

ABSTRACT

ELASTICITY OF MIND IN HERMAN MELVILLE'S *TYPEE*: A QUEST FOR INDIVIDUATION AND VOICE

By Linda T. Shealey

Recent literary criticism of Herman Melville's early Pacific works has focused largely on his relationship to Western imperialism. However, a relationship less engaged and whose influence may be minimized—perhaps due to *Moby-Dick*'s outsized masculinity—is Melville's relationship to women and to the feminine. This thesis considers the central role of Melville's relationship to the feminine from the time of his first novel, *Typee*, and its impact on the development of his narrative style, evident in *Moby-Dick* and much of his later writings. This thesis argues that the author's complex personal relationship to the feminine, as set out first in *Typee*, is impacted by the psychological tasks Melville grapples with as a young man engaged in tasks of self-definition. Tracing an innate inner conflict between rebellion and compliance, the paper speculates that the emerging writer chafed at constraints placed on him by limiting literary genres much as he chafed at rigid gender and sexual boundaries in his personal life, and that he sought a new, more feminized and elastic narrative model. The progress of this exploration is recorded in the text through Melville's portrayal of feminized native landscape and characters, his limited development of female characters, and his discovery of "elasticity of mind," a sign for the feminine. After engaging "elasticity" with the feminized nymphs and encountering the ultra-feminized characters of Fayaway and Kory-Kory, this shifting relationship culminates in the figure of Marnoo, an androgynous, cross-cultural traveler. In Marnoo's feminized yet transitional figure Melville discovers the model for resolving personal and narrative struggles that lead to his later, mature voice. This thesis further argues that Melville's evolving relationship to the feminine provides insight into a narrative approach that reaches fruition in the unique, complex, and sophisticated voice of *Moby-Dick*'s narrator Ishmael, which embodies much of Marnoo's fluidity.

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by

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INTRODUCTION

Herman Melville's semi-autobiographical first novel *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life* (1846), a bestselling travel narrative written shortly after his discharge from the Navy in 1844, is based on the author's experience jumping ship in 1842. The book was "in print and making his reputation" little more than a year after Melville had been "discharged from the frigate *United States* as a common seaman" (Matthiessen 371) and after he had spent nearly four years roving the Pacific Ocean. Although others, including William Shakespeare (*The Tempest*), Daniel Defoe (*Robinson Crusoe*), and Richard Henry Dana, Jr. (*Two Years Before the Mast*) had written South Seas fiction, and Lord George Gordon Byron's last long poem "The Island" (1823) is considered *Typee*'s literary precursor, the novel was an "instant success" and secured Melville's reputation as "the first great author to portray the authentic South Seas" (Matthiessen 371; Day v).

Since its publication, however, critics have debated the authenticity of *Typee*. Its London publisher John Murray together with British and American reviewers were skeptical of its autobiographical claims until Melville's companion, Richard Tobias Greene, or "Toby," emerged to testify to its accuracy. "The Story of Toby" was included as an appendix to all later editions of the book, with Murray even publishing it as a separate pamphlet to satisfy the reading public.

It was not until 1939, with the publication of Charles R. Anderson's *Melville in the South Seas*, that *Typee* was deemed a "compilation" (190), and its fictional and inter-

textual elements established by literary critics. As Rod Edmond summarizes in

Representing the South Pacific: Colonial Discourse from Cook to Gauguin:

Melville's stay among the Typee had been no more than three to four weeks, not four months as the book had stated. His ethnography of the Typee and other details of the Marquesas drew heavily on the accounts of earlier visitors which he read subsequent to his own stay. By the time that Melville was travelling and writing the South Seas were already extensively textualized. (84)

Edmond concluded that *Typee* is “an elaborate blend of fact and fiction, authenticity and romance, which needs to be read within and against this already complex discursive tradition” (84). Many sources acknowledge that in order to extend his limited knowledge of the Pacific island on which the novel is set—Nuku Hiva, or “Nukuheva” in the text—Melville had borrowed heavily from earlier sources, including prior exploration narratives by missionary Charles S. Stewart: *Journal of a Cruise Made to the Pacific Ocean, in the United States' Ship Vincennes, during the Years 1829 and 1830* (1815, 1822); naval captain David Porter's *Journal of a Cruise Made to the Pacific Ocean in the U.S. Frigate Essex* (1822); missionary William Ellis' *Polynesian Researches* (1833); and Russian physician and naturalist Georg H. von Langsdorff's *Voyages and Travels in Various Parts of the World, during the Years 1803, 1804, 1805, 1806, and 1807* (1813) (Robertson-Lorant 136).

The “complex discursive tradition” that Melville made use of in *Typee* were conventions belonging to that “enormously popular” nineteenth-century literary form, the

travel narrative (Martin 68). Such literature typically described a journey to a distant, exotic place, and its people and culture. Melville's effort combined both South Seas travel story and semi-autobiographical personal narrative that later became known as his "spiritual autobiography" (Crain 124). Melville found commercial success with this form in his first two works, *Typee* and its sequel *Omoo* (1847), although his American publishers censored *Typee*'s attacks on "missionary and imperialist despoilers" of the Polynesian islands, causing him to complain in a well-known letter to his friend Nathaniel Hawthorne: "Try to get a living by the Truth—and go to the Soup Societies" (Karcher, *Herman Melville* 2551). One year later, in *Omoo*, he unsparingly exposed the negative effects of white influence on Tahiti, retracting these earlier critical concessions.

As Nina Baym states in "Melville's Quarrel with Fiction," Melville became increasingly frustrated by the "requirements of truthfulness" in a narrative form more related to journalism than to literature—and a genre that required only descriptive accuracy and a good story while providing its author "limited opportunities for self-expression and intellectual probing" (911). He moved beyond the formal limits of the travel narrative in his next work, *Mardi* (1849), his favorite experimental work. Due to its dismal critical and popular reception, however, its creative advances were followed by the straightforward sea tales *Redburn* (1849) and *White-Jacket* (1850), books that did not please him as an author, but that made money. After that, as Carolyn L. Karcher summarizes, "he started experimenting with increasingly elaborate strategies for subverting his readers' prejudices and conveying unwelcome truths" by developing formal literary innovations—new techniques for "fusing fact and symbol" that "reached

fruition in his most powerful and original work,” *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* (1851) (Karcher, *Herman Melville* 2551-52).

By the time Melville wrote his masterpiece *Moby-Dick*, his artistic aspirations far exceeded those in *Typee*, where Baym concludes he did not even aspire to truth telling:

The word true [in *Typee*] bears little relation to the truth toward which Melville strove in such later, serious works as *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick*. Truth in *Typee* and *Omoo* only refers to descriptive accuracy, whereas Truth, in Melville’s later serious formulation, refers to the inspired articulation of intuited general laws about ultimate reality. These metaphysical utterances must also be distinguished from the more mundane psychological and social insights that have usually preoccupied the writers of great novels but that to Melville represented transient and trivial concerns. (910-11)

In his most mature work he strove to fulfill the role of a truth-teller whose powers derived from the Absolute, per Emerson’s conception of the artist. *Moby-Dick*, Baym concludes, was “the turning point” in Melville’s career, and marked recognition of his increasing distrust in language’s ability to do this. Karcher outlines how Melville, dissatisfied with the ability of his writing to expose the evils of “capitalism, slavery, war, and imperialism” or to meaningfully impact his audience, relinquished the “sympathetic sailor narrator” point-of-view of *Typee* and other early works in favor of the “very different literary style” exemplified in later works “Bartleby” (1853), “Benito Cereno” (1855), “The Paradise of Bachelors and The Tartarus of Maids” (1855), and *The Confidence Man: The*

Masquerade (1857) (Melville and Berthoff, *Great Short Works*; Melville, *Confidence Man*). By contrast, this later, more elastic style “mercilessly anatomized the readers he had given up hope of converting” and sought to “jar them out of their complacency” through language that “insistently provoked discomfort” and a mocking narration that mimicked the obtuseness of his readership’s social and class milieu (Karcher, *Herman Melville* 2552).

The seeds for this later work were planted in earlier texts, and particularly in *Typee*. His first work introduced many of the themes and narrative devices developed in later writing where the author aspired to create not only a “suspenseful, entertaining, salable work” (Baym 911) to meet the financial demands of marriage and family, as he did at the beginning of his career, but to grow intellectually and artistically, and to “connect the individual experience of the world with a larger totality” (Tally 193). As a preliminary effort, *Typee* introduces one of Melville’s early themes, the defense of the “savage” over the civilized. This refutation of the traditional Western dyad, which held that such social and racial distinctions were mutually exclusive, was to become an important part of his life’s endeavor. For this reason, and despite Melville’s substantial indebtedness to his sources, *Typee* was seen as the first “serious” writing of its kind, although it also became known as another in the broad tradition of travelogues that “imaginatively appropriated” the South Pacific in order to “construct its case against the ignobility of civilization” (Edmond 84).

Many critics, like Anderson, view Melville’s maiden work merely as a “preface” to his lifelong “brief against civilization” (177), noting instances in the novel where

Melville praises the savage's innate virtue and criticizes Western missionaries, morality, and capitalism. Others, such as Mary Bercaw Edwards, see this tendency as a template for future works, stressing his lifelong preoccupation with the theme, while others seek to position Melville *within* a critique of Western imperialism. In his article "'I saw everything but could comprehend nothing': Melville's *Typee*, Travel Narrative, and Colonial Discourse," Douglas Ivison characterizes *Typee* as "Melville's complex negotiation and interrogation of his position within both [colonialist] discourse and genre" (115), and one that attempts to subvert the imperialist assumptions of traditional travel writing.

