

## Herman Melville's *Typee*: The Freedoms of the Savage<sup>1</sup>

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Missionary and colonizing efforts in the South Pacific during the first half of the nineteenth century brought radical changes for the natives inhabiting the islands. Along with the supposedly humane improvements from Western influences, numerous negative effects occurred that weighed heavily on the Polynesians. The missionaries followed closely on the heels of sailors exploring the foreign islands, and these religious emissaries quickly established themselves as providers of a “one true religion” that could replace the pagan beliefs and taboo systems of the natives. Roughly twenty years after the first missionary efforts to the Sandwich Islands (now called Hawai‘i) were established, the young, directionless, financially unstable Herman Melville<sup>2</sup> boarded the whaling ship *Acushnet* and left the harbor of New Bedford, Massachusetts on Sunday, January 3, 1841. This decision would affect Melville in such a way that within the next five years he would find himself one of the foremost writers of anti-

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<sup>1</sup> This article is the first of a three part series. It is a revised version of an unpublished chapter from my work, *Melville's Missionaries and the Loss of Culture*.

<sup>2</sup> Melville's family had suffered a significant financial crash in 1832, one that eventually led Melville to sign on board to the *Acushnet*. It has been suggested that this financial downfall, and his mother's tenacious Calvinist faith would serve as a breeding ground for Melville's cynicism toward the missionaries he encountered in the South Pacific (Breitwieser, “Pacific” 5).

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missionary criticism concerning the Polynesian region. Spending time in the Marquesas, Tahiti, and the Sandwich Islands, Melville witnessed events that made him question the missionaries' activities. The variety in the Polynesian cultures increased Melville's already skeptical outlook on the standards his own culture insisted that he himself follow. Experiencing both the tranquil Typee Valley and the "civilized" island of Tahiti, Melville felt compelled to write about his island adventures in his first two books, *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847). The contrasts Melville draws between the primitive Typee and the converted Tahitian cultures illustrate his belief that the missionaries were actually driving the natives toward a cultural death through the removal of pagan practices and the introduction of the "civilized" Christian beliefs governing Euro-American society.

*Typee* is widely perceived "as romantic fiction, though based on experience" (Suggs 38).<sup>3</sup> Both *Typee* and *Omoo* were highly successful novels in terms of financial reward for Melville. Their popularity was based on "their perceived authenticity in depicting the missionary project, little-known native peoples, and Melville's self-presentation as a trustworthy observer" (Tricomi 65). The narrative of *Typee* opens with Melville's first-person narrator revealing his destination as the Marquesas Islands and he proceeds to paint a vivid, romanticized picture of pagan activities: "What strange visions of outlandish things does the very name spirit up! Naked

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<sup>3</sup> It is commonly understood that Melville borrowed heavily from other South Seas texts to help construct his first two novels. Mary K. Bercaw Edwards, in "Questioning *Typee*" has extensively shown how "Melville drew heavily upon three sources in writing *Typee*: David Porter's *Journal of a Cruise Made to the Pacific Ocean* (1815, 1822), Charles S. Stewart's *A Visit to the South Seas* (1831), and Georg H. von Langsdorff's *Voyages and Travels in Various Parts of the World* (1813)" ("Questioning" 32).

houris—cannibal banquets—groves of cocoa-nut—coral reef—tattooed chiefs—and bamboo temples; [...] savage woodlands guarded by horrible idols—*heathenish rites and human sacrifices*” (4). Melville quickly places special emphasis on the rites and sacrifices in order to draw attention to the romanticized “otherness” of the natives, thereby building drama for his narrative.<sup>4</sup> These stylized passages abound in *Typee*, and Melville found his work “praised by some as pious and pleasant but lambasted by others as immoral or sacrilegious” (Reynolds 137). Initially, in the first publication “Melville’s thoroughly disapproving remarks on the missionaries were inevitably abridged in America” (Nara 171); these cut sections were reintroduced in the later versions. While a multifaceted first novel, Melville was quick to establish one of his primary targets for criticism. Before landing in the Marquesas, the narrator gives a brief history of the islands, but not before mentioning how the missionaries have been unable to tame the wildness of some areas of the islands: “The missionaries, sent on a heavenly errand, had sailed by their lovely shores, and have abandoned [the natives] to their idols of wood and stone” (4). The narrator quickly brings the efforts of the missionaries to the forefront of his thoughts: the first chapter of *Typee* helps to establish the juxtaposition of the natives’ customs within the Typee Valley and the missionaries’ civilizing and

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<sup>4</sup> For an engaging discussion on the “nakedness” of the natives that the narrator imagines, see Stephen Matterson’s *Melville: Fashioning in Modernity* (2014). Matterson explains that within their culture, the Polynesians had “developed their own complex systems of clothing and self-decoration, and these did not simply disappear with the arrival of the missionaries and the colonists” (100-101).

