lucy Crapo writes to her sister. She then describes the “only finished house,” dismissing the others as “reed or bamboo.” A full page of comments about the local dress follows: “they are not backward about shewing their breastworks . . . sacks worn in the morning are discarded at
midday” (9/27/1870). Then she returns to the account of the well-furnished home where she is staying. Nothing else—art, history, cultural practices—is mentioned. Elizabeth Morey’s “description of the manners and customs of the people” of Pitt Island proves to be her account of visiting the home and garden of the Hunt family. The Hunts were English settlers, although Elizabeth’s comment, “she could speak verry good English,” suggests she is oblivious to her hosts’ origin (1/17/1854). While in the Bering Straits, Elizabeth Waldron expresses interest in the local people: “Capt. Norton came the one that lost his ship here last fall and wintered with the Indians. I would liked to have asked him some questions concerning them, their habits, manners and customs, but I did not have time.” Though Elizabeth had already encountered the “quantity of Indians here the past week” (8/21/1853), her descriptions never go beyond physical appearance. Here for example are the Arctic natives: “one had on a dress made of feathers. their outside dresses are worth looking at” (7/17/1853). Communication was a barrier, of course, and most women recoiled from language differences: “jabber” and “babel” are common terms. And the brevity of the women’s visits to most islands—a couple of hours for trade, and usually without disembarking—hindered any real sense of the host culture.

These impediments, however, did not affect the women’s judgments of just how civilized a culture was. The assumed baseline was barbarity. Besty Tower predictably writes of natives of Savage Island that “they were savage looking fellows and I was glad to see them off[f]” (12/11/1849), and while in West Papua, Lydia Beebe reports “The natives are a wild looking set” (5/27/1865). Assessments of progress are largely based on the native’s attire. Descriptions may include hair and skin color, but dress (or undress), as well as jewelry or other adornment are the focus. In general, less nudity means a more
positive description. Elizabeth Waldron writes approvingly of new recruits hired from Rotuma Island: “they have washed themselves and cut and combed their hair and got some clothes, so they look a little more respectable and like human beings” (3/14/1853). Outward appearance is assumed to reflect internal temperament. Even when the women met royalty—Eliza Brock on Rarotonga, Elizabeth Waldron on Strong’s Island (Kosrae, Micronesia), Eleanor Baker on New Ireland (Papua New Guinea)—there is no apparent interest in social stratification, customs, or rule. The women confine their accounts to the king’s or queen’s attire and adornment. What is described is all there is to see, and seeing is knowing. The writer observes, judges, and reproduces for others, with little sense that there may be more to the people and culture than can be learned at a glance.

Mary Lawrence’s journal contains some of the few exceptions. In places where she stays for several days, she does inquire about local customs. In February 1858, the Addison spends six days in the harbor of Magdalena, or Fatu Hiva, in the Marquesas. Mary’s preconceived notions made her feel “somewhat anxious in regard to going among those wild savages” (2/9/1858), but she is reassured by the presence of a native missionary and native teacher, and by an English-speaking local who protects the ship, preventing theft. The local customs Mary describes, including taboos and gender relations, are presumably learned from them. Yet even as she records these details, she describes the people as “frightful-looking creatures,” and she judges their appearance by her own standards, and their behavior by western notions of commerce, though she recognizes there is a local system of exchange. According to Mary, “everyone has a friend here. That means among them, ‘Me give you, you give me’” (2/10/1858). Mary supplies calico to the wives of the missionary and the ship protector, makes dresses for
their children, and gives one of her dresses to the King’s wife. Yet when he asks Mary’s husband to be his friend, Mary declares, “He is a great beggar, and I dislike him more than any that I have seen. They are all great thieves; nothing can be left within their reach that they will not take” (2/13/1858). Mary notes the local systems of exchange, but does not accept them, nor consider how the complex history of trade, coercion, and conquest in the Pacific might be affecting cultural interactions.

The biggest cultural interaction that would have taken place in these brief visits is trade. As Paul Lyons argues, “The pervasive language of Islanders as friendly (hospitable) or hostile (fearsome) pivots on the success or failure of commercial relations and a constitutive ignorance about indigenous institutions” (50). While mentions of actual threat are rare in the whaling women’s journals, the wives are clearly happier when the natives remain in their canoes, rather than coming aboard. Susan Veeder decides the natives of the Arctic are “harmless and honest all they wanted was tobacco needles and knives,” for which they “brought a few fish and teeth and some skins” (6/26/1851). Eleanor Baker has a similar experience in the South Pacific: “This morning was off Byron’s Island [part of Kiribati] and any amount of canoes came off to the ship. They were very friendly and brought some fowls hats and cocoanuts to trade” (7/31/1858). Lucy Crapo combines her fear of theft with her dislike of foreign languages when she describes “15 native boats along side, filled with half-naked and half-starved creatures, who in their eagerness to get a large share of the whale meat, mingling their bad ‘Portuguese’ and worse English, make a complete Babel. One can but pity them even though they be indolent and as one said of them years ago, every finger a fish-hook, and their hands a grapnel” (4/15/1866). Even her acts of kindness are couched in terms of
contempt. Finding “a 3 year old naked boy shivering with the cold,” Lucy and her
husband “took him into the house, and wrapped him up, and fed him. . . . I made him a
suit of clothes, for a covering. I presume the first suit of clothes he ever had, and perhaps
his last, as many of them go entirely naked, and worse than that half-starved to say the
least” (4/20/1866).

Many women respond to aggressive trade with contempt. Like Mary Lawrence in
Fatu Hiva, Lucy Smith reports about natives off the coast of Africa, that “after putting a
string around your neck they claim you for Chummie tell you their name, and . . . they
will give you whatever they have pineapples, coconuts, tamarind, banana . . . . I told them
all I did not want a chummie” (9/15/1870). In her later memoir, she adds “had I not heard
what might be expected . . . I certainly would have been more frightened than amused”
(“My Adventures Afloat” 4). Annie Ricketson is more accepting of local forms of
exchange. On the Salibaboo Island (Indonesia), “When they bring a present, they expect
one in return. If you do not give them something, they will ask. I gave her [the queen]
several little presents that amounted in value to as much as she brought me” (3/1872).
Note however that while Annie follows the local custom, she assesses the results in a
characteristically capitalist manner.

Because the whalers often traded for curiosity items as well as provisions, the
whaling museums in Nantucket and New Bedford are full of cultural artifacts from
around the world collected on whaling and other voyages throughout the nineteenth
century. Eliza Ann McCleave even turned a room in her Nantucket home into an
admission-charging museum of “curios” collected by her captain husband (Newell). And
yet, while the women list provisions taken in, they tend not to mention personal
collections, other than perhaps a few seashells gathered. There are of course exceptions. Writing from Russia’s Kamchatka Peninsula on the Bering Sea, Susan McKenzie reports that natives “brought some rude specimens of their carving which will be quite a treat to our friends at home” (6/17/1870), and Adaline Heppingstone, the captain’s daughter, records that “Today the Esquimauxs came on board from Diomedes Island and we bought some boots and a little ivory” (6/1/1882). In Adaline’s case, one wonders just how much a “little” ivory was, since a later interview with her mother identifies the family as having one of the largest collections in New Bedford. Lucy Crapo, a collector of natural specimens, notes that merchant marine Captain Menges’s wife has “quite a curiosity shop. She said her cabin would look like a junk shop when she got home” (4/17/1879). Laura Jernegan’s collection of pressed seaweed is part of the collection at the Martha’s Vineyard Museum. Some women also write of receiving exotic gifts from other captains, which certainly form part of their collections. Like scrimshaw, however, these acquisitions seem to have been taken more for granted rather than meticulously recorded in the journals.

Several women also recognize themselves as objects of curiosity. Although they generally present themselves as non-heroic, several women display a certain pride in claiming to be the “first white woman” ever to visit islands. The earliest such claim, not surprisingly, comes from the writer of the earliest extant journal. Visiting what she calls “Tower Island,” a few days’ sail from the Island of Timor, Mary Russell writes, “I believe I was the first European female that ever set foot on it” (6/28/1824). Visiting Timor Island itself a few weeks later, she describes, “crowds of people had assembled on the beach to witness the uncommon spectacle, the sight of an English woman. . . . a white
man was no novelty, but a female created a wonderful commotion” (7/7/1824). In 1853, off Rotuma Island, Elizabeth Waldron writes of the stir she and her children created amongst the natives who had come on deck: “they appeared to be very much pleased with the baby and was looking down in the cabin through the side lights all day. the first white picaniny I suppose they ever saw” (3/13/1853). Visiting Pitt Island in the Chatham Islands, which were already inhabited by an English family, Elizabeth Morey declares with some national pride that as the first “American woman . . . I was as much of A curiosity to them as they was to me.” A few months later, she was able to claim herself the first “white woman” to visit an unidentified Society Island (1/17/1854; 2/19/1855). On ships captained by their husbands, and without control over their experiences, several women do nonetheless construct themselves briefly as explorers and discoverers—and marvels—in a particularly masculine, colonial manner.

**Travel Narrative Anomalies**

I will close this chapter by considering some apparent anomalies within the whaling women’s journals that upon close examination ultimately conform to the prevalent values and generic conventions of nineteenth century travel writing. Throughout her voyage, Elizabeth Morey names and sketches “curious rocks.” In this way, Duneer argues, “she appropriates the male tradition of naming, adding an interesting sympathetic twist on the ‘monarch-of-all-I-survey’ imperialist claim” (*The Steamboat* 65). This imperialist naming may be unique to Morey, but her descriptions tend to relate these “foreign” objects to familiar things from home—a common trope of western explorer literature (Pratt 200). Of one rock, she writes, “I could compare it to nothing but a statue of a woman clothed in deep morning partly leaning over two tomb stones below,”
and as for rock “No 2 I named it Gothic rock it so much resembles a small gothic
church” (1/17/1854). Although one of the most unschooled of the whaling wives--Druett
calls her “incurably naive” (116)—Morey is nevertheless the woman who most
unabashedly considers herself to be an explorer and discoverer.