Carolyn L Karcher's landmark study of Melville and American slavery, *Shadow over the Promised Land: Slavery, Race, and Violence in Melville's America*, demonstrates how Melville's "formative" experiences as a lowly seaman and his "sojourn among 'cannibals'" (1) helped him not only identify with the oppressed, but come to view "the white civilized man as the most ferocious animal on the face of the earth" (Melville, *Typee* 91). In *Typee*, she claims, his encounter with peoples denigrated as "savages" by his own society challenged his deepest cultural assumptions. And although Melville escaped after only "four weeks of 'indulgent captivity'" on the island, he would "never again . . . take for granted either the superiority of white Christian civilization or the benefit of imposing it on others," but began to "re-examine his own society through the eyes of 'savages'" (Karcher, *Shadow* 1-2). Karcher surmises that this also taught him "to draw analogies between different kinds of oppression" (Karcher, *Herman Melville* 2551). Toni Morrison's 1988 Tanner Lecture at the University of Michigan, "Unspeakable

Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature,” extends this claim by shining light on *Moby-Dick*, whose brilliance, she claims, rests in Melville’s “recognition of the moment in America when whiteness became ideology” (qtd. in Delbanco *Melville in the '80s* 721-22).

The concepts of civilization and savagery taken up in *Typee* were also closely examined in T. Walter Herbert’s *Marquesan Encounters: Melville and the Meaning of Civilization* (1980). For Herbert, such South Seas explorations forced Melville to confront the non-white “Other,” a term used to describe “A person other than oneself; a person or group that is outside or excluded from one’s own group” (“Other *n*”), and often employed to privilege the status of the self. According to Herbert, when Melville visited the South Pacific “The Marquesans were seen by their American visitors as earlier forms of what the Americans themselves represented. In the upward progressive movement they represented a level beneath the white man and were deemed appropriate targets for cultivation and improvement” (125). Importantly, he notes that “they also represented those qualities that the white men felt obliged to fight against *in themselves* in order to maintain their own cultural identity” (125, emphasis mine).

In *Racism, Imperialism, and the Traveler’s Gaze in Eighteenth-Century England*, Margaret Hunt examines the unique role of such travel writing in consolidating this notion of “observed cultures and individuals,” noting that “racist and xenophobic ‘truths’” in travel narratives “work to confirm group values and knit individuals to their preferred community.” These travelogues titillate readers with customs just different enough to “pleasurably decenter the ‘normal’” before reassuringly returning them to their

civilized home and status (340). The nineteenth-century idea of “civilization” was also related to the idea of a “civilized self,” which was considered an “improved” form of humanity. When Melville took up the discussion of this civilized-savage dichotomy in *Typee*, he took up these related issues.

On closer look, however, the text presents an ambiguous relationship to both the travel writing genre and to colonialism. For as Catherine Addison points out in “‘Elysian and Effeminate’: Byron’s *The Island* as a Revisionary Text,” even *questing* for the island, as *Typee*’s narrator does, can be seen as “a symbol of” the colonial experience because “the ambivalent combination of exile and desirability so easily adds up to exploitation” (688). As a result, she agrees with Peter Knox-Shaw that ostensibly benign travel narratives such as *Typee* can mirror a colonial relationship to the islands they portray, for “No matter how appreciatively or empathically it is described by the white man passing through, the island exists in his text either for the consumption of a readership hungry for the exotic or for the information of potential colonists and missionaries—usually both.” In addition, Addison cites those who note that the “symbolic eroticism” found in such adventure and exploration narratives creates a pattern of “desire and exploitation” in which “the land and its inhabitants seem to lie open to the delectation of the male protagonist.” Because of this, she states, theorists and critics have equated “colonialist writing” with “writing about women” (688).

In addition to presenting an ambiguous relationship to the travel genre and to Melville’s position towards Western imperialism, *Typee* thus presents an ambiguous relationship to gender and to the idea of “self.” Strikingly, *Typee*’s exploration of

psychological, sexual, social, and metaphysical truths in the South Seas embodies a quest theme that can be seen to broadly mirror Herman Melville's own personal quest for individuation. I propose that it is this quest for individuation that not only impacts his personal, psycho-sexual development, but also impacts his development as an author and informs his narrative voice. As he begins to rebel against and critique the rigid, masculine-centered strictures of religion, and the social and sexual mores of civilized Western society, his contact with South Seas culture provides not only a portal into the feminine, but to the symbolically feminine in himself, and becomes incorporated into a more elastic narrative voice. This process of unifying traditional dichotomies—civilized-savage; masculine-feminine; white-black—and of discovering an “elasticity of mind” in the feminine landscape encompasses his belief, first set out in *Typee*, that “Truth, who loves to be centrally located” is “found between the two extremes” (143). While this process of uniting masculine and feminine reaches its “fruition” in *Moby-Dick*, the search for a liminal “Truth” is also characteristic of much of his later work, and is an inherently rebellious or subversive attempt to “jar” his American audience out of its colonialist “complacency” through language, as Karcher states (*Herman Melville* 2552).

Because *Typee* is based on Melville's experiences as a young man confronted with psychological tasks, and because he lacked a mature self and was susceptible to the world's influences at that time, Melville's youthful, “roving life as a sailor” utterly “schooled his imagination” (Karcher, *Herman Melville* 2551). In *Typee*, the young narrator Tommo becomes a stand-in for Melville's own youthful self, and for his development as a writer. Melville always recognized the immense influence the more

than three years at sea had upon his writing, declaring in *Moby-Dick*: “If hereafter I shall do anything that on the whole a man might rather have done than to have left undone . . . then here I prospectively ascribe all the honor and the glory to whaling; for a whale-ship was my Yale College and my Harvard” (156). As a result, even as Melville wrote *Typee*—the first of six books informed by these travels in the South Pacific—Herbert points out that he began exploring narrative issues by taking the outsider position of a beachcomber. In that role, living “on the boundary line between two incompatible realms,” he developed “a perspective from which the question of perspective itself becomes visible” (Herbert 147). This perspective positioned Melville to develop “sensitivity to the native point of view” (Edmond 85) and to the feminine point of view, allowing him to powerfully critique Western influence in the South Seas—not through idealization of the “savage,” but through a first-hand comparative critique of cultures, influencing even his nascent writing style.

Melville finds many aspects of the South Seas—its geography, remoteness, sexuality, and a sense of cultural coherence despite the unease such eroticism prompts—conducive to safe exploration of psycho-sexual conflicts and issues of father loss, while its “strangeness” triggers such exploration. By aligning its culture, characters, and landscape with the feminine, the island of Nukuheva offer a place from which to observe and then question his own cultural assumptions, to reconcile conflicting issues of gender and sexuality, and to develop as an author. Here, I contend that Melville’s personal development and struggles illuminate a narrative approach that he adopts as a result of this critical contact with the island and its people.

I believe that the way in which Melville employs tropes of the feminine island and islanders in *Typee* helps elucidate his personal relationship with the feminine. This relationship is complicated by a troubled early bond to his devout and domineering mother, and extended to the relationship with his wife, Lizzie Shaw Melville, over their forty-four year marriage. While this biographical context will not be an explicit concern, the author's complex and often tenuous relationship to the feminine, as set out first in *Typee*, will be. I suggest that this relationship to the feminine provides insight into a narrative approach that culminates in the unique, complex, and sophisticated voice of *Moby-Dick's* narrator Ishmael. Among the textual elements that interest me in exploring this changing relationship are Melville's feminized portrayals of both native landscape and native characters, his limited development of female characters, and how "enchantment" and "elasticity of mind"—his markers for the feminine—change to indicate a shift in his view of the feminine over the course of the novel. In making this claim, I draw a parallel between Melville's personal struggles with the psychological issues of gender, sexuality, and maturity embodied in this relationship and his narrative struggles as an emerging writer. I hope to show how these personal developments illuminate his narrative development.

This analysis, then, will begin by demonstrating how Melville depicts the feminine through positive portrayals of Polynesian inhabitants and the island landscape itself in *Typee*, including his "enchantment" by the feminine. At its apex, these feminine powers lead to an altered state, or a fluid "elasticity of mind" (90) that becomes critical to future works, and to his authorial stance. I will then demonstrate how these feminized

elements become dangerous and threatening when aligned with sexuality, including homosexuality, which he finds abhorrent. I will show how inner conflicts of sexuality and selfhood raised during this process are resolved through an encounter with the liminal and androgynous native figure, Marnoo, and how this close encounter with feminine islands and characters ultimately allows Melville to resolve psycho-sexual tensions, substitute a new sense of self, and change his view—allowing Melville to position himself within a more feminized, expansive, and less dichotomous paradigm going forward.

I offer that Melville's personal struggles parallel his struggle as a young writer, and that his contact with the island feminine and the influence of its "elasticity of mind" point out a new and unique way for him to narrate his stories. The youthful, naïve, modest, often inconsistent and unreliable narrative voice of *Typee*'s narrator, Tommo, is transformed and deepens into the fluid, flexible, strong and compelling "I" voice of Melville's most compelling narrator, whose opening line unforgettably declares: "Call me Ishmael."