conversion efforts on other islands.<sup>5</sup>

Even though the missionaries believe they are responding to a higher calling, the narrator poignantly emphasizes that they have abandoned their efforts to convert the Marquesan natives. Due to the lack of missionary activity, the natives, particularly the Typee, remain in their pre-colonial state. This seclusion creates the key component behind the narrator's ability to contrast the Typee Valley and the Euro-American colonization efforts. David Williams, in "Peeping Tommo: *Typee* as Satire," notices that the narrator "sets out to expose in novelistic fashion the social evils of [Euro-American] civilization"; the narrator's tone makes it clear that "he laments the corruption of innocence by the harbingers of civilization" (40). Such corruption will be the grounds on which Melville directs his narrator to undermine the supposition that the missionary efforts are beneficial.<sup>6</sup>

In *Typee* there is a clearly defined incongruity between the civilized world of the missionaries and the "primitive" original mode of living that the Marquesan natives retain. After Melville left the Typee Valley, he spent time in the Tahitian and Sandwich Islands. While in the Sandwich Islands, Melville witnessed the results of the acculturation process of the natives (this experience drives the narrative of *Omoa*). In *Typee*, Melville

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<sup>5</sup> While my focus in this article is on the missionary presence in the islands, it is by no means my intention to insinuate that Melville was only placing blame on the missionaries. Imperial presence is also a significant element of the novel, as "in *Typee* Melville locates American imperial ambition in relation to French and British imperialism, presenting empire as something that powerful nations pursue and not as something that is exceptional or unique to one particular nation" (Levine 14).

<sup>6</sup> In an ironic twist, Melville himself, through writing *Typee* and *Omoa*, would return to the United States and argue for the inherent value of the traditional Polynesian freedoms: "For all of Melville's critiques against missionaries, he returns to the United States and fast becomes known as the man who lived among the Marquesan Island cannibals, and thereby becomes a missionary of sorts in his own land" (Lorentzen 219).

contrasts what he perceives as the prelapsarian state of the Typee natives with the “civilized” Hawaiian natives who are living now in an arguably postlapsarian condition. With the dividing lines of the two worlds established, the missionaries, as John Alberti has suggested in his reading of *Typee*, seek “to free divine souls from natural barbarity,” the narrator of *Typee*, in contrast, follows Rousseau, desiring to “preserve an Edenic spiritual purity from the disease of civilization” (331). As the novel unfolds, the narrator defends the primitive state of the natives against the supposed advancements of the Western world.

The first relation in *Typee* of missionary efforts in the Marquesas is given with comic flair, as the narrator illustrates the misconceptions the missionaries hold concerning the natives’ nature:

A short time before my visit to the Marquesas, a somewhat amusing incident took place in connection with these [missionary] efforts, which I cannot avoid relating. An intrepid missionary, undaunted by the ill-success that had attended all previous endeavors to conciliate the savages, and believing much in the efficacy of female influence, introduced among them his young and beautiful wife, the first white woman who had ever visited their shores. The islanders at first gazed in mute admiration at so unusual a prodigy, and seemed inclined to regard it as some new divinity. But after a short time, becoming familiar with its charming aspect, and jealous of the folds which encircled its form, they sought to pierce the sacred veil of calico in which it was enshrined, and in the gratification of their curiosity so far overstepped the limits of good breeding, as deeply to offend

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the lady's sense of decorum. Her sex once ascertained, their idolatry was changed into contempt and there was no end to the contumely showered upon her by the savages, who were exasperated at the deception which they conceived had been practiced upon them. To the horror of her affectionate spouse, she was stripped of her garments, and given to understand that she could no longer carry on her deceits with impunity. The gentle dame was not sufficiently evangelical to endure this, and, fearful of further improprieties, she forced her husband to relinquish his undertaking, and together they returned to Tahiti. (Melville 6-7)

The retelling of a possible attempted rape of one of the female missionaries by the natives in an effort to discover her true divine attributes not only reveals the potential violence of their nature, but also shows the superior attitude held by the missionaries. Throughout both *Typee* and *Omoo*, such historical data regarding missionary activity in the Polynesian Islands is selectively chosen. In some cases, Melville's knowledge is word-of-mouth, heard while traveling on the whaling ships. Concerning this particular story, "Melville's source of information is not known, unless he learned the story from the natives themselves" (Anderson 88).<sup>7</sup> The humor infused into the story is for a specific purpose: it undermines the presumed positive influence of the missionary activities. Because the "missionaries [...]"

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<sup>7</sup> This story may be referring to the 1833 mission effort to the Marquesas Islands that was a disastrous undertaking on the part of American Mission in the Sandwich Islands. The group consisted of three married couples, who "were all relative newcomers to the Pacific. The Armstrongs and Alexanders, all in their early 20s, had voyaged out to Hawaii as newlyweds in 1832. [...] Benjamin and Mary Parker [...] were the least experienced in both married life and the particular trials living among the Polynesians held for them" (Wallace 272). These same inexperienced missionaries were deposited on the banks of Nuku Hiva, and of whom Melville had heard mention while travelling in the Pacific.

recoiled in horror from what seemed to them a detestable licentiousness,” Melville’s narrator “ridicules such pious abhorrence” (Herbert, “Force” par. 6); he challenges their credibility first by making the missionaries look undedicated, and also by portraying them as presuming a superior position over the natives.