The women generally downplay any danger encountered in the foreign locations
they visited, and except for regretting the introduction of alcohol, they seldom mention
the damage western civilization has brought to indigenous populations. Susan Veeder’s
journal, one of the earliest, provides accounts of both. In November 1849 the ship
_Nauticon_ came across an island whose population Captain Veeder was unfamiliar with.
Although they need provisions, he decides not to risk his ship or his family, and does not
stop there. Conversely, in a rare example of discussing possible violence to the natives,
Susan Veeder writes of their visit to Krusensterns Island, where several men had
deserted:

to day the Capn went on shore to see if the men had been apprehended but
he did not hear anything from them the Isld is small and but 12 natives on
it so he told the natives he should return in a few days and if they had not
cought them he should take away their pigs and burn their houses
accordingly in three days he returned as soon as they see the ship they set
a flag and made a fire to let us know that they had caught them.

(3/27/1850)

Susan Veeder’s neutral tone in recounting this threat may suggest complicity, or perhaps
a decision not to question her husband’s actions. Like most husbands, Captain Veeder is
only occasionally mentioned in Susan’s journal, and nothing suggests he is capable of
such violence. Nor do Susan’s sea journal or her later land diary suggest marital
 troubles. In her land journal she marks the months and years he has been gone without
 melancholy, but this fits Susan’s pragmatic tone in both her journals.

 Captain Veeder, however, never returned from this last voyage. As revealed by a
 journal kept by a young sailor on Veeder’s last voyage, the captain fell in love with his
 Polynesian mistress who he brought onboard, and he also became an alcoholic and
 abusive to his crew, who turned him over to the American consul in Tahiti, despite
 Veeder’s request to be “taken back to Barclay’s Island with his mistress and 100 barrels
 of oil” (Tyler 36). He died some years later in Tahiti. Both the threats Susan Veeder
 describes and Veeder’s later behavior are certainly consistent with what we know of
 nineteenth century whalers, but among the subdued, even pious, accounts of whaling that
 appear in the women’s journals and letters, they are unique.

 Finally, I turn to the previously mentioned letter that was written by a young
 woman in Ponape to her father-in-law in Martha’s Vineyard, probably in early 1890.
 Though the original is in her native language, the “literal translation” by her husband,
 Henry Worth, that accompanied it displays the complex paradox of personal agency and
 western missionary and colonial values many Pacific Islanders experienced. Although
 authors Emma Mayhew Whiting and Henry Beetle Hough identify the woman as Lipei
 Naij, she presents herself as Elisabeth Worth.

 Good day Sir Father

 Here am I Elisabeth the girl that is married to your son Henry. I do
 hope that you will not feel very bad because he does not return to you for I
 trust you will meet together sometime in Paradise for he is a Christian
now, when he first came among us, he did not like to go to church, but after a while he went in a vessel to Guam, and then we used to pray for him, not only myself, but a good many others that he might become a Christian we praise God that he quickly heard and answered our prayers, for when he came back he was a changed man. then we were married and baptised when the Morning Star [a missionary ship] came here. Mr Doane went in her on a visit to other islands and Henry takes his place here at Oua. now we want you all to pray for us that we may hold out to the end. we have given up our trading for we are tired of it, for we did not make much, there are lots of foreigners we [who?] want to give Henry work trading for them. but we do not wish it, for we are trying to work for Jesus, we wish God to give us a good work in this coming year, we also wish it to continue. Now Henry will interperet my letter for I do not know how to write English. He tells me that you send your regards to me and it makes me happy to hear it. I like to hear about you all. I now send my regards to you all, and if we never meet in this life we will hope to in the next, now I have written this for you to see how we wriet and spell in Ponape, and the only thing I am afraid of is that it will not reach you safely.

I remain yours Elisabeth Worth

Preserved in Massachusetts, the translation of Elisabeth’s/ Lipei’s letter supplies a paradoxically complicit counterpoint to the appropriating anti-conquest narratives of the whaling women. Fully converted to Christianity, her letter tells the story of her fulfilled desire that Henry would accept Christianity as well. And yet, while in concert with the
missionary project, even through translation “Elisabeth” reveals her agency in shaping her husband’s future by making his conversion a requirement for marriage, and by apparently shaping his career choices as well. On such a possibility, the whaling wives were silent.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has explored how the women’s travel narratives describe the natural and the cultural phenomena they encountered, and the meanings they ascribed to them within the journals’ rhetoric. The women drew on two available yet dissimilar genres in describing flora and fauna: empiricism and romanticism. Though seemingly anti-conquest, empirical descriptions often suggested how such natural resources could be consumed or otherwise appropriated by more industrious westerners. Romantic language, often suggesting the sublime of nature, becomes evidence of God, who is uncompromisingly Christian and often American. Evaluation from a position of moral and cultural superiority shapes the women’s descriptions of foreign communities as well. Again deploying anti-conquest language, they juxtapose accounts of natural resources with condescending descriptions of the natives, making clear both the resource potential and the need for American influence. The vague accounts of various cultures, often employing the same well-worn terms for very different people, provides little insight into the foreign, but a great deal into how writing, even by withdrawn and submissive figures, still constructs American culture as inherently superior in terms of land usage, civility, and religion. Foreigners receiving any praise are therefore those seen as amenable to missionaries or, more pragmatically, happy to trade with the whaling ship; however,
Elisabeth/Lipei’s letter shows a native woman negotiating western influence, converting to Christianity but complying to western women’s subordination.
Chapter Four: Close Readings

This chapter provides an in-depth look at two of the more notable journals and several memoirs. Eliza Brock’s journal, written between 1853 and 1856 closely follows the patterns of description, genre, and rhetoric outlined in the previous chapters. But Brock supplies more detailed log data and many more poems than most women, allowing us to see in a single journal how the various genres and representations create a distinctive intertextuality. The second text, a partial journal covering thirteen months between 1823 and 1824, and therefore the earliest extant journal by over two decades, was kept by Mary Hayden Russell. Captain and Mrs. Russell were American emigrants who resided in England and sailed English whaleships; as a result, her entries are very different in tone and rhetoric than her later, American “sister sailors”’ journals would be, showing how specific ideological constraints and rhetoric are to a time and place. Finally, I turn to some memoirs that women wrote decades after voyaging to see if a different set of constraints on the format and function of representation come into play, given their composition at a time when the whaling industry was almost entirely defunct. I also consider the function of memory in creating a memoir, as opposed to writing daily records in a journal.

Log Data and Poetry: Eliza Brock

Eliza Spenser Brock commenced her only whaling voyage in 1853 on the ship Lexington. She was forty-three years old; Peter C. Brock was forty-eight and had already

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11 The last known woman’s whaling journals are Charlotte Church’s formal logs, kept during voyages into the early 1910s.
captained three successful voyages. Both Eliza and Peter came from multi-generational Nantucket whaling families. In fact, Eliza’s great-grandfather was Peter’s grandfather. Peter and Eliza had four children, the first born five months after Brock departed on his first voyage as captain. Brock met his eldest child when Oliver was two months shy of his third birthday. Brock left to captain his second voyage eleven days before his second child, Lydia, was born on July 16, 1837. She was almost four when he returned. The Brocks’ third child, William, was born in 1847, a year after Peter returned from his third captainship. Although he was previously home for less than a year between voyages, this time he remained for six years, and Eliza gave birth to a fourth child, Joseph Chase. Only Joseph accompanied his parents to sea in 1853, when he was five-years-old. Oliver had already begun his career as a sailor, and while it is not surprising that Lydia, in her mid-teens, stayed at home with relatives, why the Brocks did not also bring their third child, seven-year-old William, is something of a mystery. Nantucket historian Betsy Tyler suggests the Brocks may have wanted him to begin school. Nonetheless, it was not unusual to leave children at home, or to bring only the youngest.

Why Peter Brock decided to captain a voyage after a six-year hiatus is unclear, and Eliza’s journal does not explain why she accompanied him. No professions of wifely devotion appears in the three years of daily entries; she did however paste a short newsprint article about forgiveness, the “most divine and generous picture of virtue,” onto the cover page of her journal, just below her handwritten poem bidding a sad farewell to home. While the clipping encourages speculation, Eliza never explains it. Perhaps she was persuaded to sail by the new “fashion” of wives accompanying their captain husbands—a fashion emerging in the years following Captain Brock’s most
recent return. Fourteen Nantucket wives had set out on whaling voyages in the previous six years; two more would sail within two months of Eliza’s departure. In all, thirty-four Nantucket women or women married to Nantucket captains sailed on at least forty-one voyages between 1847 and 1877. Most Nantucket wives actually sailed out of other ports. The whaling industry may have been at the height of its “golden age,” as many historians refer to it, but when Eliza and Peter departed in 1853, Nantucket’s port had been in a decline since the 1820s, due to a sandbar that prevented new and larger ships from entering the harbor. The last whaling ship voyage embarked from Nantucket in 1869.