Specifically, I will argue that Melville's struggle with the native, feminine m/Other reveals his struggle to establish a mature, independent identity separate from that of his childhood self, and that this struggle is reflected in the development of his narrative self. Melville's task requires grappling with latent psychological issues by projecting inner struggles onto his portrayals of native people and landscapes. In opposition to this attempt is a contrasting male world seeking to enforce social and sexual mores by foiling attempts to breach social and sexual boundaries: the Father, in Oedipal terms, that denies

the son's sexual access to the (feminine) Mother. As a result of this tension, the fictional characters and landscapes are made alternately alluring and disgusting to him, although they allow him to vicariously approach the feminine and to begin resolving these conflicts. The exotic island, his destination, provides the setting for this inner confrontation while the narrative provides a vehicle to enact the struggle and trace its progress. Narrator Tommo, as stated, embodies both Melville's youthful self and his development as a writer. Over the course of this exploration, Melville also develops a narrative voice based on those socially and sexually *hybrid* aspects of island life that he finds most appealing and freeing: its cross-cultural, free-roaming, liminal characteristics personified in Marnoo. By following Marnoo's powerful, fluid, and eloquent example he discovers a new way to tell a story, capture an audience, and—in the process—discovers his own life's work. It is this fluid, composite style that he emulates and develops over time, and whose narrative model ultimately provides for the heterogeneity, complexity, and structure that gives Ishmael his full, rich voice.

Since *Typee* was written when Melville was twenty-six years old and recounts his youthful adventures and struggles as a twenty-three year old, it makes sense that his first novel reveals a complex and contradictory relationship to the feminine. Given the promise of escape from a fraught family life and sexually repressive nineteenth-century American culture that such an excursion to the exotic South Seas offered, one might expect the encounter to call forth issues of identity and sexuality, and the text to become a record of this inner voyage of self-discovery. By the time of its writing Melville had already lost his father and his social status at a young age, been separated from his family

by more than three years at sea, and furnished evidence of a rebellious nature. Indeed, critic William Heath has characterized Melville's innate temperament as a conflicted combination of Calvinistic "moralistic rectitude" and "sensual indolence" (53)—two opposing inclinations that he fought to reconcile most of his life—while Karcher likewise agrees that Melville was "at once a refractory conformist and a reluctant rebel" (*Shadow* 3).

It is consistent with Melville's innate ambivalence that he, in the person of Tommo, jumps ship with shipmate Toby in July 1842. His few weeks' experience on the island (which in *Typee* became four months) can then be seen not only as a "quest for adventure and young girls" in a wholly new and erotic culture, but as a personal quest to escape what he knew and what he was. His mission may have been less to "enter and understand" the Typee culture, as Edmond claims, than to work out psychological struggles with which he was tasked. Because the quest reflected these psychological struggles, however, the island culture became for him "a contradictory landscape in which nothing is as it seems" (84-85).

The semi-autobiographical tale begins as Herman Melville, in the person of a self-described "shy" and "modest" twenty-three-year-old American sailor named Tommo, on a whaling expedition in the South Pacific, relates how he abandons his whaling ship in the Marquesan island group and flees to the inner valley of its largest island, Nukuheva. As with the *Bounty* mutiny fifty years earlier, this attempt to go ashore and trade the ship's harsh discipline for the freedom, sensuality, and ease of the beach is an act of rebellion and mutiny. To reach the "valley of his dreams," however, Tommo must get

past six French naval ships anchored in the harbor, a beach full of soldiers, and finds—once the beach is crossed—a thicket of tall, tough reeds as stubborn as “rods of steel” (Edmond 84; *Typee* 35). Instead of longed-for freedom, Tommo encounters unanticipated hardships:

Two or three times I endeavoured to insinuate myself between the canes, and by dint of coaxing and bending them to make some progress; but a bull-frog might as well have tried to work a passage through the teeth of a comb, and I gave up the attempt in despair.

Half wild with meeting an obstacle we had so little anticipated, I threw myself desperately against it, crushing to the ground the canes . . . and, rising to my feet again, repeated the action with like effect. (35)

Even though Edmond characterizes *Typee* as a “beachcomber narrative” because it describes Tommo’s effort to know a culture so unlike his own, right from the start the young narrator’s tangled encounter with the tough, steely canes foreshadows how difficult and roundabout this voyage to personal and artistic freedom will be, and how he fears the masculine world will attempt to thwart and punish his efforts.

Ready to explore as soon as he arrives, Tommo describes his kinship with the “partner” of his “adventure,” Toby, a young American sailor of the same age. They have similar backgrounds, as they both move “in a different sphere of life” and are “anxious to conceal it”—perhaps alluding to a shared experience of lost family wealth. But Toby, who has always shown a “partiality” for Tommo’s “society,” is a “strange, wayward

being, moody fitful, and melancholy,” whereas Tommo himself is an energetic, curious young man, determined to fully engage his exotic explorations (31-32).

When they arrive on the island Tommo wants to engage in “discovery-makings,” but Toby warns against it, saying “if you are going to pry into everything you meet with here that excites your curiosity, you will marvelously soon get knocked on the head” (40). Tommo characterizes his own “mind” as one of “deep passion” that exerts a “strange . . . power . . . over feebler natures,” presumably like those of Toby (32). And his personality seems well-suited to the kind of narrative Truth-seeking Melville explores and develops in his writing, as he laughs at his companion’s reluctance to freely explore a footpath on the frighteningly unfamiliar island, saying: “there’s something to be seen here, that’s plain . . . and I am resolved to find out what it is” (40).

In fact, after their ordeal to reach the Typee village—a quest constrained, as mentioned, by the regulating male world—Tommo illustrates his inclination for free-thinking when he is the first to conceive that the Typees might be “mortarkee” (56) or good—in sharp contrast to the prevailing judgment that they are not only bad, but a tribe of dangerous cannibals. He even dons the Typee costume almost immediately after reaching the village, although he alters it for the sake of “propriety” (89). Throughout, Tommo gives the reader a sense of his intense passion and desire for adventure and truth, while alternately acquiescing to and contradicting masculine modes of Western morality. His is an energetic yet immature narrative voice—bold and full of promise, yet reluctant to take responsibility for his rebellion, and so also unreliable.

Over the course of his encounter with the Typees, Tommo—and Melville—are enchanted by the island’s feminine landscape and nymphs, and particularly by the sensuality and beauty of his “favourite” nymph, Fayaway. His constant companion is the *tayo*-like, or homosexual, male servant Kory-Kory—another manifestation of the island feminine, yet a gender perversion that he must escape. Ultimately most important is Tommo’s powerful attraction to the liminal male warrior, Marnoo, whose free-roaming, heroic, and intelligent nature seems to mirror Tommo’s—and Melville’s—own “truth”-seeking quest.

In addition to serving as a composite male-female figure who points the way to resolving struggles of gender and selfhood, Marnoo’s eloquence and command of his audience serve as a model for Tommo’s emerging narrative style. While the text records Tommo’s struggles with personal, sexual, and cultural questions—evidenced in abrupt tonal shifts alternating sharply between joy and fear, contentment and anxiety—he concludes that the islanders want to capture him on the island. Fearing loss of his civilized self and a loss of control over his developing authorial voice, he beseeches Marnoo to help him leave the island. After four months of “indulgent captivity” he must make a sharp break, and injures a Typee warrior in order to return to civilization.

Whereas other critics, like Anderson, minimize the “effect this relatively slight contact with primitive life” on the island could have “upon the spiritual biography of a sensitive young man,” characterizing its influence as “largely a matter of conjecture” (192), I argue that Tommo’s adventure provides a metaphorical journey that mirrors the important inner journey Melville himself takes, and that his increasingly ambivalent

portrayals of the feminine in *Typee*—sometimes good, maternal, and innocent, while sometimes evil and sexual—are projections of such confrontations. Ultimately, Melville’s altered position toward the feminine helps him to reevaluate rigid sexual and gender roles and to assess the relative merits of Western civilization, imperialism, and other strict Western categories. This assessment opens up his narrative style to the island’s feminizing influence—especially that modeled by Marnoo—and to an “elasticity of mind.”

To help demonstrate this pattern, I will begin by looking at the protagonist’s relationship to the feminized island landscape and then to its people—specifically his relationships with the nymphs, Fayaway, Kory-Kory, and ultimately Marnoo. These relationships help formulate his position toward the feminine, and introduce him to the “enchantment” that gives him the tools to resolve inner conflicts and re-invent himself. I will begin by considering the ways in which Melville initially layers the island world with positive emblems of femininity, then how this feminine world begins to threaten his sense of identity as a Western heterosexual male. I hope to show that in the course of this exploration, traditional masculine and Western dualities—civilized-savage; masculine-feminine; light-dark; good-evil—are transformed into ambiguous categories that both intrigue and disgust him before they are reformulated through his newfound narrative model, a model based on Marnoo’s transitional nature, and one which incorporates the island’s enchantment as well as its sovereign and life-affirming “elasticity of mind.”

CHAPTER I

TYPEE'S FEMININE ISLAND

The South Pacific island of Nukuheva symbolizes “the feminine” in *Typee* because Melville aligns its extreme natural beauty with innocence, the maternal, and the desired. Such characterization is not unusual. As Annette Kolodny points out in *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters*, the bond between nature and the feminine is a longstanding literary trope in American writing. According to Kolodny, Melville simply

asserted another version of what is probably America’s oldest and most cherished fantasy: a daily reality of harmony between man and nature, based on an experience of the land as essentially feminine—that is, not simply the land as mother, but the land as woman, the total female principle of gratification—enclosing the individual in an environment of receptivity, repose, and painless and integral satisfaction. (4)

Fellow eco-feminists agree that although this conflation of nature with the “feminine” and the “maternal” is a forced analogy, it is also a familiar one. Catherine Addison speculates that South Seas islands may be particularly susceptible to this feminization by virtue of their geography, for not only are islands seen as feminized destinations that represent “emblems of unrealized aspiration, existing beyond the quotidian horizon,” but such beautiful, distant landscapes can also easily be transformed into “object(s) of male desire.” That is, the island can function like the trope of “the secluded garden” in

literature: as an enclosed space connoting privacy and longing. Unlike the land-bound garden, however, the island's "enclosure" is "no mere wall or hedge but that most suggestive of all material things, the *sea*" (687, emphasis mine).