This incident helps Melville establish a theme that runs through *Typee*: the dichotomy between Euro-American civilized living and the natives’ traditional existence. It also exemplifies how “resistance is figured through divestiture, and the (would-be) colonized rout the (would-be) colonizers”(Goudie 226). Furthermore, it demonstrates the narrator’s opinion that the natives are aware of the missionaries’ superior attitude over them. And so, in the larger context, for Melville, *Typee* becomes an inaugural novel in which he “expresses nearly everything he could express in political or social terms” (Donoghue 362), but I would add that the missionary presence in both *Typee* and *Omoo* take a paramount position in his social critique. Melville’s cultural critique often exposes how “[t]he cultural edifice [the missionaries] attempted to transmit to the Polynesians [...] was remote from the missionaries’ own culture in both time and place. It presented a tremendous challenge in translating to terms accessible to yet a third culture with a starkly different history and worldview” (Bercaw Edwards, *Cannibal* 112). These challenges, in Melville’s depiction, enact the cultural destruction of the natives in the attempt to “civilize” them.

Upon landing on the island of Nuku Hiva in 1833, the missionary Mary Parker commented upon the “depravity” of the islanders: looking around, she “saw the natives, naked, rude and disgusting to every feeling. Their little filthy huts bespeak their poverty and degradation, and their vacant looks tell

their poverty of mind” (qtd. in Wallace 272). Parker’s tone further reveals her assumed advanced position relative to that of the Marquesan natives: “What a savage people [...] their looks strike terror. I cover my face to keep away the sight. Can they be human? Did humanity ever sink so below the brute? [...] For what do we make our abode with them? No light shines on the path” (qtd. in Dening 176). The missionaries’ Euro-American standards make it hard for them to enter the Marquesas without viewing the natives as savages, with no place in the world outside their own “naked, rude, and disgusting” lifestyle. Such superior attitudes, especially demonstrated through the female missionaries, has led one critic to note that, “[u]nable to allow any continuity between themselves and the Marquesan women, the American mission wives experience only repulsion and disgust, not the compassion assumed to be at the core of their vocation” (Wallace 285–86). Returning to the fiasco of the female missionary’s clothing, the narrator’s ironic comment that she is “not sufficiently evangelical” to endure being placed on the same level as the Marquesan women exposes his opinion that there is an inherent injustice to the missionary view that natives are subhuman.

After the narrator descends into the Typee Valley and assigns himself the name Tom (converted to Tommo due to the phonology of the Typee language), he begins his philosophizing about the destruction

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<sup>8</sup> Tommo is essentially a captive in the Typee Valley, with the natives keeping a close watch on his every move. In this sense, “[t]he politics of *Typee* are more complex than those of most American captivity narratives, which tend to present an uncomplicated picture of civilization encountering savagery—Tommo, in contrast, is distrustful of such narratives and in particular of the exercise of colonial power” (Nediger 28). Interestingly, Tommo’s position as a captive, rather than putting a negative twist on his perspectives, causes him to praise the Typee’s daily life and how they live freely.



of the native lifestyle occurring throughout the Pacific Islands.<sup>8</sup> As Zan Dale Robinson argues, *Typee* is a confrontation between “good and evil in which [Melville] depicted the ruination of primitive life by the intrusion of Western civilization” (2). Tommo’s thoughts counterbalance the views of such missionaries as Mary Parker; he does not see the natives living in a disgusting state *until* they have been converted to the standards that the colonizers and missionaries bring with them across the ocean. Later in the narrative, when comparing the Polynesian heathen with the Fuegians of South America, Tommo’s voice exemplifies what Robinson calls the “sense of dread and mystery whenever he demonstrated how evil inscrutably manifested itself” (2):

The naked wretch who shivers beneath the bleak skies, and starves among the inhospitable wilds of Tierra-del-Fuego, might indeed be made happier by civilization, for it would alleviate his physical wants. But the voluptuous Indian, with every desire supplied, whom Providence has bountifully provided with all the sources of pure and natural enjoyment, and from whom are removed so many of the ills and pains of life—what has he to desire at the hands of Civilization? She may “cultivate his mind,”—may “elevate his thoughts,”—these I believe are the established phrases—but will he be the happier? Let the once smiling and populous Hawaiian islands, with their now diseased, starving, and dying natives, answer the question. The missionaries may seek to disguise the matter as they will, but the facts are incontrovertible; and the devoutest Christian who visits that group with an unbiased mind, must go away mournfully asking—“Are these, alas! the fruits of

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twenty-five years of enlightening?" (Melville 180–81)

When assimilated into the Euro-American standards, the heathens in some sense may conform to a "civilized" standard of life, as measured by an external culture, but they are no longer capable of providing for themselves. Tommo depicts the presumed advancements of the converted Polynesians as an unwilling "participation in a cultural system" that becomes "a kind of captivity, delineating cultural assimilation as imprisonment" within a foreign system (Colatrella 90). This internment brings about "the realization that the Polynesians [are] being destroyed by the multiform pressure of white Western culture" (Herbert, "Force" par. 20).<sup>9</sup> Such cultural confinement is something that Tommo dreads for the Typee, and he bemoans the day when they will be decimated like the inhabitants of the Hawaiian Islands.