Eliza’s journal commences on May 21, 1853, as the ship is “Lying at the Wharf at Edgartown,” from whence it departed. In June the \textit{Lexington} reaches its first foreign port at Azores Islands, followed by the Cape Verde Islands. From there it rounded the Cape of Good Hope, sailing across the Indian Ocean to reach the sea above New Zealand by December. For the next two years the ship sailed the North and South Pacific Oceans, sighting and/or stopping at dozens of islands including the Kermadec Islands, the Cook Islands, and Guam, before spending May through October in the Okhotsk Sea, located off Siberia. Following the summer season, the \textit{Lexington} stopped in the Sandwich Islands, before returning to the South Pacific. After completing the annual route a second time, the \textit{Lexington} sailed from Honolulu to Cape St Lucas (Baja), then south again to the Society Islands before heading home. The last stop in the Pacific was at Talcahuano, Chile, before rounding Cape Horn in April 1856 and finally arriving home in Nantucket in June 1856 with 310 barrels of sperm oil, 1,657 barrels of oil from other whales, and almost twenty thousand pounds of whalebone.
Eliza’s journal follows the conventions of an official ship’s log—from the two titles on the cover page and above the first entry, to the headings indicating the ship’s name and direction on every page thereafter. Her daily entries read exactly like an official log, providing the technical details—weather, rigging, employment of the crew, and ships sighted. She closes entries with the latitude and longitude. This log data appears in every entry except her travel narratives, written when visiting ports, but ten days into the voyage Eliza begins including personal accounts as well. Her first self-reference appears on June 1, when she remarks that it was a “lonesome day,” and closes the entry by stating “have not been on deck to day, have whiled away the time in Reading, writing and knitting; one sail in sight.” Eliza may have been familiar with sailing terminology, but this particular entry also reveals the captain was providing her the technical details that she would not have witnessed from the cabin, such as “double reefed Topsail and Foresail at 7 PM.”

Eliza’s journal slowly adds more personal information as she begins to record her daily activities—sewing, knitting, reading—in addition to those of the sailors. On Friday, June 3, 1853, she comments on the difficulty of maintaining a daily record—“ship rooles about so much it is quite hard work for me to write”—a complaint she makes many times after, though her penmanship remains perfect, with no ink blots or stray marks. On Sunday, June fifth, she mentions the Sabbath for the first time: “oh how I miss my meeting and Sabbath school where I have spent so many hours[?].” After describing the weather later that day, Eliza adds several more devotional sentences—the first of many pious entries that come to dominate the personal contents of her journal, particularly on Sundays. The Sabbath is also a time for expressing homesickness. Frequently calling the
religious services “privileges” that she is “denied,” she writes of missing friends and family who are likely attending, though never naming anyone specifically. She also occasionally bemoans the lack of news from home. Her first letters reach her on August 10, 1854, fifteen months into the voyage.

Eliza rarely writes about her children—neither those in Nantucket or at sea, nor the son she has with her. During the first six months of her voyage, she only mentions her children three times, and then in the most general of contexts: “thinking about my home and children” (8/5/1853). Though Eliza does not record anyone’s birthday for two years, her daughter’s eighteenth birthday inspires perhaps the most maternal entry: “This is Lydia G Birth Day, Eighteen years of her life has passed away; Twenty six months have passed and gone since I last saw her, and my dear little William, but though absent from them; their Images are vivid in my fond heart” (7/16/1855). Six months later, she writes about her eldest son, “My dear Sailor Boy,s Birth Day twenty Two years old; if living and a wander,er like his Mother upon the wide Ocean; five long years have passed away since I last saw him . . . and yet many more long weary months will lapse before we meet again; and perhaps never. life is uncertain; may heaven,s blessings rest upon him” (1/13/1856). William’s birthday is never mentioned, and Joseph Chase’s only once, even though he is on the ship with her. But then, Joseph Chase only appears in the journal when taken on the boat to shore with his father or when he is sick. From the brief entries already mentioned, and from her excitement at receiving letters from home, Eliza clearly loved and missed her children. Nonetheless, she adheres to an understood journal-writing practice that children are rarely mentioned, even as she fervently and frequently wrote about longing for Sabbath meetings.
Like other whaling women, Eliza generally records news of whaling shipwrecks and the deaths of captains and wives with surprisingly little emotion or personal reflection. But she documents an unusually high number of tragedies, and at times does express distress. In late May and June of 1855 alone, Eliza records the loss of seven ships, the unrelated deaths of three captains, and the disappearance of two fully manned whale boats. “[A]ll hands saved,” she reports regarding the first two ship losses; she makes no other commentary, although one of the ships had been “in company,” or partnered, with the *Lexington* the year before, and she had enjoyed gams with the captain. The following day, June 1, Eliza learns of the loss of another ship, and of the deaths of three captains due to illness. Two were Nantucket captains, whose wives and children were accompanying them. Eliza probably knew Charlotte Ackley and Margaret Upham, and writes that Mrs. Upham and her son would return home in the *Gazelle*, but Mrs. Ackley, her two children, and her husband’s remains would be on the *President*. Though she observes, “this is a long detail of bad news more than I have ever recorded before at one time,” in closing the entry Eliza expresses no sympathy, and elides the difficulties the women will likely face in their journeys home. And indeed, the *President* is the seventh ship Eliza reports lost that month, though Charlotte and her children do finally make it back to Nantucket on the ship *Canton* (*WSL* XIII.17 130). Margaret Upham and her son also had much more difficulty than Eliza’s entry anticipates. The *Gazelle* did not return home directly, and a later account states Mrs. Upham and her young son, “enduring much hardship and escaping many perils, made the return journey by way of San Francisco and the Panama route” (Hurd 134).
Later in the month Eliza records the loss of two ships in the Okhotsk, each with a wife aboard. Both ships had run aground in the fog, and in both cases, “all saved.” Sailing in the same dangerous conditions, Eliza reflects on her own vulnerability as well as her grief. Writing about the loss of the *Jefferson* [II], she states, “Mrs Hunting Capt Wife was with him so much bad news makes me feel sad. I know not whose turn it next may be, as likely mine as anyone; but however I will not borrow trouble for it comes fast enough; that we all know; an alwise God ordereth all things aright, his footsteps are on the sea as well as on land” (6/26/1855). Recognizing the precariousness of her own situation, Eliza declares her faith in God’s preordination, a common affirmation within the whaling women’s journals. The very next day, however, she records more distressing news: “Capt Peirson,s wife of Ship Edgar; after the Ship struck on the Rocks, in attempting to get into the Boat, to be lowered down slipped and fell overboard, she was taken on board Ship Montazuma unsensible; is now very sick, had not spoken for three days.” Eliza makes comment, but given the constancy of her piety, she probably again turned to religion to make sense of the news.

Like other whaling women, Eliza records whales caught and oil procured, and she is very invested emotionally and economically in the success of the voyage. The first six months were very unprofitable, and she is as anxious as any sailor: “Forty nine days from home, and no Sperm Oil as yet, have not seen the spout of a Sperm Whale the passage off” (7/9/1853;) “three months to day since we sailed and no oil yet” (8/21/1853); “almost seven months out without any Oil; enough to discourage us; but I will hope for the best” (12/2/1853). The *Lexington* had caught “blackfish,” or pilot whales, while near the Azores Islands in June, but this small species produces neither the quantity nor the
quality of the highly valued sperm oil. Nevertheless, Eliza writes that catch and processing was “quite a sight to me that never see anything of the kind before” (6/24/1853). Although she does not describe what she sees, she echoes many other women in her wonder at the procedure. In December of 1853, the Lexington finally caught its first sperm whale. Eliza records this and marks the entry with the traditional whale stamp. She will use it when recording the next sperm whale catch, and two pages toward the back of her journal are devoted to whale stamps recording whales caught and lost (a stamp only of the tail) in the Okhotsk Sea in 1854 and 1855. Her account of the first sperm whale catch includes two observations common to most whaling women’s journals. First, she notes the disparity in labor between the genders: “have been on deck all day watching others work” (12/21/1853). Second, she acknowledges the difficulties of the profession: “the whailemen earn their money if any class of men do, by hardships; they toil early and late, exposed to great dangers in taking whales” (12/23/1853).

Eliza does not describe fauna at sea—an exception is what is probably a beluga whale in June 1855—but she occasionally becomes rather poetic about the weather, noting “dark stormy Clouds scowling over the sailors anxious head” (10/5/1853). While she occasionally comments on a “beautiful moonlight evening” she tends to find the weather “dreary” and difficult seas “boisterous.” The weather clearly affects her overall mood: “I like being at sea first rate in plesant weather, but in a Storm had much rather be at home” (1/14/1854). This is one of Eliza’s very few claims that she is even content on the ship, a remark most women make at least once. At her most lyrical, however, Eliza works the weather into her devotion:
I have seen little good weather in my wandering, on the mighty deep but have seen many things that call to mind that passage of scripture, they that go down to the sea in ships that sail on the great waters, these are they that see the works of God and his wonders in the deep. (1/10/1855)

Here Eliza recalls Psalm 107 to endow the bad weather and the voyage itself with religious significance.

Though attentive to log data and to expressions of religious nostalgia on Sundays, unlike most women Eliza does not include detailed descriptions of gams or special meals served at sea. Following the protocol of official logs, she records ships spoken and visited, the number of months out, and the oil procured. Her first social encounter occurred on June 9, 1853 in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean, when the Lexington “spoke the Bark Fortune of Marseilles bound to Harvre France” from the West Indies. The Lexington gave the French merchant ship bread—“they had not had any for twenty days”—while the Fortune sent Eliza “Wine, Cologne, and a Parrott and Joseph Chase a Monkey.” Her first gam was October 28, 1853, when the captain of a Nantucket ship came aboard for tea. Since women only went aboard ships that carried another lady, her first gam could have been with Mrs. Little in the Arctic. But Eliza writes, “too cold for me to go, I regret it very much” (5/24/1854). Two days later, however, Captain, Mrs. Little, and child came on board the Lexington, which she notes without emotion or further narrative.