On a deeper level it is possible that the island's isolated, watery landscape reminds the young voyager of a prior, idyllic state: of his experience as "fluid-surrounded child in the womb" and of the womb's "inaccessible nature" (Addison 687). *Typee*'s South Seas' island can thus serve as both destination for a quest of individuation and as a symbolic encounter with the m/Other or feminine, both of which characterize Tommo's voyage to Nukuheva.

In the beginning, however, the rigid, masculine world—as symbolized by a thicket of tough reeds or "steely canes" (35)—confronts Tommo's attempt to trade masculine for feminine experience by thwarting his and Toby's efforts to enter the feminine landscape. "Half wild with meeting an obstacle we had so little anticipated," they must throw themselves "desperately" against this barrier, "crushing to the ground the canes" (35) in order to gain access to the island. And since it is only after avoiding French naval ships and a beach full of sailors that they successfully enter the Typee valley, their struggle has already become "emblematic," for Rod Edmond, of how difficult "further attempts at finding freedom" will be in this feminine world (85). The masculine world he leaves behind becomes an impediment to Tommo's self-development, and it is only by repeatedly "rising" to his feet and repeating his efforts until he is nearly "exhausted" (35), that he is able to exchange the masculine world of the whaling ship for the feminized island life, and to explore a setting on which he might

enact any inner conflict with the feminine. Latent gender and identity conflicts aroused by this encounter are recorded in the nature of his projections onto its landscape and its characters, affording numerous and changing portrayals of both landscape and native, and especially feminine, characters.

Like James Fenimore Cooper's Natty Bumppo in the *Leatherstocking Tales* (1823-1841), a character whose development, Kolodny maintains, gradually allows Cooper "to make of 'the pastoral design' in America what Leo Marx has called 'a symbolic structure of thought and feeling, a landscape of mind in which the movement in physical space corresponds to a movement in consciousness'" (114-15), *Typee* also traces how a shift in physical space—from whaling ship to island—signals a shift in Tommo's consciousness: from civilized to savage, masculine to feminine, and self to Other. The narrator's fraught and ambivalent views of the island, his changing "landscape of mind," are not resolved until inner tensions with both the feminine and the obstructive masculine are resolved.

At the outset of this journey, however, Melville makes only positive references to the feminine island. The otherworldly Nukuheva, characterized by its watery enclosures, valleys, lush, verdant scenery, and vivacious young girls, entices *Typee*'s narrator with its beauty and sensuality. Wholly different from the masculine world of the ship, it provides a compelling reason to desert the whaler and trade its masculine discipline, privation, and harsh authority for an essentially feminine alternative. Melville borrows the language of "enchantment"—of charms, spells, fairy tales, the mythological nymphs, mermaids, and sylphs—to mark this femininity and to show Tommo's transformation by it. Among these

positive aspects are its beauty, innocence, maternal nature, sensuality, and peace, which are embodied in its lush nature and beautiful young “nymphs.”

Because it is a feminine space, the voyager cannot become “naturalized” to the South Seas landscape through heroic, manly efforts, as he can on the ship. On the island, he can only “belong” by becoming receptive to its “feminine principles” (Addison 687). Like the young Scotsman Torquil in Byron’s “The Island,” he can either allow himself to be rescued by the lush and sensuous feminine world he encounters or be forced to return to the constrained world of the male-dominated ship (Byron and Pinto, *Byron’s Poems* 515-51). The act of jumping ship and exchanging ship for island provides a new and feminized perspective, as well as an opportunity to reexamine the dichotomous, masculine-centered categories of his Western inheritance. The backdrop for this inner journey is the rigid outer world of strict gender, racial, and class dyads of home and ship, a world he rebels against and wishes to escape through contact with the island and its people.

Among the most auspicious and affirmative connotations initially aligned with the island landscape is its rich, maternal, life-giving “greenness.” Nukuheva is portrayed as a paradise of “umbrageous shades” and “glorious tropical vegetation” (30) whose “crowning beauty” is its “universal verdure” (43). The island not only embodies such feminized beauty, but finds Tommo acutely susceptible to its charm. He is awed by its natural splendor:

How shall I describe the scenery that met my eye, as I looked out
from this verdant recess! The narrow valley, with its steep and close

adjoining sides draped with vines, and arched overhead with a fret-work of interlacing boughs, nearly hidden from view by masses of leafy verdure, seemed from where I stood like an immense arbor disclosing its vista to the eye, whilst as I advanced it insensibly widened into the loveliest vale eye ever beheld. (30)

Such high praise points to a “yearning,” Kolodny maintains, “to know and to respond to the landscape as feminine” (8), as is clearly witnessed by his eye’s recurring masculine gaze. This longing subsequently evolves into a yearning to respond to it sexually, as if to a woman’s body. And, as if on cue, Tommo begins to describe it as such.

Tommo personifies the island landscape as a valley, chasm, or gorge to be penetrated, its “recesses” and “narrow valleys” widening into “the loveliest vale eye ever beheld.” Its welcoming valleys also have breasts—“the bosoms of the valley” (43) and its “smiling bosom” (52)—while its “green and sloping acclivities” “swell” to a sexually suggestive “lofty and majestic height” (26). To account for such alternating active (penetration) and passive (widening) impulses towards the feminized landscape, Kolodny speculates that “just as the growing child must confront and mediate between his conflicting drives for individuation and maternal union” the American literary imagination was “forced to choose between a landscape that at once promised total gratifications in return for passive and even filial responses” and one which “tempted, even invited, the more active responses of impregnation, alteration, and possession” (71). This trend seems evident in *Typee*, as Tommo moves from portrayals of innocently sexualized landscape and nymphs into actual sexual relationship with Fayaway, his

Marquesan love-interest. At the same time, such symbolic gendering of the landscape ensures its ability to embody the author's psychological conflict with the feminine, and to perhaps help resolve those tensions.

For Melville, the island becomes the perfect landscape on which to project and resolve conflicts of individuation and gender identity—as shown by his alternating portrayals of its femininity as either innocent and maternal or sexualized and threatening. From early on it has appeared not only as a protective mother but also as an object of desire, and he has eyed it with an acquisitive, erotic gaze. As their whaler approaches the Marquesas, for instance, his fellow sailors long to “rid[e] snugly at anchor in some green cove” (14) and to “close in with” (19) or “touch” (18) her landscape. And despite his narrator's protestations of innocence, such a sensual encounter seems intentional.

As Mary K. Bercaw Edwards points out in *Cannibal Old Me: Spoken Sources in Melville's Early Works*, Melville was surely aware of Nukuheva's reputation for sexual license prior to his arrival, largely through familiarity with earlier narratives by explorers Porter, Ellis, von Langsdorff, and Stewart. He even mentions Porter and Stewart in Chapter 1 of *Typee* (15). Indeed, he likely anticipated sexual experiences when he landed on the island. William Heath supports this claim in “Melville and Marquesan Eroticism,” agreeing that Melville had “no doubt” heard “numerous sailor yarns” describing Marquesan culture and knew of their reputation for providing visitors “with all the pleasures the vain heart could desire” (43). Heath assures that even though the customary sailor's welcome was degenerating by the time of Melville's visit, American whalers were still “accustomed to stopping at Nukuhiva [*sic*] to take on provisions of fruit,

vegetables and pork . . . and to allow for sexual indulgence” (46). Accordingly, as the *Dolly*’s crew sails towards the island, Tommo relates how the exotic land had been “glowingly described” by “older voyagers,” and become so renowned for its sensuality that sailors exhorted their captain to “come to his *senses*” and drop anchor (14, emphasis mine).

As anticipated, when Tommo first encounters Nukuheva he experiences a powerful and sensualized effect, exclaiming: “What a delightful *sensation* did I experience! I felt as if floating in some new element” (29, emphasis mine). The island is everything that the masculine ship is not—“The usage on board of her was tyrannical; the sick had been inhumanly neglected” (24)—and contrasts dramatically with the arduous and masculine demands of whaling. Heath additionally speculates that what really “caught [Tommo’s] eye and stuck in his imagination” on the island were “those aspects of Marquesan culture that contrasted most sharply” with the “deepest tacit assumptions of his own society” (45): namely, its sensualized femininity. And as *Typee* begins, Tommo is surely content to trade the constrained masculine world he leaves behind for the island’s valleys, “abounding with all manner of delicious fruits” (44).

As Robert T. Tally notes in “*Spaces that before were blank*”: *Truth and Narrative Form in Melville’s South Seas Cartography*, the feminine island world he encounters is not only a “sprawlingly expansive region” that in its very “uncenteredness” makes it a kind of “*no-place*”—the kind of place that might lend itself to discovery and invention—but is a fluid world of ambiguous gender and social categories (188). And while *Typee*’s “basic theme” ostensibly concerns the “transaction between ‘savages’ and

‘their civilizers,’” this weighty topic is encased in euphemisms, lightly veiled allusions, and an ironic tone that, according to T. Walter Herbert, “*suggest*, rather than screen” an abundance of “forbidden *erotic* scenes” (15, emphasis mine). Such screened allusions and indirect approach to topics of sexuality and gender might arguably suit a young man grappling with issues of sexuality, gender identity, and selfhood in the nineteenth century—a time when many of these concepts had no language to describe them. At the same time, interaction with a culture so unlike one’s own—a culture in which “profligate sexuality received every sanction” and in which “Nothing was more honorific . . . than sexual skill” (Heath 54, 48)—would present the perfect medium for adolescent issues of gender, sexuality, and selfhood to take root.