If the savages must be brought into a "civilized" state of living, Tommo desires them to be brought there without their culture being utterly destroyed. The simple manner of living enjoyed by the Typee leads Tommo to believe, in Walter Herbert's words, that "civilized man has departed more widely from his innate moral sense, into arbitrary forms and requirements of behavior" (*Marquesan* 167). The Typee Valley, free from almost any influence from outsiders, has been able to retain its original sense of ease, and Tommo comes to believe that the Typee have

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<sup>9</sup> Often documented, with most Western influence came the presence of strong alcohol; as much as the missionaries tried to admonish drunkenness by the sailors and natives, they were far from successful. In the 1837 *Travels to the Islands of the Pacific Ocean*, J. A. Moerenhout relates an 1830 visit to Tahiti where the natives, "like all the nations in their condition, are only too much overtaken by drunkenness; therefore, one soon saw nothing but drunk people everywhere, at every hour, on all sides, from day to night, women or men indifferently" (149). Under such conditions, the natives often resorted back to their previous "pagan" practices; during one such relapse, Moerenhout recounts that: "Horried, the missionaries used all their influence to prevent this blow [of regressive behavior]" (149).

a right to their own methods and culture. This opinion mirrors Melville's own experience: while "[a]mong the Typees—in an ironic similitude of the internal conversion the missionaries sought for the natives, both in cause and resulting vision—Melville underwent [a] profound and fundamental psychological transformation [...]. Consequently, he learned to see and think of culture and civilization in new, even revolutionary ways" (Cluff 65). Holding an alternate view of culture and civilization brings Tommo to believe that the conversion processes that the missionaries are using result in an undesirable outcome: "Let the savages be civilized, but civilize them with benefits, and not with evils; and let heathenism be destroyed, but not by destroying the heathen" (288). As of yet, the Typee Valley is free from this destruction; however, Tommo fears it will not be long before the invaders permanently enter their world.

With the natural resources provided by the islands they inhabit, the Typee are not in need of development to make them happier. In contrast, the Hawaiian Islanders, Tommo argues, no longer possess the natural freedoms and happiness they once had; they have become shackled by the vices of the external world now penetrating deep into every essence of their living. Joyce Sparer Adler, in "Melville's *Typee* and *Omoo*: of 'Civilized' War on 'Savage' Peace," claims that in *Typee*, "[t]he peaceful primitive life of the Typees is a vantage point from which to look more sharply at the destructive aspects of nineteenth-century civilization" (97), allowing Tommo to praise their life by contrasting it with the presumed advancements of his own culture.

Not yet infiltrated by foreign inhabitants, they are free from the diseases that Melville so strongly emphasizes in the text as being a primary

tribulation in the Tahitian and Sandwich Islands:

the continual happiness, which so far as I was able to judge appeared to prevail in the valley, sprang principally from that all-pervading sensation which Rousseau has told us he at one time experienced, the mere buoyant sense of a healthful physical existence. And indeed in this particular the *Typees* had ample reason to felicitate themselves, for sickness was almost unknown. (185)

Charles Stewart's narrative, in *A Residence in the Sandwich Islands* (1839), paints a very different view of the Hawaiian natives' condition following colonization: "It is quite sickly among the natives at present. Two chief women died on Sunday; one here, and one at Waikiki; and from the daily wailing heard in various directions, it is probable there are many deaths among the common people" (225). Stewart also observes that the introduction of their afflictions "is attributed, by the natives, to foreigners" (119). Tommo laments the arrival of the colonizers because "no sooner are the images overturned, the temples demolished, and the idolaters converted into *nominal* Christians, than disease, vice, and premature death make their appearance" (Melville 288). For Tommo, the introduction of Christianity precedes the destructive forces of civilization. As traditional Polynesian lifestyle is replaced by the Euro-American views of proper human conduct, the native is left vulnerable and needy.