Eliza offers more information about social encounters ashore. In Lahaina, Honolulu, and the Bay of Islands, Eliza lists the social calls she makes and receives. In Lahaina Eliza “met with many old acquaintances”—she welcomed the familiar faces, but...
also the news and letters from home (11/19/1855). In the Bay of Islands in February 1855 she was particularly happy to see Mrs. Grant, a fellow Nantucket resident, and “a very fine woman, on that I dearly love” (2/26/1855). Since Mrs. Grant was six months from home, she has lots of news, and Eliza calls on her several times, including on February 26, when she finds Mrs. Grant and her newborn doing well. (Following standard journal practices, Eliza had not mentioned the pregnancy.) She also writes of encountering Hiram Swain, a young sailor from Nantucket who was “one of Olivers and Lydia G school mates” (2/16/1855). Her journal therefore documents a widespread network of New England whalers, who encountered each other at remote locations in the center of the whaling grounds. This displaced society not only brought comforts during otherwise lonely voyages, but may have influenced the women’s decisions to accompany their husbands.

This network expanded as the women befriended new whaling wives, missionaries, and consuls. In Rarotonga in the Cook Islands in March 1854, Eliza “stoped at the missionary House, Rev Mr Buzzacotts had a very pleasant visit stayed there two days found them to be very fine folks; very pious people.” In addition to their daughter Sarah, the Buzzacotts were educating two young daughters of missionaries in Samoa, and in “Upola, Samoa or the Navigator Islands” a year later, Eliza laments not being able to visit a “Mr Hardie, the missionary” as she is “well acquainted with Mr Hardies Daughters, they are at Rarotonga at school. I have seen them at the missionarys, Mr Buzacotts” (3/27/55). Through such connections and encounters, a community of travelers and settlers develops, and as the time passed, the increasing presence of missionaries throughout the Pacific also supported the captains’ wives on their voyages.
Eliza’s accounts of the inhabitants of the various islands and ports she visits, however, emphasize difference. In language similar to many other whaling women, she assumes American superiority, while failing to acknowledge differences between the nationalities and cultures she encounters. This perspective does not change during the three-year voyage. Animal imagery is common. In Flores in June 1853, the women are “swarm of flies”; in Tonga in November 1853 and in Rarotonga in March 1854, the “natives” are “on Deck as thick as Bees”; in the Bay of Islands in February 1855, natives “go up and down the side of the Ship just like Cats.” Such people are frightening, incomprehensible, and agreeable. “Tonga natives are a hard looking set, almost naked. it is quite amusing to hear them jabbar and talk their Lingo, they are very friendly towards the white people” (11/3/1853), Eliza observes, and the same goes for Samoa: “the Natives are a wild looking set, almost naked, but are very friendly towards white people” (3/27/55). The similarity of the people’s physical features and amiability elides all differences between them. “Jabbar” describes the several foreign languages she encounters; “hard looking” and “wild” cover all potentially dangerous and primitive people, and “friendly” gets added in response to successful trade.

Significantly, Eliza saves her strongest condemnation for Catholicism, witnessed during a festival on Guam.

This one of the worst places I have ever seen any where. All Spaniards rigid Roman Catholicks, the people a sickly looking set the Catholicks were keeping good Friday saw, the processions through the streets, their images they carry, they are all very large; our blessed Savior of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, St Josephs St John Christ in the tomb his resurrection;
Oh what poor deluded mortals . . . . I turned away . . . . It is a fine place for wood and water and that is all I can say in its favour; the natives are an ignorant indolent set of beings their wants are few; it is a matter of wonder to me how they live at all; females almost naked; children the same.

(4/15/54)

Here Eliza offers not only a moral display of her Protestant sensibilities, but an implied argument about the role of Western religion in the Pacific. The Spanish are “rigid” and perhaps “a sickly looking set,” which probably explains why the natives are “ignorant” and “indolent.” Indeed, Eliza’s paradoxical claim that the people are “indolent,” but “their wants are few” recalls Mary Brewster’s very similar statement about native Hawaiians, revealing the wives’ general and unconscious complicity with capitalist practices and their abhorrence of non-accumulative cultures. Eliza does praise the natural resources available in Guam, but complains about the costs: “everything here very dear, eggs 25 Cent Dozzen; milk 25 cent per Bottle recruits very scarce” (4/18/54). Certainly, Eliza is a capitalist, with all the contradictions that entails.

While consistently recording goods procured at each island and port, her descriptions of landscapes are brief, though always noting if the land is green, forested, mountainous, and/or rocky. As the anti-conquest seeing man, through “benign and abstract appropriation,” she identifies various “resources to be developed, surpluses to be traded, and towns to be built” (Pratt 37, 59). Eliza both describes and appropriates the Okhotsk Sea with romantic terms: “the ice floats slowly along two thirds under water; it looks beautiful, in the Rays of the Sun, as white as alabaster or Snow, in all Shapes, some of the Pieces reminds me of Italian Immages or Marble Statues” (5/25/54). Once more
performing the seeing man’s narrative, Eliza’s adjectives and comparisons are all Western and cultured, perceiving uninhabited, extreme landscape through the Italian renaissance.

In the second half of her voyage, however, Eliza begins incorporating poetry into her daily entries, and the journal’s final pages are filled with approximately forty poems. Though several commentators have claimed that many of these poems are original, as more literature and publications become digitalized, and poems become easier to search for and identify, it becomes clear that Eliza wrote few, if any, of the poems, hymns, or song lyrics found her journal. At first, if an entry left a few extra lines open on the page, she would fill them with a psalm or other pious, inspiring words. The first poem found within an entry appears on December 15, 1854, when she copies a stanza of “The Meeting of Ships” by Thomas Moore, although without identifying the author or source. On New Year’s Day, she copies in a stanza from a popular maritime song, and on January 24, 1855 she adds a poem whose source is unknown, but which also appears in Captain Robert McCleave’s official ship log kept from 1848 to 1852 (qtd. in Newell). Eliza follows this practice through the rest of her journal. Some weeks she adds poems every day, at other times several weeks will go by without poems. Occasionally the poem reflects material in the entry, such as stanzas about tempestuous seas Eliza has mentioned there. And after leaving the Bay of Islands for the final time, Eliza includes stanzas from the song “Isle of beauty, fare the well” (1848) by T. H. Bayley in three different entries.

All poems incorporated into entries are nautical or devotional, and so are many found in the forty pages of verse at the end of her journal. One striking exception is “The
"Nantucket Girls’ Song” credited to Martha Ford, wife of an American doctor at the Bay of Islands. This poem includes the following lines

For a clever sailor husband is so seldom at his home
That his wife can spend the dollars, with a will that’s all her own.
Then I’ll haste to wed a sailor and send him off to sea
Because a life of independence is the pleasant life for me

So unlike anything found in any other whaling women’s writing, it is intriguing that Eliza copied it without comment. The end of her journal also features letters, essays, and even “the account of the loss of ship Citizen . . . written by the captain.” Eliza was obviously transcribing a great deal into her journal, though often it is not clear why. Perhaps she was bored; perhaps she became obsessed with whaling, as many captains did. Perhaps she decided to turn her journal into a collection of whaling literature or a commonplace book. But clearly she was glad to go home. On April 3, 1856, she had written “Bound at last towards that happy land called Sweet America,” and upon arriving at Nantucket Harbor on June 25, 1856, her last entry reads “So ends my journal and my voyage in the good ship Lexington.”

**The Oldest Extant Journal: Mary Hayden Russell**

Mary Hayden and her husband Laban Russell Jr. married in Nantucket in 1802. Laban Russell Senior was also a Nantucket whaling captain, as was Mary’s maternal grandfather, Shubael Pinkham. According to the file accompanying her log at the Nantucket Historical Association (NHA), Laban and Mary immigrated first to Dartmouth, Nova Scotia and then to Milford Haven, Wales. Although the dates of their immigration are unknown, Laban captained a whaling ship from Milford Haven in 1805.
The file also claims that Mary accompanied Laban on the whale ship *Hydra* in 1817; however, her journal for October 1, 1823 indicates that she did not accompany her husband on his previous voyage.