In “The Signifier and the Tattoo in Melville’s *Typee*,” Daneen Wardrop’s observation that encounters with cultures wholly different from one’s own can also “illuminate rents in the idea of the self” because “gaps” revealed in one’s understanding of the Other “necessitate an awareness of the gaps in the subject’s self-awareness” (137) completes this proposition. The conjunction of issues presented by Melville’s voyage—his youth, disturbing contact with a culture of eroticism so unlike his own, and the psychological mandate to establish personal and sexual identity at a time when he is struggling to locate himself—combine to support a reading of his island voyage as analogous to an inner voyage of self-discovery. His visit to the island can readily be seen as a quest for individuation and selfhood, and one in which his profound shock acts to not only identify “gaps” in his self-understanding, but to catalyze growth. From this it is only

a short leap to extend the trajectory of personal development on the island to the development of his work as a writer.

Over the course of his discovery, Tommo fully engages the island feminine and his relationship to it becomes increasingly desirous and acquisitive. Such development is nearly inevitable, concludes Addison, given *Typee*'s historical context of Western imperialism: in her view, in classic colonial discourse the island could never be "a place of heart's desire" *without* "concomitant, consequent, or concealed exploitation" (690). But first, and among varied characterizations, Melville begins to employ the colonialist trope of island as feminine m/Other and to portray its landscape as an innocent, yet desired, virginal space.

In the beginning, Tommo recognizes the delicacy and purity of the landscape's femininity. He describes how Nukuheva's "unbroken solitude" (39) has lain "undisturbed for years," and how it has "relapsed" into its "previous obscurity" (14). For a young writer, the landscape might even be experienced as a blank slate or a *tabula rasa*. He recounts how vulnerable the island is to being "visited," "touched," or "broken in upon" by an intruding masculine presence, saying: "Once in the course of a half century . . . some adventurous rover would break in upon their peaceful repose . . . almost tempted to claim the merit of a new discovery" (14). Directed by an impulse, Kolodny holds, to experience what we now agree are "universal mythic wishes" to recover an earthly paradise, the island is also portrayed as a charmed or "enchanted" space, a primitive and innocent Eden (5).

Melville's portrayal of it as a kind of earthly paradise also fulfills the tradition of the American pastoral, and romanticized post-Rousseauist writing. As Tommo rapturously sets out:

Over all the landscape there reigned the most hushed repose, which I almost feared to break, lest, like the enchanted gardens in the fairy tale, a single syllable might dissolve the spell. For a long time, forgetful alike of my own situation . . . I remained gazing around me, hardly able to comprehend by what means I had thus suddenly been made a spectator of such a scene. (43)

In this “hushed,” pre-lingual landscape the island is a “silent Paradise,” an “uncorrupted Eden,” and one that his intrusive masculine gaze and the imposition of language—especially conventional, masculine, and culturally-bound categories of thought—threatens to “break.” It is a place of “Kristevan *chora* of pulsions and rhythms, a womb-space of ‘murmurings’” that exists before language (Wardrop 143). Not merely an “object of domination and exploitation,” as colonialism would dictate, this island is romanticized as a “maternal ‘garden’” (Kolodny 5) and an “enchanted” garden in a “fairy tale,” far removed from the reality of Western life. Not even simply enchanted, its “hushed repose” is so fragile that even a “single syllable” might dissolve the “spell.” It is a psychological and narrative space where nothing is written and all is possible.

Kolodny speculates that the appeal of this “maternal embrace” is the “promised release from adult striving and adult assertions” (123) and its promise to return one to an earlier, carefree time. Whatever its source, the island landscape points to a state of

innocence that, at the deepest psychological level, may signal a regression from adult life and “a return to the primal warmth of womb or breast in a feminine landscape” (6). In the dichotomous cultural and creative framework of the West, it is the inherent opposite of a male conception of the world. Tommo is awestruck by a beauty that he is “hardly able to comprehend,” and more than wanting to dominate this landscape, fears spoiling its innocence. If seeking a reprieve from his “situation”—the harsh dictates of ship and masculine life—he seems to have found it in this feminine alternative. The unspoiled island provides the freedom not only to explore personal struggles, but also to begin wrestling with the intellectual and creative struggles facing a young writer.

Taken together, Melville’s feminized characterization of the South Seas landscape makes the island, “floating in that lovely bay, the green eminences of the shore looking down so tranquilly” (19), a place of ease and possibility. Even its climate, unlike the harsh, cyclical regularity of the boat’s (literal and figurative) climate, is “one long tropical month of June melting into July” (147). And while its lush landscape promises liberation from his dualistic, masculine world, it is hard to miss the undercurrent of sexuality that emerges as its young females are introduced into the text. The girls become alluring enchantresses, and their home a “space apart” from ordinary life. As this occurs, Tommo’s guilty “peeps” of the island—its untouched beauty, charms, and especially its young females—begin to expose a more complex and ambivalent internal landscape, while his narrative voice becomes more conflicted and less trustworthy.

The Enchanting Nymphs and Elasticity of Mind

The language, myth, and sensuality surrounding the “dark-eyed nymphs” of *Typee* anchor the trope of “enchantment” or idealized femininity in the text. I submit that Tommo’s relationship to these nymphs charts his changing relationship to the feminine, and mirrors inner personal changes that are reflected in his creative development. This dynamic is especially evident later, in relationship to his paramour Fayaway, the nymph who epitomizes ultimate femininity until she sullies that femininity with sexual associations, but it is also evident in relationship to his servant Kory-Kory, whose homosexual status repels Tommo as a freakish perversion of the feminine. These figures either attract or repel Tommo, who exhibits extreme ambivalence toward them, exposing his tenuous relationship to the feminine m/Other, and propelling his continued quest.

Almost as soon as the island is established as a feminized landscape, however, the *Dolly*’s sailors are helplessly swept towards it, as if under a spell. The feminized language of “enchantment” in *Typee* is nowhere as prominent as when Tommo encounters its “nymphs,” “mermaids,” or “sylphs,” who appear intermittently in the text. As in mythology, these are goddesses of earth, water, and air: female deities who, with their exemplar, Fayaway, personify idealized feminine nature. The young spirits are dancers, wild and free. Their power rests in their primitive, sensual, and “savage” connection to the natural world—to birds, air, flowers, land, and especially to water, that most feminine element. At first their beauty is innocent, but when it becomes more erotic, the narrative tension surrounding them heightens.

The feminized island is so alluring that the whaler eagerly “headed to her course” and “jogged on her way like a veteran old sea-pacer” (17) to fulfill her “desires” there. Its allure can be seen in the unaccountable and “irresistible curiosity” that compels Tommo to “behold” its shores, much as a lover might seek a beloved (14). His attraction is so strong that it drives him to abandon ship and commit mutiny—an extremely serious offense punishable by law, yet a rebellious act that he blames on Nukuheva’s inescapable magnetism. In short, the compulsion that drives Tommo towards the island is a force outside of masculine control, and one that overwhelms all masculine willpower. Ironically, he had expressed the *intention* to jump ship as soon as mere anticipation of “touching on” the island excitedly compelled him to begin Chapter 2, “I can never forget the eighteen or twenty days during which the light trade-winds were silently *sweeping us towards* the islands” (17, emphasis mine). Then, he and the entire ship—as if enraptured—fall prey to its charms. All the crew, in fact, is unable to resist Nukuheva’s enchantment and the sailors abandon themselves to its feminizing fate as they approach the island:

What a delightful, lazy, languid time we had whilst we were thus gliding along! There was nothing to be done; a circumstance that happily suited our disinclination to do anything. We abandoned the fore-peak altogether, and . . . slept, ate, and lounged under it the live-long day.

Every one seemed to be under the influence of some narcotic. (17)

So powerful is its appeal they even feel insensible and drugged as they near it.

Immediately after, however, Tommo admits that he is “astonished” that “not a single

female” (20, emphasis mine) swam to greet them, betraying what may be his true interest in reaching the island. Apparently, he has come for the girls.

Melville most likely expected a warm welcome from the island’s women since earlier accounts of the Marquesas describe how “swarms of young women” would “swim out to a ship and offer themselves to the crew” when visitors arrived (Heath 45). Luckily, after native men board the *Dolly* it is not long before they direct Tommo’s attention to “a singular commotion in the water ahead” and the longed-for women, a “shoal of ‘whihenies,’” swims to greet them (20). This literal and figurative “boarding” of the masculine ship by these embodiments of exotic femininity is the first of three such “arrival scenes” that were scenes of “encounter” characteristic of travel writing (118). According to Mary Louise Pratt, such scenes were “particularly potent sites for framing relations of contact and setting the terms of its representation” and provided useful cues for identifying an author’s colonialist tendencies (qtd. in Ivison 118).

Part travel narrative, *Typee*’s first “arrival scene” also makes use of the genre’s unique capacity for permitting expressions of forbidden sensuality otherwise “unthinkable” in nineteenth-century Western writing, according to critic Robert K. Martin’s “‘Enviably Isles’: Melville’s South Seas.” In addition, Melville takes advantage of the genre’s ability for submitting a “critique of dominant mores” (69)—another feat difficult to pull off in a different format—openly criticizing Western colonialism, Protestant evangelism, and missionaries. These additions probably made *Typee* more interesting and marketable, but may also point to the influence of this feminine encounter on Melville’s artistic development, and his inclination, from early in his writing life, to

reject rigid masculine norms and the constraints of accepted narrative form in favor of more fluid modes of exploration.