Intertextual borrowing in *Typee* and *Omoo* is perhaps most noticeable when Melville is addressing the impact of the missionaries. Another source that Melville references in writing his commentary on the Sandwich Islands is Otto Von Kotzebue's *A New Voyage Round The World in The Years 1823-*

1826 (1830). Kotzebue gives an account of the sickness that was wiping out many of the natives of the islands: "An epidemic disease prevailed this year throughout the Sandwich Islands. It produced a great mortality, death generally following the attack within a few days. In Hanaruro I saw many corpses daily carried to their burial; but nowhere is recovery from serious illness so improbable as here" (423). While Melville's stay in the Typee Valley was much shorter than his other island adventures, he was greatly impressed by the absence of illness among the natives. The narrator reports that "[d]uring the whole period of my stay I saw but one invalid among them; and on their smooth clear skins you observed no blemish or mark of disease" (185). Indeed, as Rousseau so clearly explains, "[w]hen one thinks about the stout constitutions of the savages, at least those whom we have not ruined with our strong liquors; when one becomes aware of the fact that they know almost no illnesses but wounds and old age, one is strongly inclined to believe that someone could easily write the history of human maladies by following the history of civil societies" (122). Freedom from Western diseases physically exemplifies the Typee natives' independence from Euro-American influence. They appear to be unblemished in all aspects of their lives; thus, Tommo refers to their valley as an Edenic retreat from the encroaching exterior world.

Tommo's contrast between the Typee Valley and the other Polynesian locales already succumbing to the advancements of civilization is paralleled with the Nuku Hiva natives. On a visit to the island three years prior to the events of *Typee*, Melville spent time wandering the village of Nuku Hiva. The contrasts between island countries that Melville witnessed are voiced in Tommo's opinion that even the smallest of interactions between

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the natives and foreigners impacts them negatively, as he “had observed that even the little intercourse Europeans had carried on with the [Nuku Hiva] natives had not failed to leave its traces amongst them” (267). Tommo’s narrative reaches the critical point of calling Western interaction something akin to pollution, as the shoreline is “contact zone” (Doan 208) for the inhabitants of Nuku Hiva, but the Typee are protected within their valley. Yet, while Melville romanticizes the lifestyle of the natives through what appears to be “a modern sensibility,” he is still “very much embedded in the racial hierarchies that pervaded nineteenth-century Western life” (Tricomi 81). In one sense, Tommo is caught in a hypocritical conundrum because he himself has now infiltrated into the Typee Valley, bringing with him his own cultural values and comparisons. Mitchell Breitwieser, in “False Sympathy in Melville’s *Typee*,” sees this bias occurring because “[t]he root of colonialism is so deep that even an apparent rebel may turn out to be an assistant” for external forces (“False” 397). On the other hand, others have argued that the narrator is able to separate himself from his Western roots: “Tommo compares his own ways with theirs in an unusually fair-minded way for his time. Unlike the repressed missionaries to the Marquesan Islands [...], Tommo is consciously fascinated by the Typees’ uninhibited nakedness, and intellectually curious about their unusual taboos. He seeks to understand rather than dismiss the customs of the islanders” (Cassuto 171–72). In his effort to explore Polynesian cultures, Tommo pays close attention to the cultural differences not just of the Typee, but also those with whom he contrasts them. Therefore, Tommo is able to observe that the Nuku Hiva natives have already been influenced by their interaction through both the missionary efforts and the harbor

landings of whaling ships.

The simplicity Tommo admires in the Typee lifestyle leads him to praise the lack of societal standards considered essential by his own culture. Through the voice of his narrator, “Melville described the society and the daily life of the Typees as a version of paradise. He was especially taken by the absence of labor, money, and guilt, seeing that habits he thought were natural to mankind when he grew up in America were, in fact, culturally determined and baneful” (Ziff 5). These absences lead him to realize that “savagery was a term applicable to the Europeans’ colonial and missionary activities in the Pacific rather than to the people they practiced upon” (Ziff 5). By redirecting the issue from civilizing the so-called savage to that of highlighting the destruction of their life, Tommo is able to proclaim:

Better will it be for them for ever to remain the happy and innocent heathens and barbarians that they now are, than, like the wretched inhabitants of the Sandwich Islands, to enjoy the mere name of Christians without experiencing any of the vital operations of true religion, whilst, at the same time, they are made the victims of the worst vices and evils of civilized life. (267)

Here we find the primary thrust of Melville’s quarrel with the missionaries. While attempting to convert the savage, the missionaries have either neglected to provide sufficient direction for the natives to live a Christ-like existence, or they have simply Christianized the natives in order to proudly proclaim the abolition of paganism. This argument makes it clear why “Melville’s perception was uncomfortable for those who saw Christian civilization as naturally good and heathen savagery as naturally evil” (Denning 148). More specifically, Melville’s narrator thus “lays bare

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the imperialistic motives behind the introduction of Christianity to non-Western cultures, the savagery it causes rather than eliminates" (Rowe 83). The Typee are in a state of innocence that allows them to remain outside the confines of the colonizers' rigid morals. Tommo's narration attempts to show that "[g]oodness and peace are original to human nature. Hatred and aggression signify a depravity, a fall," as Adler argues, and the Typee have not "yet had Christianity forced upon them. In this they are still fortunate, for the imposition of Christianity upon 'pagan' peoples is a death-dealing process" (99). Melville is apprehensive for both the survival of the natives and their culture:

The primitive world is the elemental, unartificial world of the child, and is the only world which can embrace what for Melville is the childlike ideal of Christ. Thus Melville sees the missionary as a paradox, for not only does the missionary not represent Christ and not suffer the little children to come unto him, but he tries to destroy those very childlike qualities which are the beauty of the barbarian. (Stern 21)

This paradox ultimately unfolds into Melville's desire for the native to remain in his primitive state. It is obvious from his first-hand observations in the Sandwich Islands that the missionary efforts have destroyed any semblance of the "happy and innocent heathens" by indoctrinating them with fundamental Christian beliefs and a culture differing substantially from that which the natives have been forced to abandon. Their conversion has only introduced the vices that pervade the Euro-American society.