Mary’s extant journal was written during her voyage on the *Emily* between 1823 and 1824. Recorded over two decades earlier than any other women’s writing considered in this study, Mary’s journal is also anomalous in its sensational descriptions of dangers overcome during the voyage. Though other women describe perilous situations, they do so only briefly, downplaying the danger through brevity and lack of detail. Mary includes weather and ship direction, but she does not write daily, nor does she include technical log data like latitude and longitude. The manuscript is also an example of a letter/journal, because part of the journal was sent home to her twenty-year-old daughter, Mary Ann. Though an early entry refers to her by name, later in the journal Mary Ann is the “you” directly addressed, and Captain Laban is referred to as “father.” Covering from February 11, 1823 to March 11, 1824, only this portion of the journal that was mailed has been preserved. According to the Russell file, the ship had left England in early January 1823 and returned before the end of 1824. From Portsmouth, the *Emily* sailed to the Canary Islands, then South in the Atlantic Ocean. The ship rounded the Cape of Good Hope, stopping near Cape Town, South Africa in April 1823 before continuing East across the Indian Ocean toward “New Holland” (Australia). The ship stayed in the South Indian Ocean, just above Australia, until late November 1823, when it sailed into the Pacific. In March 1824 the *Emily* reached Guam, mentioned in the journal’s last entry, and presumably where Mary Russell mailed the journal to Mary Ann. The file at the NHA indicates that the *Emily* continued on to the “Japan Grounds,” in the waters off southeast
Japan before returning to England. Since I read a transcription, the spelling and punctuation may not reflect the original.12

Mary’s journal begins with expressions of piety and the threat of shipwreck. Though the first dated entry is February 11, an undated and partial entry precedes it. After a severe gale, Mary writes dramatically, “I found there was a reality in religion. . . . This world and all that it contains appeared like vanity and in my estimation less than nothing.” She then adds, “My first inquiries were was there no lives lost.” Unfortunately, she finds an excellent sailor and the cabin boy are gone, presumably washed overboard. Then Mary’s eldest son, William, a boatsteerer on the voyage, brings her news of a potential breech in the ship’s hull. She records him advising her to “try to compose yourself. Let us hope for the best . . . but should it be otherwise, and this night is to prove our last, We will go trusting in the mercy of God.” If William sounds strikingly stoic, such attitudes are common in whaling wives’ journals. For example, Mary Lawrence writes, “I was very calm and composed,” as she dresses her daughter and prepares to abandon ship, although it did not come to that (6/17/1858). After a similar false alarm, Elizabeth Morey confesses “these wer fearful moments to me and yet I tried to compose myself as much as posable for I knew very well that any one must have great presence of mind in such a time as this” (7/4/1855).

Mary Russell, however, attributes the qualities of calmness and fortitude to her son and she herself as the flighty or overcome one. In fact Mary presents her male relations as masculine and heroic in the face of adversity throughout her journal. On March 18, 1823, her youngest son, Charles, breaks his arm, and Mary writes, “Such an

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12 The original is fraying and extremely fragile and hence unavailable to researchers.
accident on the land would have been distressing, but what were my feelings when I saw the child writhing in agony and no surgeon on board.” Though perhaps not surprising from a mother, this response is in contrast to most whaling women’s descriptions of their injured or endangered children. Neither Augusta Penniman nor Harriet Allen registers her own reaction after Genia Penniman slipped and dangled off the side of the ship, and Nellie Allen actually fell overboard or, earlier in the voyage, when Nellie broke her arm (Penniman 12/12/1864; Allen 11/12/1871, 5/2/1869). These mothers had to be concerned, but their omission of any anxiety fits the particular self they were striving to construct in their journals: a woman who possessed the composed resilience considered necessary for a whaling voyage. They were aware of the mid-century American opposition to their presence on the voyages. Mary Russell, however, wrote decades earlier and shipped out of England, where naval captains’ wives had been accompanying their husbands for decades. Mary Russell’s own anxieties, therefore, seem to set in relief the strength of her husband and sons. She notes that Captain Russell set his son’s arm with “fortitude and presence of mind that seldom forsakes him,” and young Charles “bore the operation with a courage that would have done credit to a man” (3/18/1823). Her husband has the ideal qualities of a captain, and her young son those of a man, while she suffers as an anxious woman. Or as she says in another entry, “as is often the case, . . . my fears had outrun the reality” (9/3/1823). Yet such statements seem to be a performance rather than an example of stereotypical femininity, since her very presence on board and her interest in interacting with foreign cultures suggest she is courageous.

Mary’s journal includes several incidents that no other whaling wife describes, and these entries further enhance the heroic image of her captain husband. The first
incident appears in the entry that confirms Mary was not on her husband’s previous voyage. As the ship *Emily* approaches the Island of Ternate (Indonesia), she explains that “Father,” Captain Laban, had been there twice on his previous journey, and that during the second visit was “detain’d better than a month due to a mutiny.” Mary then writes that “As we, who were then in America, heard so many various and contradictory reports, I shall here insert for your satisfaction, the particulars of that disagreeable scene that ended so fatally for one of the misguided objects.” The mutiny occurred when a few sailors stayed on shore over night, despite the local law that that visiting sailors must be on the ship by sunset, because of their tendency toward “riotious” behavior. When the captain confronted the men the next day, their impertinence led him to slap one. Suddenly, he “found himself surrounded by the people and one of them struck your dear Father on the head with a piece of plank. He was nearly stun’d . . . but his powerful arm sent one to the right and another to the left and getting into the boat he went on shore and stated his situation to the governor” (10/1/1823). Mary thus portrays her husband as strong enough to defend himself against a gang of men, yet prudent enough to take the legally correct action of seeking government assistance. Her long, detailed recounting of the events contrasts with Susan Veeder, who briefly refers to an attempted mutiny as a “fuss,” although she does note the men were put “in the rigging and [given] a dozen or two [lashes]” (9/6/1849). As for Lydia Beebe, neither her journal nor her husband’s official log even mentions the mutiny that occurred while stopping at St. Helena Island on their return voyage in late 1865.

The two other atypical incidents in Mary’s journal are threatening encounters with natives. In an entry summarizing May 18 to May 30, 1823, Mary describes, in her usual
heightened language, “pirates . . . their features and countenance which bore the stamp of villains.” These attackers were scared off by the many muskets the Emily pointed at them, and the same threat protected the ship near “Mazao Island” close to Papua New Guinea. Mary writes that she wanted a closer look at “a fleet of proas,” fifty-foot long canoes, leaving the harbor. The Emily lowered boats in pursuit even as the canoes maneuvered to avoid the westerners. Mary was surprised the natives did not recognize the visitors as friends, holding up a white flag. Nor were her husband’s attempts welcome:

Eager to make them come alongside he had approach’d so near the proa that the oars of the boat were entangled with their outriggers. At this moment one of the natives caught up a spear and pointing it at your dear Father with his body crouch’d would have darted it had he not instantly seiz’d a musket and presented it to him. On the sight of this formidable weapon he instantly dropped his spear and made his salam.

Persuaded this way to come aboard the Emily, the Chief was supposedly so impressed with the “wonderful objects that met his view that he could neither eat or drink.” Mary and young Charles were among the wonders. As for the man who had threatened the captain, he was tied up and shown a lance, thus “punishing him with fear.” The Russells then traded for “curiosities” and “all but the cutlery we purchased of them giving in exchange handkerchiefs of which they seemed uncommonly fond” (11/11/1823).

Mary also writes that she did not purchase some children offered for sale, one of several conflicting descriptions of slavery in her journal. “How I wish’d for the power to have redeem’d these little objects from their wretched condition;” Mary recalls, “but to do this was utterly out of our power, and I saw the children laid down again in the bottom
of the boat and cover’d over with a sensation that I shall never forget as long as I live” (11/11/1823). Yet the distress Mary expresses here sits uneasily with earlier descriptions of slavery, so her concern can hardly be interpreted as an abolitionist position. While visiting Ternate Island just a month earlier, Mary reports that “a gentleman of any property must have fifty or sixty slaves,” and that “when the master and mistress pay a visit [to other slave owners], then the slave is decorated with fancy ornament” (10/4/1823). While in Copang (Kupang) Harbor on the island of Timor, then under Dutch control, Mary admires the attire of the governor’s “house slaves,” in the same way as she praises the decor of the home. She also is delighted with the music they play for her (7/7/1823). Several weeks into the Russells’ stay there, Governor Hazaart receives some child slaves as a “payment of debt.” Having become friendly, Mary records the governor’s wife’s “principles and feelings would not allow her to sell a human being, but she had frequently given them to such of her friends she was assured would use them well. . . . I accordingly selected one that from her intelligent countenance I thought would answer. When we ask’d her by signs if she would go in the ship with me, appear’d highly delighted. She will go on board tonight” (7/29/1823). Though Mary never again mentions this young girl, perhaps her presence accounts for Mary’s sympathy for the child slaves offered near Papua New Guinea.

Mary’s long and detailed island narratives assume the seeing man anti-conquest perspective that women whalers would generally adopt. Mary spends more time on European colonists’ lives and property than indigenous people or laboring immigrants, like the Chinese whom she notes on many islands throughout the South Indian Ocean. In addition to portraying natives as hostile to westerners, Mary’s portraits of physical
appearance or customs, though far more detailed than many later women’s accounts, are generally derogatory. The people of Kupang, Timor are described as “grotesque and singular in the extreme, to one who has not been us’d to see nature in its roughest form”:

“of midling stature, of a dark copper coulor, their hair straight and black, their hands and feet are much smaller than a European’s, they have no beards and owing to this peculiarity . . . I thought the greater part of them were women (7/6/1823). Mary does not describe the appearance of the natives of St. David’s Island, somewhere near Papua New Guinea, but she does note “they have a frightful way of frizzing their hair which serves to protect them from the sun as well as a hat.” In conversation with the king, who knew some English as one of his sons had sailed for a short while with Captain Russell on his previous voyage, Mary asks about the foods. She finds them lacking: “Their chief substance is coconut and fish, bread they had no idea of, nor is there any vegetable.” As for their spirituality, “They do not appear to have any religious ceremonies among them, except dancing in a ring at the full of the moon. They had not the least idea of future rewards or punishments” (9/17/1823). Mary confidently writes as if her brief encounter, despite different languages and cultures, gave her actual understanding of the people and their customs. Like later whaling women, she applies western standards, and sees divergences as deficiencies.