For Tommo's part, his "first encounter" with the native island women notes not only their girlish innocence but also aligns them with sexually tempting mythological "mermaids" as they swim towards the ship:

As they drew nearer, and I watched the rising and sinking of their forms, and beheld the uplifted right arm bearing above the water the girdle of tappa, and their long dark hair trailing beside them as they swam, I almost fancied they could be nothing else than so many mermaids—and very like mermaids they behaved too. (20)

Since his sly add-on, "and very like mermaids they behaved too," alludes to their promiscuity, the sailors are as helpless to resist the "mermaids" as to resist the island itself, and the "swimming nymphs" "boarded" them "at every quarter" (20). Almost immediately, this fascination with the "longing for the unattainable" that mythic nymphs represent ("Nymphs"), displayed alongside actual sexual promiscuity, sets up a telling narrative tension in *Typee*. I offer that the text begins to record Melville's emerging ambivalence about personal gender and sexuality issues as it alternately alludes to and obscures the island's "voluptuousness" (Crain 41). Embodying the subversive nature of his essentially "anti-social" (Martin 71) quest, *Typee* both points to and negates what becomes an uneasy longing for erotic adventure and ease.

The young mermaids that Tommo encounters create an immediate spectacle: "Sparkling with savage vivacity, laughing gaily at one another, and chattering away with

infinite glee” (20), they anoint their “luxuriant locks” with fragrant oil. Tommo, who parodies the moral censure of missionary narratives, mockingly describes their effect: “What a sight for us bachelor sailors! How avoid so dire a temptation? For who could think of tumbling these artless creatures overboard, when they had swum miles to welcome us?” (21). Although their actions are sexually provocative and his jocular tone offers an indirect criticism of Western strictures on sexual expression, Tommo persists in portraying the nymphs as mythical, natural, and innocent. This inconsistency leads the reader to question the false dichotomy established between innocence and experience, and to question his truthfulness as a narrator. Tommo persists in extolling their natural beauty, however: “Their appearance perfectly amazed me; their extreme youth, the light clear brown of their complexions, their delicate features, and inexpressibly graceful figures, their softly moulded limbs, and free unstudied action, seemed as strange as beautiful” (21).

This complimentary appraisal may have also been genuine, according to William Heath, since Polynesians were known to be “especially attractive to the Western eye.” Indeed, Heath maintains that the “tall, muscular men and the light-skinned shapely women of the Marquesas were often termed the most beautiful in all the South Seas” (53). Nonetheless, such descriptions of “inexpressibly graceful figures” and of a loveliness that “perfectly amazed” continue to reinforce the literary convention of the Other’s “unconcealed physical perfection” (Iverson 119) in the text, which is expanded in later portrayals of Fayaway and Marnoo. This positions Melville as a Westerner and reminds us that he is a cultural outsider among the Typees, still relying on his own

cultural and artistic traditions, but perhaps beginning to engage the limits of this “civilized” literary culture.

Melville’s portrayal of the nymphs’ “nakedness” also links him to eighteenth-century colonialist discourse, which assumes the fundamental distinctness and inferiority of racial Others in relationship to their civilized counterparts. Nineteenth-century readers would readily recognize Melville’s nymphs as expressions of the exotic “natural woman” or feminine m/Other, not unlike other depictions of non-white women of the era. Although Edward Said would later show how such Orientalizing acted to disfigure nonwestern cultures, Melville’s use of the colonialist convention seems sympathetic and innocent—if not completely honest. In addition to setting them apart from the real world, one can ascertain his “quiet,” “modest” narrator’s susceptibility to the women’s power, and his eagerness to be impacted by their feminine sensuality (109).

When the nymphs finally board the ship, Melville asserts their intense sexual power over the sailors and makes it clear that they are neither as treacherous nor as evil as the nymphs of myth. Once again, Tommo and his shipmates are helpless to resist their “strange as beautiful” charms, and their seductive actions leave young Tommo both “dazzled and disturbed” (Heath 46). He relishes their erotic displays, saying, as they board:

The Dolly was fairly captured; and never I will say was vessel carried before by such a dashing and irresistible party of boarders! The ship taken, we could not do otherwise than yield ourselves prisoners, and

for the whole period that she remained in the bay, the Dolly, as well as her crew, were completely in the hands of the mermaids. (21)

That evening, he relates their captivity by these feminine forces. The whaler's hardened men, "Six months at sea!" (13), succumb effortlessly to the charms of the "picturesque band of sylphs" (20). The girls are also "passionately fond of dancing" and exhibit such "wild grace and spirit" and "abandoned voluptuousness" that he "dares not attempt to describe" their influence (21). Not unexpectedly, perhaps, this encounter is followed by a thinly veiled shipboard orgy. Although not explicitly stated—Tommo, in fact, goes to great length to maintain a narrative distance from events—one broadly assumes that he, too, participates in the bacchanal. Seemingly afraid of revealing the whole truth, his actions continue to reinforce a youthful, immature, and unreliable, narrative voice.

Melville's first allusion to the nymphs' *dancing* in this passage is a motif that comes to symbolize erotic femininity in *Typee*. For Heath, such dancing was in fact "the central symbol of Polynesian eroticism" (51), but even much later in the text—as late as Chapter 20—Melville insists on juxtaposing Tommo's claim to "quiet" "sober-mindedness" with this clearly erotic display:

The young girls very often danced by moonlight in front of their dwellings. . . . Indeed, the Marquesan girls dance all over, as it were; not only do their feet dance, but their arms, hands, fingers, ay, their very eyes, seem to dance in their heads. In good sooth, they so sway their floating forms, arch their necks, toss aloft their naked arms, and glide, and swim,

and whirl, that it was almost too much for a quiet, sober-minded, modest young man like myself. (109)

While it is evident from Melville's portrait that these girls are "free, inartificially happy, and unconstrained" (92), it is also evident that their characterization is severely limited by virtue of their unsophistication, sensuality, and voicelessness. Now seemingly threatened by the very sensuality he sought, and perhaps to guard against that threat, he retreats to Western binaries and employs the masculine lens that limits their intelligence and utility. In fact, besides observing their "gleeful" "chattering," Melville imparts no speech at all to the nymphs—maybe the worst fate an author can ponder, and certainly an unlikely narrative model. As inarticulate beings, the feminized influence they exert over Tommo is only the power to captivate him through their mythic charms. Still, the nymphs' feminine "enchantment" will have a transformational effect on Tommo's development going forward, and will be especially important to his personal and narrative identity. The nymphs free him up to explore the island feminine further, such that his time with them alters not only his "landscape of mind," but eventually his development as a writer.

The most significant expression of the nymphs' influence on Tommo is indeed noteworthy. For it is only when Tommo relaxes "insensibly" into the nymphs' daily routines that their charmed influence creates an "altered frame of mind" in which "every object . . . struck me in a new light" and "tended to strengthen my favourable impressions" of their world. And it is in their presence that he experiences the pure "elasticity of mind" that places him "beyond the reach" of those "dismal forebodings" to which he succumbs on Nukuheva (90-92). This transformative experience becomes

perhaps the culmination of his attempts to gain entry into this feminine worldview. As a precursor to the “elasticity of mind” that Ishmael experiences in *Moby-Dick*, this remarkably mutable state of being provides access to a more fluid and elastic perception and propels him to consider shifting his Western paradigm for the island model, while promoting his exchange of the masculine for a more fluid, feminine voice. This is a remarkable yet short-lived revelation, however, and it is not long before the guilt and anxiety of such sensual experience is countered by another masculine juxtaposition. As Matthiessen concludes in an early reading of *Typee*, “even in his relaxed days on the island . . . another force was working beneath the happy surface of Melville’s mind: He could never be a savage; his background of Presbyterian orthodoxy, though in abeyance now, was soon to reassert itself in his meditations on innate depravity” (375).

Melville’s narrative voice splits at this critical juncture in *Typee*, indicating his trouble integrating the simple, sensual life of the nymphs into any permanent manner of self-definition. Surely, their voiceless sensuality cannot be a lasting model for sexual, individual, or narrative development in a civilized American world. Still, many of their feminine qualities, as noted, will be incorporated into other native figures in *Typee*, and most especially into the influential Marnoo’s fluid masculinity—a character whose liminality he does embrace, and whose mature voice he emulates as a model for his own narrative. At this point, however, the nymphs’ extensive and “elastic” influence is too threatening to contemplate, and they are dismissed as a sensual sideshow in the text.

Now, as their erotic natures become more prominent, Tommo’s narrative voice not only splits but slips into falsehoods and omissions, becoming more untrustworthy. To

deny their increasingly apparent sexuality he omits disclosing the extent of their sexual expression in favor of preserving “sentimental images of idyllic eroticism” with noble savages “innocent, guiltless, and free” (Heath 47). He even reverses the prevalent civilized-savage dichotomy that posits Westerners as a morally “civilizing” influence by indicting fellow sailors’ “grossest licentiousness” and “most shameful inebriety” for *corrupting* the girls, saying: “Alas for the poor savages when exposed to the influences of these polluting examples!” (21). As Laurie Robertson-Lorant concludes in her 1996 study *Melville: A Biography*, Melville takes the opposing, and psychologically protective, position that “Like Eve, these women, though sexually promiscuous, are essentially innocent,” and that, “like Satan, the white man insinuates sin into the Polynesian paradise” (138). Against all evidence, the young American denies the “abandoned voluptuousness” of their dance and the “riot and debauchery” (21) of his experiences by insisting that the nymphs are both attainable *and* innocent, an implausibility. This may be an attempt to assuage his guilt over his own sexual transgressions and to preserve his innocence in a rigid, sexually repressive culture—and for a Western readership—that demands half-truths in exchange for full membership.