One of these flaws frequently referred to by Melville is the converted Polynesian culture's new-found greed for Euro-American possessions. The



element of greed is something that he develops to a greater extent in *Omoa*. In *Typee*, however, Tommo focuses on the natives' lack of that unhealthy desire for monetary goods. Despite the so-called benefits the missionaries have brought to the natives, they have also instilled in the natives an extreme drive for foreign possessions. The extent of the vices prevalent in the Sandwich Islands can be ascertained in Stewart's *Residence*:

When a strange ship arrives, and the officers complain of the extravagance of the harbor-fees, this impost is immediately declared to be exacted by the advice of the missionaries: the high prices of articles of refreshment in the market, is assigned to the same cause; though we ourselves are now living almost exclusively on sea biscuit, salt beef and pork, brought from America, two or three years old, and scarce ever taste a banana or melon, because we do not feel at liberty to purchase fresh provisions and vegetables—much less fruit—at the price demanded by the chiefs. (125–26)

The corruption of greed negatively affects the natives to such an extent that they are willing the direct the cause of their extortion practices to the missionaries. While the natives may have converted to Christianity, they have not shown the fruits of their “salvation” because their actions speak loudly against the doctrines surrounding Christian conversion.

The contrast between the sophistication of the civilized islands and the innocent nature of the Typee is further emphasized through Tommo's explanation that in the Typee Valley, the natives are free from greed-generating influences. Tommo discovers that

[t]here were none of those thousand sources of irritation that the

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ingenuity of civilized man has created to mar his own felicity. There were no foreclosures of mortgages, no protested notes, no bills payable, no debts of honour in Typee; [...]; no beggars; no debtors' prisons; no proud and hard-hearted nabobs in Typee; or to sum up all in one word—no Money! 'That root of all evil' was not to be found in the valley. (183–84)

The Typee give freely to Tommo all that they have to offer; food, clothing, and shelter are provided for him without the slightest expectation of recompense. Practices revolving around the exchange of money are nonexistent in the Typee Valley, and its absence produces vitality in their social system that exists in few places outside the valley. Tommo insinuates, then, that the greed of the other natives, if they were truly converted, would remain minimal if the missionaries were properly performing the true purpose of their mission. It is important to bear in mind, nevertheless, that as much as Tommo praises the Typee lifestyle he is retelling his narrative from the safety of his home country: "The fact that he remembers the valley as a place of constant and unvarying sunshine is [...] evidence of the nostalgia that sometimes distorts his retrospective vision" (Dillingham 19). Melville, in directing Tommo, is able to emphasize the stability of the Typee culture in its independence from the culture-crushing impact of Western and missionary imposition.

The primary cultural foundation that Tommo praises in the Typee natives is their simple system of self governing. He observes that "the influence exerted over the people of the valley by their chiefs was mild in the extreme; and as to any general rule or standard of conduct by which the commonality were governed in their intercourse with each

other [...], I should be almost tempted to say, that none existed on the island, except, indeed, the mysterious 'Taboo' be considered as such" (293). Yet the system of the taboo pervades the natives' governing system to a much greater extent than Tommo grasps. Melville himself, as well as his narrator, may not be able to understand the Typee restrictions, but the text does emphasize how important the system of taboo is for the Polynesians' existence. Melville is able to perceive "with unusual intuition that *tabu* was the indispensable symbol of mind and life" for the islanders (Baird 153). The colonizers, however, cannot establish a hierarchal order based on such an undefined system; likewise, the missionaries are unable to incorporate their religious doctrines into a pagan system of belief. Nevertheless, Tommo claims that since "there were no legal provisions whatever for the well-being and conservation of society," the Typee are still able to live "with a harmony and smoothness unparalleled [...] in the most select, refined, and pious associations of mortals in Christendom. [...] They seemed to be governed by that sort of tacit common-sense law, which, say what they will of the inborn lawlessness of the human race, has its precepts graven on every breast" (293-94). By suggesting the existence of a civilized pagan, Tommo undermines the missionaries' justification for removing the so-called barbarous traits of the natives. He testifies to the fact that the natives can coexist in harmony, even to the extent of pious Christians, and therefore professes that their system need not be altered by Euro-American standards.