Mary’s accounts of landscape and natural resources also enact the seeing-man anti-conquest appropriation. She is the first whaling women to invoke the sublime, the romantic indescribable: “I arose at daylight to a view that stupendous mountain, the Peak of Teneriffe. The sight to me was truly sublime . . . the rising sun spreading his beams on the snowy summit” (2/11/1823). Like many whaling women, she lists the produce grown
and goods traded for at every stopping point. She can be simultaneously amazed and puzzled by the quality of produce. While visiting “Fish Hook Bay,” near Cape Town, she writes, “the lady of the house presented me with some of the finest grapes I ever saw, and what seems strange to us these fine grapes grew from a soil composed of beach sand” (4/17/1823). Like so many whaling women, for Mary, what seems “sublime” when looking from a distance, pales somewhat when the assessment takes place up close.

While most whaling women proudly affirm their American identity, as an emigrant to England, Mary negotiates her way through hers. Though always pleased to speak or gam with Nantucket whaling ships, Mary twice refers to herself as European and English. In another anecdote, women passengers on another ship comment that Captain Russell is superior in appearance to a whaling captain they had seen. Mary reports “‘This is easily account’d for,’ said your father, ‘that capt’n is a Yankee!,’” and the captain of the other ship then claims he would not gam with Yankees, whom he “detest[ed].” “Here was prejudice carried to its utmost extreme,” Mary comments. “Little did he think at that moment that he was conversing with two of those detestable beings” (9/22/1823). Mary therefore shifts between English and Yankee identities within her journal. Though one of the first of many Yankee women whalers, she was one of the only English women whalers, since its whaling industry was coming to an end before America’s had reached its “golden age.”

**The Memoirs/Reminiscences**

Six whaling captains’ wives and daughters wrote memoirs/reminiscences or gave long interviews many years after their voyages. Some of these documents are entitled “reminiscences,” rather than as “memoirs,” perhaps because they are short and somewhat
informal, and like the women’s journals and letters, these memoirs have very little
narrative arc or figurative language. Though written with a greater sense of audience than
the journals, neither mass publication nor a full-length book was the goal. In her
interview, Adeline Heppingstone says she does not wish to be published, and this seems
to be a sincere request. Two narratives appeared in small, regional publications; two are
unpublished essays held in archives. Four of the narratives were created in the twentieth
century; the fifth and sixth are undated. When examining five of these reminiscences, I
consider the function of memory in creating the narratives, and also how the much later
time period affects the women’s self-constructions.

**Bertha Hamblin Boyce**

Bertha Hamblin Boyce’s narrative, *Bertha Goes Whaling: Personal Memoirs of a
Voyage Aboard a Whaling Bark, Islander*, was published in 1963 by Kendall Printers,
part of what had been the Kendall Whaling Museum. Ninety-six years old at the time of
the publication, Bertha was five years old when she accompanied her parents on the
voyage. The narrative is rather simplistic, making it unclear if Bertha, formally educated
and the president of West Falmouth Library for forty-seven years, was writing from the
perspective of a young child, or recounting the events as a very old woman. The story
opens with Captain Boyce asking Bertha’s mother if she would accompany him on
another whaling voyage, as she had twice before. Bertha’s older sister and brother had
been born in Australia and Norfolk Island, but now there were six children and her
mother wavered when deciding. Ultimately only Bertha and her two-and-a-half-year-old
brother were brought along. Bertha therefore depicts the difficulties of deciding to leave

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children behind, something no journal deals with outright. Bertha does not indicate, however, that her mother was eight months pregnant when the Islander set sail, simply noting that a seventh child was born at sea the day before her own birthday.

Bertha’s narrative seems inspired by general questions she must have been asked many times. She includes her first impression of the cabin—small—and describes where she slept, information not found in many other accounts. Since “everyone wants to know what we did for amusement,” she answers that she played on deck, adding, “I guess there was no danger of our falling overboard, for mother let us go up alone” (11)—a guess refuted later in her narrative when her brother, playing on a rope, accidentally swings out over the ocean. Bertha describes sailors’ lookout duties in the “crow’s nest,” the process of catching a whale, and the crew creating scrimshaw during “dull” moments, providing a long list of what became items she still owns. While many journals and letters describe whaling, none describe the sailors’ free time or mention scrimshaw. By the mid-twentieth century, however, scrimshaw was a highly prized and valuable artifact for museums and private collectors. In another gesture to her 1960s audience, Bertha explains the oil was for lamps as “in those days . . . there was no electricity” (12).

Just as scrimshaw triggers her memory of the sailors’ personal activities, turtle shells remind her that they ate turtle soup, and a Bible she still owns reminds her of “a Mrs. Tassell,” met in Australia, “a missionary, I think,” who gave it to her (14). After her father sold the ship, they took a steamer home, stopping at Lisbon, Portugal, Le Havre, France, London, England, and Faial, Azores Island. She collected souvenirs at each location, but cannot recall the names of the islands they visited in the Indian Ocean, as “I gave my father’s log book away” (12). “We must have stopped at an island where there
was a cow,” she concludes, because she remembers burning her mouth on milk her mother was scalding to preserve. She met the King of Madagascar and his seven wives, “dark skinned, of course, being Africans, and they were dressed in white. Their lips were blood red from chewing betel nuts.” She then adds, “I tell the girls that is where they got the idea of using lipstick” (13), suggesting this particular anecdote may not be a precise memory. For this memoir, then, objects still in the narrator’s possession, answers to common questions, or oft-told anecdotes seem to trigger most of the memories.

Anna Stott King

Anna Stott King also sailed with her parents. Her narrative, “The Infant Mariner,” was written in 1910 and published in 1957 in *Old-Time New England*. The most researched of any of the memoirs, Anna opens by discussing Fairhaven, her hometown, and New Bedford during the whaling days. She includes such industry details as the making of barrels, taking them apart, and reassembling them on the ships; the process of mending the sails; and the tools used for scrubbing the decks. While many whaling wives’ journals listed the daily employment of the sailors, none provide such technical details, and they deliberately avoided showing personal familiarity with the sailors, since they were, for class reasons, providing only what a captain would include in the official log. Writing long after her voyage, when the whaling industry itself had all but ended, Anna’s memoir authorizes itself through such specific industry knowledge, which she claims she gained onboard by sitting in the center of the sails while the sailors mended them, and by learning the names of the masts, sails, and ropes. She also describes the inside of the forecastle, though certain sentences suggest that she never saw this space herself: “it must have been a dark place at best. I am not sure if the foremast came up
through the forecastle but it probably did which only added to the crowded condition” (31). Perhaps due to her age, then, Anna presents herself as crossing some of the class/rank boundaries the women strove to maintain in their journals. There are, however, hints that much of her knowledge came from research later in life.

**Helen Allen Bradford**

Helen Allen Bradford’s narrative is the longest and most detailed of all the memoirs. She was seven years old when she embarked on her whaling voyage from 1868 to 1872 with her parents and her older brother. Though she does not indicate how old she was when she wrote the memoir, Helen was no longer a child, and she refers to the time onboard as “long-ago days.” Nor is it clear who her audience is. But her opening words proclaim her own agency and value: “In the lives of most mature people enough of interest and adventure has occurred to make at least one fairly good story. Why should I not tell mine?” Her mother had voyaged with her father, a whaling captain, once before; her elder brother was born on Mahé Island in the Seychelles.

The detail and clarity suggests that Helen draws much from her mother’s journal and perhaps her father’s, enhancing these sources with her own memories and the family’s often-repeated anecdotes. The voyage commences with the same trope that appears in many opening journal entries—the dispatch of the pilot. Helen also succumbs to seasickness. She describes the daily routine of her brother and herself: meals, lessons under their mother’s guidance, and some free time to play. Helen also mentions the invisible divide on the deck between the captain’s family’s space and the crew’s: “Of course I was not allowed to go forward beyond the quarter deck” (14). Following the conventions of women’s whaling journals, Helen states “the real business of the voyage
was catching whales,” and remembers the first catch with enthusiasm. To watch the cutting-in process, she sat in the starboard whaleboat raised on davits, as many women and children did.

But Helen’s journal is not dominated by whale hunts and catches, one of the significant differences between her memoir and most women’s journals. Though she strategically adds certain details, her focus is her own experience. When describing an extended stay on Mahé, she informs us that “In my mother’s journal she speaks of Mr. Atwater and his work with Clara Barton, but I am telling only what I myself remember” (20), asserting her own authorship, yet sneaking in this detail. The details and even word choices do indicate that Helen relied heavily on her mother’s journal. Here, for example, is Helen’s entry about Delagoa Bay:

Our first port after rounding the Cape was Delagoa at bay on the southeastern coast of Africa. I was much impressed with the appearance of the first boat that came off to us from shore. He contained two white men and six or seven black slaves whose costumes took my attention. I thought they were black uniforms, and my exclamations caused much amusement for the older people. Great with my astonishment when they came on board and I saw they were without clothes just the “tappa” of cloth around the loins, and the black uniform was their skins. (6)

Her mother’s journal entry reads:

Saw a boat coming from the shore . . . a young man who could speak a little English & seven slaves The costume of these last completely astonished the children. Nell thought they had on closely fitting “black
suits” when she saw them coming in the boat. They put on a “tappa” before they came on board. (1/25/1869)