In an abrupt tonal shift that demonstrates Tommo’s ambivalence to their outright sensualism, all mention of the girls’ shipboard escapades are omitted once he and Toby land on the island. Melville again renders the nymphs as romantically innocent figures, and if they are sexualized at all it is due to their feminine “naturalness.” Tommo even obscures their “Long and minute,” hands-on bodily “investigations” of him while he is sleeping. Although he describes in detail these sensual investigations, he continues to

assert the girls' purity and virtue, hastily assuring the reader that their actions were "innocently" carried out, and that the "lively young ladies" were at the same time "wonderfully polite and humane." Tommo persists in denying the sexual nature of their contact, even when the reader cannot. For *Typee*'s reader, such concomitant expression and denial of the nymphs' sensuality results in an unreliable narrative fraught with tension—a tension that reflects both guilt and fear of reprisal—and a tension that longs for resolution.

Perhaps part of what the reader senses in Melville's indirect style is an unreliable narrative voice that is obfuscating the truth. For Toby's "outrage" at meeting such desirable and sexually free "objects" in the flesh is simply inconsistent with their motives for visiting the Marquesas. After all, the pair had purposefully left the ship to explore the island, aware that its females, wholly unlike their Western counterparts, had a reputation for being "void of artificial restraint." This suggests that the nymphs' presence in the text, besides providing romance and exoticism, also gave Melville the chance to exercise his writerly imagination. Strictly speaking, as Baym states, such artistic license is incompatible with the truthful claims of a travel narrative, as "Fiction," in her view, should only enter the genre "in that undermining form we can properly call lying" (911). But as if witness to his struggle to reconcile feminine and masculine worlds, Melville's creative embellishments bypass the genre's established masculine limitations and allow him to begin defining a more fluid and feminized narrative identity.

Melville's deviations from truthfulness in such passages also allow him to use the narrative as a vehicle for contrasting "savage" and "civilized" sexual mores, and to

highlight those desires and pleasures that require repression in a young Westerner. Tellingly, he uses the nymphs' "innocence" to link unspoiled nature to *positive* connotations of sexuality by contrasting them to rigid Victorian sexual expression. One facet of this contrast is Tommo's description of their adornment. Like their leader Fayaway, but unlike "the beauties of our own land" (67), they ornament themselves naturally, with flowers, rather than with man-made jewelry. Much preferring this simplicity, he praises the nymphs' unspoiled beauty: "Judge ye then, reader, what beautiful creatures they must have been" (68). And he would even wager "a gallery of coronation beauties, at Westminster Abbey" against this "band of island girls" to find the "artless vivacity and unconcealed natural graces" of these "savage maidens" far preferable to the "stiffness, formality, and affectation" of young Western women. Tommo punctuates his assertion by contrasting the lovely "Venus de' Medici" to that of a stiff "milliner's doll" (114), making a veiled analogy between such natural adornments—and, by extension, natural sexuality—to the "stiffness, formality, and affectation" of Western sexual culture. Here, one might also draw an analogy to the steely reeds, naval ships, rigid Western thought, strict gender roles, and conventional Western traditions of the masculine-dominated written culture that he is part of, and that he attempts to transform through this contact with the "natural graces" of the feminine.

Melville extends these flattering physical contrasts to the nymphs' character. The island women are more pleasing and compliant than Western women, and can ease a man's troubled spirits with their feminine powers of consolation. The "sweet nymphs" (96) lavish their sensual attentions on him daily, in fact, as when offering massages:

Every evening the girls of the house gathered about me on the mats, and . . . would anoint my whole body with a fragrant oil. . . . And most refreshing and agreeable are the juices of the “aka,” when applied to ones, limbs [sic] by the soft palms of sweet nymphs. . . . (82)

Nonetheless sick, injured, and—as time goes on—despairing of his captivity on the island, Tommo succumbs increasingly to the nymphs’ charms, allowing them to provide the “returning health and peace of mind” that gave “a new interest to everything around me.” They help “diversify” his time by offering “as many enjoyments as lay within [his] reach,” many of which transpire around a fictionalized and symbolically feminine “miniature lake.” These “maidens of the valley” provide Tommo’s most pleasurable moments on the island, as when they frolic with him in the water. Not surprisingly, he points out that their “familiarity” with that most feminine of elements is “truly astonishing” (95).

It is by the lake that another related contrast between native and Western sexuality is discovered, this time by omission. In a lapse that points, once more, to the “bashful” young narrator’s unreliability (69), the reader surmises only obliquely that the nymphs are not only adorning themselves with flowers, but also wearing mostly *only* flowers. Their near-nakedness again forces a contrast to Western women of the day and is alluded to when Tommo catches “glimpses of their forms” (95) while “Bathing” and “sporting” (96) in the lake.

In a climactic narrative scene midway through the text, Tommo not only enjoys the lake’s “indescribable” beauty but also alludes to the nymphs’ sexuality once more, in

a lyrical scene where he recalls his experiences with the “amphibious” and enchanting young women:

I remember . . . plunging in among a parcel of these river-nymphs, and counting vainly on my superior strength, sought to drag some of them under the water, but I quickly repented my temerity. The amphibious young creatures swarmed about me like a shoal of dolphins, and seizing hold of my devoted limbs, tumbled me about and ducked me under the surface, until from the strange noises which rang in my ears, and the supernatural visions dancing before my eyes, I thought I was in the land of the spirits. (95)

Although the narrator is unwilling to admit this, it seems clear that he engages sexually with the “amphibious young creatures”—experiencing “the ecstasy of the spirit through the ecstasy of the flesh”—as Robertson-Lorant quips (139). When the young women flee the lake, however, Tommo’s “amusement” comes to an end and his life becomes “dull and insipid.” His ennui causes him to appeal to his servant Kory-Kory for “the return of the nymphs” (96). Clearly, in declining to take them up again after Chapter 18, or in the entire second half of the text, Melville understates their influence on Tommo. Rather, their important role in developing his “elasticity of mind” seems to be handed off to their exemplar, Fayaway.

Fayaway: Mother Earth or Sexual Captor?

Tommo’s relationship to the nymphs becomes more complex and ambiguous when he is threatened by disturbing and dangerous aspects of their femininity, namely,

their sexual expression. The masculine forces that demand work instead of pleasure, and compliance instead of exploration, seem to relinquish their defenses. For his special love-interest Fayaway embodies the same innocence, beauty, connection to the land, and maternal qualities as the other nymphs, but in her these qualities are heightened: Melville idealizes Fayaway based on her unique beauty, extreme innocence, extraordinary compassion, and deep connection to the land. She exemplifies the *ultimate feminine*, that is, until she becomes eroticized through direct, physical expressions of sexuality. Tommo's desire appears to be manageable when idealized or barely acknowledged, as with the nymphs, but dangerous when there is either potential for sexual relationship or fulfillment, as there is with Fayaway.

The reader observes Tommo's struggle to maintain a romantic view of Fayaway as their erotic relationship deepens. In heightened language closer to the romantic sublime, he begins aligning his "peculiar favourite" with sharply negative aspects of femininity (66). When his attraction becomes more evident, narrative tension mounts further as her presumed innocence as a nymph and her actual allure and experience as a sexual woman are accentuated. This tension reveals the internal conflict sensed but largely unexpressed in his interactions with the nymphs, and mirrors those that Tommo copes with personally—the strain of claiming to be innocent while actually being experienced. The stakes get higher in relationship to Fayaway because his deeper involvement with her threatens his identity as a modest, controlled, and civilized observer. Their relationship also "outs" his sexual transgressions. In Fayaway's presence, the "elasticity of mind" experienced with the innocent nymphs is immediately

undermined by unreasonable fears of captivity and Freudian anxieties of being unmanned (also seen in a leg injury that he tends throughout his stay on the island). All are now set in a sublime landscape of “green and precipitous elevations” that “precluded all hope of escape.” No longer free to envision his world a manageable, silent, virginal, and unwritten slate that places him “beyond the reach of . . . dismal forebodings,” this latest intrusion of the contrasting masculine world that he attempts to leave behind leaves him increasingly ambivalent about the feminine landscape he has entered (90).

In fact, Fayaway personifies an ambivalent view of femininity that can be seen from *Typee*'s opening lines. At that time, Tommo complained of unjust conditions on board ship and of his dissatisfaction with the masculine whaling life. He lamented the sailors' harsh conditions, “Six months at sea!” with “nothing left us but salt-horse and sea-biscuit,” and wondered: “Is there nothing fresh around us? Is there no green thing to be seen?” (13). Wanting to move from the masculine world of the ship to the feminine world of the island, he even urged his captain to “come to his *senses*” (14, *op cit*) and head to the Marquesas, indicating the sensual or erotic nature of his quest.