Larzer Ziff has expounded on the observations on self-governing taken up by Melville's narrator. Since the Typee oversee themselves with this "common-sense law," Ziff sees parallels between Tommo and the theories

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within Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*:

To view savagery as inherently lawless is really to view democracy as ultimately unworkable. Undemocratic forms of authority require the doctrine of natural depravity, as Paine perceived when he asserted that "the palaces of kings are built on the ruins of the bowers of paradise." If American civilization has gone wrong, so wrong as to disinherit the young such as Melville, it has done so by allowing adverse experiences to detach its social system from its foundation on a belief in the inborn goodness of all men. [...] Manifestly, [Melville] is referring to a political government among the islanders which can be lax because harmony arises from the possession of common virtues. (Ziff 7–8)

Yet, the missionaries, among others, believe the natives' system needs a Christianized form of rule in order to bring about their civilizing. While in the islands, Charles Stewart observed a similar phenomenon; he realized that the natives were able to live with each man acting as a "representative of his own rights, and the only law-giver, with liberty in all cases, promptly to wield the power of the executive, after having discharged, to his own satisfaction, the functions of the judge!" (qtd. in Anderson 130). To the Western mind, however, a system like this one cannot be integrated, because it must inevitably lead "to lawless retribution and revenge"; thus, in Stewart's mindset, "the Hawaiian missionary monarchy—so odious to Melville—was far preferable" (Anderson 130). Such one-directional opinion is supported in another South Pacific account. Richard Henry Dana, in *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840), considers the Hawaiian missionary efforts as necessary to establish a system of law:

Doubtless the missionaries have largely influenced the legislation of the kingdom, and its police system; it is fortunate that they have done so. Influence of some kind was the law of the native development. Had not the missionaries and their friends among the foreign merchants and professional men been in the ascendant, these Islands would have presented only the usual history of a handful of foreigners exacting everything from a people who denied their right to anything. (qtd. in Frear 41)

Dana believed that after exposure to the Western world, the “harmony and smoothness” in which the natives live required an established system of government to rule over them—arguably to protect them from their own denial of self rights or protection.

The absence of a foreign power leads Melville’s narrator to praise the natives and raise them in esteem above many who practice Christianity. Tommo’s emphasis is on the actual conduct of the natives. He is not concerned with whether they bow their head in a Christian fashion; rather, it is their ability to civilly interact with each other that garners them such admiration. Tommo becomes confounded: “Are these the ferocious savages, the blood-thirsty cannibals of whom I have heard such frightful tales!” (297).<sup>10</sup> Realizing that they may indeed be cannibals, Tommo still questions if this practice means that their entire culture is completely depraved. Waichee Dimock has put forth in “*Typee*: Melville’s Critique of Community,” that cannibalism acts “[a]s an emblem of the perfect community, [it] reflects

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<sup>10</sup> Some critics have observed that Tommo’s greatest two fears while among the Typee are their constant pestering that he be tattooed and that he remain with them for the rest of his days (Evelev 25).

not only a *primitive* but also an *advanced* social state" (35). Dimock believes that the Typee appear as "[a] community eager to 'incorporate'" their guests "literally, [and] bodily"; therefore, the Typee reach an "advanced" state because: "[h]ospitality effaces the identity of the host and seeks also to efface the guest by assimilation; cannibalism accomplishes the same on a physical level" (35). While still fearing the natives' propensity towards cannibalism, Tommo gives "the hint of superstitious cannibalism" (Sanborn 98), but he cannot allow this practice to become justification for completely destroying their entire culture. He even diminishes the serious potential cannibalism with a "refusal to accept the existence of cannibalism motivated by superstition" (Sanborn 100).

Tommo claims that the Typee should not be judged by just their cannibalistic habits; rather, a shift in focus should occur, and they should be evaluated for their civility toward one another. Dimock expounds on this position, noting that the "Typee are not exactly like America, to be sure, but only because [their culture] is more refined, more advanced, only because it is already in possession of the 'social order' America is still striving after" (36). The Typee are therefore more advanced in this social aspect. Melville's narrator believes the Typee "deal more kindly with each other, and are more humane, than many who study essays on virtue and benevolence, and who repeat every night that beautiful prayer breathed first by the lips of the divine and gentle Jesus" (297). Tommo commends the humanity of the natives; in his view "the Typees suddenly appear neither exotic nor primitive. They are rather models of Christian charity, 'unparalleled' perhaps, but hardly unsanctified" (Dimock 36). In Tommo's eyes, the Typee have proven themselves more respectable through their

actions than those professing the faith of the missionaries, and as the novel moves to a close, Tommo's "creeping dread" (Suzuki 364) of Western invasion escalates.