When compared with her mother’s journal, Helen’s memoir reveals more class and gender identity conflicts during the voyage. Her mother, Harriet Allen, was the one woman to write, however briefly, of women’s rights: “I think that women are decidedly making great progress towards equal rights in this age,” after reading an English newspaper (9/26/1869). Yet in Helen’s memoir she shows her mother enforcing gender difference: “there were times when the injustice of letting Henry roam the decks at will, and do any entertaining thing he chose, while I just because I was a girl, must sit and sew was hard to bear” (3). Yet after the required time sewing, Helen did go on deck to play, and when writing years later, she offers no larger reflection on women’s rights. A second ideological conflict appears when Helen recalls that “In preparation for our visit to Mauritius mother read Paul and Virginia to us. We thought it very interesting but sad. Later in a cemetery there, we saw two mounds said to be their graves” (29). *Paul and Virginia* is a late eighteenth century novel set in Mauritius critiquing slavery, but Helen’s own memories, often displaying strikingly similar word choices to her mother’s, naturalize class difference and colonial privilege throughout, particularly when describing their stays at Mahé, a British colony, and Diego Garcia (of the Chagos Islands), which was then under French control. In addition, numerous accounts of foreign ports mention slaves without further comment or disapproval in either Harriet’s journal or Helen’s memoir. Ultimately a very readable prose adaptation of her mother’s journal, Helen offers no additional reflection on the events stimulated either by her personal growth or the modern world.
A different Helen, Helen Jernegan, also may have turned to a journal to help her write her memoir. Addressed to her youngest child, Helen’s memoir is dated July 9, 1912—forty-four years after her second and last voyage. The document is brief and ambiguous; as Helen’s opening sentence states, “It is so many years since I went on a voyage that many incidents have passed from my memory” (1). Helen met her husband in Honolulu to join his voyage in 1866. She took a steamer from New York to Panama, a train across the isthmus, a steamer to San Francisco, and a final steamer to Honolulu. She then accompanied her husband on the five-month voyage back to New Bedford. Though a demanding expedition to join only the last part of her husband’s voyage, Helen’s effort certainly confirms many women’s insistence that they would rather be with their husbands than waiting at home. Indeed, Helen left her three-year-old daughter with relatives to make the journey.

Helen includes one memory from her first voyage, and only a few more from her second. She recalls visiting an English missionary family on “Aitatack” (Aitutaki, Cook Islands), seeing their “oven made of stones in the yard,” and giving the family calico—a common gift of whalers to missionaries (2). Of course, many women’s journals often have long, detailed entries on the missionaries’ lives in remote locations, but Helen is recalling the events years later. Descriptions of her second voyage are slightly more detailed, perhaps because she may have been referring to her daughter’s journal. Laura, six, and Prescott, two months, accompanied their parents in 1868, and Laura kept a simple journal, with entries that testify to her young age. Nonetheless, many of the events
she lists appear in her mother’s much later memoir. “Monday 18 [1869] UNCLE
NATHEN CAME ON BORD AND SPENT THE FORENOON.” Laura writes, and Helen recalls this unusual gam: “Your uncle Nathan was on a whale voyage in the Ship Splendid and he had written your father to meet him on a date in March, in mid ocean, and on that date we saw the ship” (3). Laura also notes her parents going on shore at Juan Fernandez Island; Helen describes visiting the three caves where Robinson Crusoe lived, and seeing the monument to him—evidence that even in the nineteenth century tourist traps were popular attractions. Crusoe was of course a fictional character only loosely based on a historical figure.

Unlike most whaling women, who rarely mention their children’s daily activities, Helen Jernegan writes about the swing built on deck for Prescott, where he sat while she taught Laura, and of the children’s fondness for looking out the portholes at the sharks following the ships. Helen also writes happily of her second extended stay in Hawai‘i, while her husband whaled the Arctic: “We were glad to be in Honolulu once more after being five months on the Roman” (4). Most women follow the example of Augusta Penniman: “don’t you think it is very cruel indeed to leave me here for seven months,” she asks (5/2/1866). Like many women, though, Helen socialized with the missionaries. “[H]eard Mrs. Thurston one of the first Missionarys who went to the islands give a lecture on her life as it was in 1820,” Helen recalls: “the exhibit of the old idols used by the natives was very interesting” (5). Helen also reports “I had a native woman to take care of Prescott, she lived in the yard in a grass house,” adding that “They never cooked the fish always eating it raw” (5). Although writing many years later, these descriptions
are very similar to those of whaling women visiting the islands in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Helen’s memoir also echoes a very familiar whaling women’s claim: “In December we went to the Marquesus Islands, the ships always stop here to get fresh water which is taken on board in barrels. I was the first white woman who had ever landed on the Island and I was the object of curiosity to the natives” (5). While there are many islands in the Marquesas, if this island the *Roman* visited was really a popular destination for ships to obtain water, in 1870 Helen would not have been the first white woman to visit. As for mutinies, Helen does not downplay this event, but writes luridly about the seventeen conspirators: “We were glad to see them leave the ship as I expect we would all be killed or that they would set fire to the ship” (6). Perhaps this incident convinced Captain Jernegan to send his family home. From Honolulu they returned by steamer to San Francisco, and then took the new transcontinental railroad. This was fortunate. That summer the *Roman* was one of thirty-two ships to become trapped in unseasonal ice in the Arctic. The crews abandoned them just before they were crushed.

*Adeline Heppingstone*

One of the three women who experienced the Arctic disaster of 1871, Adeline Heppingstone was interviewed in 1906 about her whaling days. The transcript is the final memoir of this study.

So you want a story as to ‘natives hot and natives cold,’ [and] to see our curios . . . Over in the fire place are pairs of the best I have seen, selected from a great number . . . the quantities we have had and wearied of that would have fitted out several museums. (1)
So she begins her memoir, and so it continues in the same self-congratulatory and casually racist tone for fourteen typed, double-spaced pages. Adeline is the most smug, xenophobic, and cantankerous whaling wife I encountered. Some of this may have been a response to the interview itself, as she makes several derogatory comments about the interviewer. Adeline seems to jump from topic to topic, but this might be the result of answering questions posed, although only Adeline appears in the transcription. She boasts of her experiences throughout, and also evades discussing in detail some topics raised by the interviewer. Her marriage for instance: “[A]s your ‘shipping list’ extracts has our marriage in Honolulu in December, 1861, you can see why I went sailing” (1), she tells the interviewer, but offers little information about her husband. Since she is from Nantucket, one can only presume that she knew Captain John Heppingstone before traveling to Honolulu where they were wed. She then sailed with him for fourteen years.

Adeline describes the Arctic disaster of 1871, when an unseasonable ice freeze crushed three ships, and forced the captains of twenty-nine more to sign a statement citing imminent destruction as the reason for abandoning them and their cargo of oil. Adeline recalls the moment of destruction of her ship, Julian: “The most frightful noise of the grinding ice being driven from sea against the ships, ours was stove, crushed in, the water awash of our lower deck, finally rolled over on her side with her spars lying on the ice to which we all walked” (1). Adeline notes her own precarious time, “I had a 2 1/2 year old little girl to keep warm, the open boat trip in rough cold water” (2). She does not add that the 1,219 men, two other women, and several children spent three days in the small whaleboats, rowing ninety miles through the rough, icy waters of the Arctic to reach the few whaling ships south of the danger. She does, however, mention that three
hundred people were on the ship that brought them to Honolulu five weeks later, and that even in these extreme circumstances, class/rank and gender distinctions were maintained. The captain gave the Heppingstones his cabin, and “Oh we fed well aft, as we took our cabin stores with us, there were plenty and good ship fare as usual.” As for the hundreds of others, they “were fed in messes, how cooked for so many? Why, in the try pots to be sure” (2).

Adeline and her daughter, also named Adeline, sailed on at least one more whaling voyage to the Arctic in 1882. Fourteen-year-old Adeline kept one of the journals discussed in this dissertation. On May 31 and June 1, she writes of encountering “Esquimauxs” in a neutral entry, with none of the racism that permeates her mother’s interview. “Yes I lived afloat for 14 years in out-of-the way parts of the world,” Adeline the mother recalls: “Bering Straits and also under the Equator among Islands, where though man is primitive, he and she are not attractive or desirable neighbors” (5-6). For her, any native is “the most degraded repulsive filthy being” (9). During several fraught trading sessions she encouraged the men to be well armed, and she claims that she and her daughter were seen as valuable commodities by various natives who offer a trade for them, and became angry when the captain refused.

Adeline does provide insight into just how adept a woman could become on board. According to her, she learned to “work up sights and navigation,” although “it was a long time ere the Captain would allow me to wind the Chronometers.” After being asked her assistance when bad weather struck during a cutting-in, she claims, “I worked myself into a steady daily duty thereafter. Oh I can work up navigation after taking sights and figure the rating of chronometers, making corrections as per well located head leads.
I have taught navigation to otherwise good sailors to whom navigation was a terror” (6). Though certainly not a call for women’s rights, Adeline’s account of her abilities makes a case that women could contribute at least as much as some men to the smooth functioning of the ship.

Though written decades after the women’s voyages and the Victorian era, all but one of the memoirs—Anna King’s—accept the same limitations that shape the journals and letters written on the voyages themselves. Memories recounted in the later reminiscences often appear to require triggers: souvenirs, earlier journals, and research. Adeline Heppingstone’s interviewer also may have roused her through questions, although she tended to turn her answers back to vague, racist descriptions of everyone she encountered. Rather than tapping into larger myth-making narratives regarding the whaling industry, the women seem to let genre conventions limit the content of the memoirs.

Conclusion

This chapter explores earlier and later outliers of the whaling women’s writings. I have argued that the journals are both a product and a producer of the culture the women write within: looking at these later reminiscences reveals how culture sustains itself in these women’s narratives. Writing several decades before the other women, and negotiating a bi-national identity, Mary Hayden Russell is slightly removed from the latter nineteenth-century culture of the journals. It should not therefore be surprising that her rhetoric and the conclusions she draws from her recorded experiences are unique. But this difference draws further attention to similarities of representation in the rest of the journals. Eliza Brock’s journal is typical in many ways, but she includes significantly
more poetry than any other woman, while inserting as much log data as the women who kept actual official ships’ logs. Incorporating multiple genres and (frequently un-credited) authors, Eliza Brock’s journal becomes an intertextual repository of whaling literature, signifying her participation in a much larger discourse community. My examination of the memoirs reveals that while these women were producing these reminiscences and interviews decades after they voyaged, they seldom refashion the content into a new understanding, or reveal any previously elided information. By including materials from an archive larger than her own memory, Anna King’s memoir is the only one that resembles the larger consciousness of Eliza Brock’s journal.
Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have examined seventy-four journals, letters, and memoirs of sixty-one whaling captains’ wives and daughters who embarked on long and dangerous voyages around the world. I have focused on the women’s generic and rhetorical choices in constructing gendered, racial, and national selves, and in negotiating the class and gender expectations of their perceived audiences: family and friends at home. I draw on Joan Druett’s accounts of whaling women’s experiences and Lisa Norling’s analysis of the onboard separate spheres, but I have further complicated these historians’ representations by arguing that the journals’ appropriations of the conventions of the ship’s log, of nineteenth-century travel narratives, and of the domestic diary, create a sub-genre of nineteenth-century maritime literature. Judith Butler’s notion of performativity, and Amy Kaplan and Lora Romero’s recognition of women’s agency within the rhetoric of domesticity, support my argument that the performance of domesticity allowed the women to voyage, and the language of domesticity enabled them to engage in public discourses, and especially the national project of colonization, within their journals.

The women who give reasons for voyaging offer up wifely devotion: they improve their husbands’ lives, and therefore benefit the overall purpose of the voyage. This reason asserts agency, rather than simple complicity with gender stereotypes, since active support was an acceptable motive for women to venture into a space and economic project where they would not otherwise be welcomed. In fact, the husbands are almost never the focal point of the journals; the women praise God rather than the captain when the ship survives a storm or catches a whale. Still, families and ship owners often
objected, though women often counter this resistance simply by not mentioning it, thus eliminating such criticism from their self-constructions, if only within their journals. And these women also had their advocates. In keeping with national nineteenth-century discourses that identified women as agents of civility in both the home and the nation (Kaplan; Romero), religious and industry newspapers such as The Friend and The Whalemen’s Shipping List praised women’s civilizing influence on board. Yet while Abby Jane Morrell’s published journal and Lydia Sigourney’s volumes of poetry offer rhetorical models for women advocating maritime reform, the whaling women’s journals do not follow this path, only occasionally remarking on the hardships of the crew, and in fact, rarely mentioning the sailors or their living conditions at all.

Though physically and socially isolated from the crew and the labor of whaling, the wives record the log data—weather, ships, and latitude and longitude—and the daily toil, from catching and processing whales to the more tedious tasks. The men performing the labor, however, are often excised from their journals. I argue this strategy suggests the women were maintaining the appropriate distance, even while inserting themselves into the complex onboard hierarchy of class, race, and rank through surveillance of “the ship’s” activities. Race is noted, but there is very little commentary on racial difference. These accounts also enabled them to participate in the economic purpose of the voyage, at least within the journals. There are no descriptions of the crew’s living space or social activities, and even descriptions of the officers, who shared the main cabin with the women, are limited. The steward and cabin boy, the women’s closest associates, were usually referred to only by their job titles. Class/rank difference is further performed when women unselfconsciously record the differences between meals served in the cabin
and forecastle, and when some even appropriate living space from the officers.

Crewmembers are only mentioned by name when they were sick or dying—a strategy conforming to nineteenth-century sentimental novels, in which heroines cross clearly demarcated class differences to display the concern and piety apparently “natural” to women.

Gender difference shapes the women’s accounts of watching but never participating. Such surveillance, however, is fully invested in the purpose of the voyage. The women happily record oil procured, lament whales lost, and become frustrated during long periods without whale sightings. Women assist in other ways. They sew for the captain and occasionally others onboard. Some briefly fill the role of the steward, some tend to the sick, and at least five keep the official log—all unpaid and unacknowledged labor. While many women note this disparity, and even bemoan their idleness, they never suggest that they could or would want to assist in the labor of whaling, or that they should be compensated for the work they do perform. Yet the women’s inclusion of daily log data suggests that they see their journals as backups to the official log, increasing their overall importance.

Many women further follow ship’s log conventions by including a title, page headings, and a whale stamp for every catch. Recording poetry is also typical of both sailors’ journals and nineteenth-century women’s diaries. In a few cases the poems are original, but more often the women copy out nautical or sentimental verse published in industry magazines or hymnals. Perhaps they are following childhood instructions that encouraged transcribing poetry rather than expressing their own emotions, but by choosing nautical poems, they appropriate the voices and perceptions of sailors. The
nostalgia and homesickness the women record is also a common trope in sentimental novels, and appears in men’s letters home for decades before the women began sailing. Women’s whaling journals therefore draw on two very different genres in ways that highlight the influence of the culture of sentiment on nineteenth-century writing.

Log data and other conventions are fully integrated with accounts of domesticity, as genres and topics can shift several times within a single entry. Even when recording ordinary tasks such as sewing, reading, and child-rearing—and less ordinary ones like giving birth—the women insert log data that reminds us these activities are occurring on a floating factory in international waters. Despite the distance from home and the unique circumstances, the widespread patterns of appropriate topics and silences within the women’s journals testify to the power of those generic and gender constraints they internalized, including those in writing instructional manuals. Sex, prostitution, and pregnancy are almost never mentioned, while sewing, reading, or pious reflection appear in virtually all journals. Further reflecting the culture is the abundance of tropes. What today strike us as clichés were actually powerful signifiers within the nineteenth-century culture of sentiment. Whether recording homesickness, or the death of a child, these tropes allowed the women to convey an array of meanings with only a few phrases.

The whaling women perform civility in their journals not only through accounts of routine domestic chores, but also by describing elaborate tea parties and celebratory meals hosted in the middle of the ocean. Such events follow the same conventions as they would at home, but the journals also reveal that the women developed a set of customs specific to whaling gams, including the exchange of exotic gifts such as pet monkeys, or gifts reminiscent of home, such as a slice of cake. Unusual foods emphasize the ship’s
distance from home, while the cook and the wife’s abilities to turn such fare into familiar dishes displays an ability to survive abroad with a certain degree of comfort. Such descriptions are also often anti-conquest tropes of plunder typical to nineteenth-century travel narratives, revealing a rhetoric of culture readily understood by the intended audience, but one deriving its symbolic meaning through the act of transcription.

Recording national holidays is also a performance of identity, with Washington’s Birthday, the Fourth of July, and Thanksgiving often noted even if not always celebrated. A national, gendered identity is further affirmed through expressions of joy at encountering other American ladies. Yet the journals are largely apolitical. Despite the ship’s racial diversity, the women do not discuss abolition, and despite their presence, and even assistance, on a “floating factory,” they do not advocate for women’s rights. Rather, the women construct themselves as models of nineteenth-century civility. It is their presence, rather than any overt engagement, that will potentially influence the crew and the foreign populations encountered.

The women perform civility and gendered national identity on a world stage, as the ships visit ports across the globe. They generally are more concerned with their cultural values than representing those of the people they encountered. Different places and ethnic groups become confused, and often undifferentiated. Here too the women rely on tropes, particularly those found in what Mary Louise Pratt calls “anti-conquest” nineteenth-century travel literature. Seemingly benign entries employ the terms “indolent” and “lazy” to describe diverse groups of people, even though the landscapes are “green,” and local produce and animals are listed. Such assessments of natural resources, when juxtaposed with condescending descriptions of natives, focus on both the
resource potential and the need for “improvement”—a word the women often use. While
never mentioning American imperialism, the women praise the efforts of missionaries,
even in locations where little “progress” has been made in converting and assimilating
the “heathens.” On islands throughout Oceania, and especially on the Hawaiian Islands,
friendships are formed with the missionaries that reinforce and strengthen the influence
of Euro-American domesticity, economics, and political power. Although the whaling
women’s visits to various ports ranged from a few hours to several months, their growing
numbers and return visits impacted the cultures they encountered in different ways and to
different extents than the thousands of sailors. The sightseeing the women record, ranging
from visiting Napoleon’s tomb on St. Helena Island in the North Atlantic to Robinson
Crusoe’s caves off the coast of Chile and to the Kīlauea Volcano on Hawai‘i, also reveal
an emerging global tourism. The women therefore participated in the American imperial
project and global expansion beyond the rhetoric within their journals.

The accounts of foreign encounters and daily life onboard remain basically the
same in the several memoirs written by whaling women decades after their voyages.
They neither refashion the content in light of new understanding, nor do they reveal any
details previously omitted. The majority of these memoirs remained unpublished, and
like the journals and letters themselves, anticipated a limited audience. Whether in the
nineteenth or the early twentieth century, the voyaging whaling captains’ wives’ voices
remained mostly unheard. But their presence onboard has been noticed in the second half
of the twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries, as their experiences, drawn from
their journals and letters, have been a subject of many articles, a few books, and at least
three museum exhibits. Yet the focus thus far has been primarily on the women’s
experiences, although Haskell Springer does consider the journals as life-writing, and
Lisa Norling analyzes them as part of a larger project on the social and economic history
of New England women in the whalefishery. As my dissertation shows, however,
analysis informed by life-writing, gender studies, post-colonial studies, and cultural
studies offers even more information about women’s writing and nineteenth century
literature. In fact, similarities in content and form across the women’s journals create a
sub-genre of sea narratives, and the rhetorical strategies, tropes, and discourses operating
within make these journals both products and producers of nineteenth-century American
culture.
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