Tommo's praise of the natives' civility radically contrasts with his opinion of the natives' status in the Sandwich Islands. He laments that the simple lifestyle of the Typee Valley will soon be destroyed, as in Hawai'i, with the missionaries' civilizing efforts: "Ill-fated people! I shudder when I think of the changes a few years will produce in their paradisiacal abode" (287). Tommo's most powerful attack on the missionaries' work in the South Pacific comes in this bitterly satiric account of the destruction of the Hawaiian natives:

Behold the glorious result! The abominations of Paganism have given way to the pure rites of the Christian worship,—the ignorant savage has been supplanted by the refined European! Look at Honolulu, the metropolis of the Sandwich Islands!—A community of disinterested merchants, and devoted self-exiled heralds of the Cross, located on the very spot that twenty years ago was defiled by the presence of idolatry. What a subject for an eloquent Bible-meeting orator! Nor has such an opportunity for a display of missionary rhetoric been allowed to pass by unimproved!—But when these philanthropists send us such glowing accounts of one half of their labours, why does their modesty restrain them from publishing the other half of the good they have wrought?—Not until I visited Honolulu was I aware of the fact that the small remnant of the natives had been civilized into draught-horses; and evangelized into beasts of burden. But so it is. They have been

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literally broken into the traces, and are harnessed to the vehicles of their spiritual instructors like so many dumb brutes! (289)

The natives must now carry the burden of “civilized living,” which brings them no rewards, as they are laden with constraints that are dehumanizing and murderous. While Tommo raises the natives to a higher level than most Christians would allow, the missionaries lower the natives’ status to that of “beasts of burden.” By describing the natives as draught horses, Tommo illustrates how the natives have become commodified by the colonizers of the Sandwich Islands. Tommo “feels special resentment toward the missionaries who, pretending to exercise Christian sympathy for the victims of power, are actually rendering the islands pliable by shaming them out of indigenous cultural traditions” (Breitwieser, “False” 403). Inevitable as the colonization of the islands may be, Tommo cannot justify the abuses that civilization has brought and will bring on the natives.

In one of his famous claims concerning the primitiveness of the *Typee*, Tommo illuminates how his perspective differs from that of the missionary. He believes that “[t]he penalty of the Fall presses very lightly upon the valley of *Typee*” (287); therefore, he sees no reason why they must be subjected to the position of work horses by the introduction of foreign cultures. As Alberti observes, “Tommo consistently wants to see *Typee* life as formless, existing outside the ‘civilized’ regimens” (338) that are held within the Euro-American conceptions of man’s duties. This prelapsarian stability contradicts the reasoning of Biblical theology, and counter to the postlapsarian theory the *Typee* live within a world where hard labor is not essential to survival. The valley is presented by Tommo as “an unspoiled Eden: a primal paradise that will reveal its marvelous secrets if man will



lay aside his civilized pretensions and enter into the spirit of the savage” (Herbert, *Marquesan* 169). Yet, this Eden cannot continue; when the Euro-American civilizations force their expectations upon the simple world of the native, this state of Edenic bliss changes into the fallen state of civilization.

Tommo’s comparison between the natural Typee Valley and the Biblical Fall further intensifies his belief that the natives do not require civilizing. The need to exert themselves in order to provide nourishment appears to be minimal, as Tommo relates: “I scarcely saw any piece of work performed there which caused the sweat to stand upon a single brow. As for digging and delving for a livelihood, the thing is altogether unknown” (287). Nature, not the doctrines of civilization, provides adequately for the Typee. Melville creates a vivid contrast between the living conditions of those who have been subjugated under the foreign colonizers and those who are still free. Ultimately, as Herbert claims, “[w]hat Melville sees in the interaction between the missionaries and islanders in the South Seas is a process where the grand abstractions espoused by the missionaries produce a distortion of native life that justifies and facilitates a system of economic oppression whose results appear to vindicate the abstractions that sponsor them” (*Marquesan* 174). For Tommo, the Fall does not occur among the islanders *until the intervention of the missionaries*. It is this paradox that creates in Tommo’s opinion the impression that the natives are not benefited by their conversion.

With a voice of dismay, Tommo expresses his belief that “[t]here is something decidedly wrong in the practical operations of the Sandwich Island Missions” (291). The natives, peaceful and content before the advent

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of Western civilization into their culture, find themselves involved in vices much worse than those that the missionaries claim to be removing. At times, Melville even goes so far as to consider “practical ways of applying the principles he has learned of the Typees’ society to that of the civilization he belongs” (Nara 174). As a consequence of Colonialism, however, Herbert observes that “the natives are crushed into apparent conformity with the dictates of missionary theory. The spiritual ascendancy enforced by their self-styled benefactors initiates a process which reduces the native population into a labor force for the support of what rapidly becomes a bitter material oppression, and the doctrine of the Fall is invoked to interpret and justify the results of the process” (“Force” par. 23). This process actually reduces the native to a subhuman being, expressly confined to the missionary perspective on a proper Christian mode of living. Now the converted Polynesians of the Sandwich Islands have been reduced below the level of human existence—a condition which denies to them any of the benefits of their usurped culture—and they are no longer free to live the simple but vanishing Edenic life which the Typee still enjoy.

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# BULLETIN

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