Yet even before reaching the maternal island—before being “within a biscuit's toss of the merry land, riding snugly at anchor in some green cove, and sheltered from the boisterous winds” (14)—Tommo foreshadows disturbing ambivalence towards this sensual, feminine world. He is intrigued by it, and yet the masculine world that seeks to bar his entry is a source of anxiety. He is afraid and “haunted” by “strangled jumbled anticipations” as they make their approach:

The Marquesas! What strange visions of outlandish things does the very name spirit up! Naked houris—cannibal banquets—groves of cocoanut—coral reefs—tattooed chiefs—and bamboo temples; sunny valleys planted with bread-fruit trees—carved canoes dancing on the flashing blue waters—savage woodlands guarded by horrible idols—*heathenish rites and human sacrifices*. (14)

While these “strangely jumbled anticipations,” Robertson-Lorant points out, “replicate stereotypes perpetuated in Anglo-American travel literature” by fulfilling Western biases of the “savage Other” (138), they also layer onto this positive, maternal, and protective view of the island other, negative qualities associated with femininity: namely, its eros. This dynamic is seen from the time Tommo approaches the island and conflates “Naked houris” with “cannibal banquets” and “savage woodlands” until the time he leaves Nukuheva. In this introductory passage, in other words, Tommo conveys the fears that both prompt his personal quest and force him to abandon it. Observing this shift in *Typee* allows one to argue that femininity itself, and especially its negative, sexual associations, threaten Tommo and are the source of his unease. It is this eros that makes the island his “*anxious Paradise*” (5, emphasis mine), an observation introduced by early critic Arthur Stedman and still commonly held. One might also assign responsibility for this great ambivalence to his initial encounter with the island’s cane fields, which—upending all eager anticipations of sensuality and repose when he seeks to enter the feminine valley—foreshadowed and prompted such unease. That world also makes him question the wisdom of entering such a strange and untamed landscape.

To fully appreciate Fayaway's central role in positioning Tommo within this ambivalent relationship to the feminine, though, one must examine her position as the ultimate feminized figure in *Typee*. For it is evident from her stature as primary female figure and by her significance to the plot overall that only she—the “beauteous nymph Fayaway” and his “peculiar favourite” among the “lovely damsels” (66)—is burdened with this negative and threatening aspect of femininity. Like the quest itself, Fayaway is safe only as long as she is idealized. When she is fully realized and sexualized, her presence reinforces the sexual and gender anxiety of Tommo's paradise, an anxiety later heightened in relationship to Kory-Kory and Marnoo.

Fayaway is one of many island nymphs—a “nymph of the valley” (67), “gentle nymph” (97), and “nymph of the vale” (114)—yet stands apart from the others and exists far beyond the quotidian. Unlike the “amphibious rabble” (69) of nymphs that amuse him by the lake, Fayaway even has “strange blue eyes” (66) that distinguish her from her “dark-eyed” counterparts (90). Wholly enchanted, Tommo infatuatedly asserts that when “contemplative” her eyes seemed “most placid yet unfathomable,” and when “illuminated by some lively emotion . . . beamed upon the beholder like stars” (66). Employing the language of Western courtship, Melville asserts her primary position in his inner feminine landscape.

His “favourite” female is also an unusually perceptive and intelligent “savage”: “Indeed,” he relates, “at times I was almost led to believe that her mind was swayed by gentle impulses hardly to be anticipated from one in her condition.” Fayaway becomes both Tommo's love-interest and his primary source of solace; his most emotionally

supportive relationship, she has “a tenderness in her manner” that is “impossible to misunderstand or resist” and “the liveliest sympathy” for him. Her manner, he confides, “convinced” him that “she deeply compassionated” his “situation”: a stranger in a strange land, “removed from my country and friends, and placed beyond the reach of all relief” (81). Metaphorically, Fayaway accompanies Tommo on his path to personal and creative development from the start.

Tommo relies on Fayaway’s especially “soothing influences” (78) and seeks her consoling presence. He attests to her special influence by confessing: “This gentle being had early attracted my regard, not only from her extraordinary beauty, but from the attractive cast of her countenance, singularly expressive of intelligence and humanity” (80). He demonstrates her privileged role by admitting: “If the reader has not observed . . . that I was the declared admirer of Miss Fayaway . . . he is little conversant with affairs of the heart” (97). At the same time, the observant reader might find it extremely puzzling that *Typee*’s most significant female character, described as intelligent, compassionate, and understanding, is given *no significant dialogue* in the entire narrative! Throughout all of *Typee* he talks *about* Fayaway, but never allows her to speak for herself.

Louder than words, this lapse indicates young Tommo’s inability to relate to Fayaway as a person, but demonstrates her treatment as a symbolic vessel. It may also point to a larger fear that the “symbolically feminine” within himself is silent and voiceless. Perhaps after his courageous and manly efforts to reach the feminine, there is nothing but a void at its center. Although he promotes her “intelligence” (80), she does

not exhibit this directly. Rather, she functions primarily to help him enact personal, perhaps unconscious, difficulties with the feminine m/Other and to help resolve psychological tasks. In her portrayal, Melville takes great pains to exhibit aspects of her ultra-femininity, only to then limit her personal or narrative usefulness by virtue of this same quality—much as he does for the nymphs. For her extreme femininity eventually restricts her, as it does all the nymphs, to the confines of sensuality, “insensibility,” and heterosexual gender roles—issues that Tommo struggles with personally. Tommo is both attracted to and fearful of Fayaway’s influence but seems to manage this ambivalence by denying her personhood: by allowing her an inner life and speech. In what may be an act of self-protection, he dons his civilized, Western hat and imprisons her in the one voice that he can wholeheartedly reject—that of the voiceless, feminine “savage.”

Melville employs this device in her physical portrayal, as well. On the one hand she appears nearly civilized, as though capable of seriously engaging Tommo’s interest. Many of her features, for example, including her blue eyes, are distinctly Western, and her hair “flowed in natural ringlets over her shoulders,” as it might for an American woman. Her feet are as “diminutive and fairly shaped “as those of “a Lima lady’s” (66), while she has “the most bewitching ankle in the universe” (97) and hands as “soft and delicate as any countess.” Her light-colored skin—unexpected in the South Seas—is “inconceivably smooth and soft” and protected from the sun by a tunic “reaching from her waist to a little below her knees,” which reveals a “lovely bosom” (66-67). This language of Western courtship and romance implies that she may be a potential mate.

On the other hand, in ambivalent and sharp counter-characterization, the author relegates Fayaway to savagery by cloistering her in the simplicity and silence of the other nymphs. She only retains civilized distinctiveness, for example, until one learns that, when not visiting neighbors, she is typically stark naked. Much like his allusions to the nymphs' lack of clothing, it is easy to miss Tommo's description of her dress, which, "for the most part," he calmly informs, "clung to the primitive and summer garb of Eden" (67). In Fayaway's case, however, Tommo increases the narrative tension by openly applauding her naturalness: "But how becoming the costume!" he declares, for "It showed her fine figure to the best possible advantage" (67). Although her nudity is embedded in the same language of Victorian courtship and womanhood—"ringlets," "diminutive," "bewitching ankle," "bosom"—it is still present, and provides evidence of the extensive and ambivalent nature of the threat she poses to his civilized self.

Oddly, Melville's use of the genre's allowance for sensual titillation, which attracts an audience, seems to place his narrator in the uneasy and ambivalent position of offering "peeps" at the girls' eroticism when he appears personally conflicted about such expression. Obscuring Fayaway's nakedness—an open manifestation of her sensuality—in innocent, biblical language ("the primitive and summer garb of Eden") may help accommodate the conflicts and anxiety it arouses in Tommo, but Melville and Tommo do not speak in unison with respect to Fayaway: one points to, and the other denies, such eros. As a result of this incongruity, the narration surrounding her becomes more tense and inconsistent, and Fayaway's characterization suffers. She cannot be a powerful model if she exemplifies such underlying conflict, and, if Melville seeks a model for

unified voice and point-of-view, the silent Fayaway does not offer that. Although a more fluid voice is later embraced in Marnoo and in Ishmael's highly "elastic" narration, Tommo's voice is inelastic in Fayaway's presence.

Fayaway becomes more threatening when eros is revealed, but she also becomes more highly ambivalent when distinguished by her extreme intelligence, beauty, and consolation. This is heightened further when she proves more civilized by virtue of being "little embellished" by "desecrating" tattoos (67). "Apparently wanting his heart to proceed," the young Tommo boasts, she displays merely those discreet and non-threatening markings that he prefers: "Three minute dots, no bigger than pin-heads, decorate each lip" while two short parallel lines "just above the fall of the shoulder" are "filled with delicately executed figures" (67). Her non-threatening tattoos seem to indicate her appeal and potential influence on his developing identity, until the language of her toilette takes on heightened sexual innuendo and alludes to her equally enhanced sexuality.

Not only does she embellish herself with "Flora," as do the other nymphs, but Fayaway's adornments are decidedly erotic. She sometimes wears "necklaces of small carnation flowers," for instance, "strung like rubies upon a fibre of tappa," or "displays" by her ear "a single white bud" that looks "like a drop of the purest pearl" (67). Even disregarding Melville's sexualized language, Heath observes that these flowers were probably more than innocent adornments in Marquesan culture, and signified "more than Melville realizes" (55). Indeed, based on his study of Marquesan eroticism, Heath concludes that it is actually "likely" (54) that Fayaway was "a real Marquesan girl" and

may well have belonged to the Typee *kaori* society (54-55) whose tribal duty it was to “spark and sustain” erotic energy through sexual skillfulness (49). Among other sexualized passages supporting this characterization are those of her with a nasal flute, an instrument Tommo describes as an “awkward” yet “beautiful scarlet-coloured reed,” but one that in her “delicate little hands” was played most “gracefully” (156).

Much of Fayaway’s “enchanted” aspect is given by such recurrent characterization of her especially sexualized nature. But, as shown, such open admission quickly compels a denial. For whenever her sexual nature is alluded to, Melville reinforces her opposing portrayal as one unusually innocent and sheltered from civilization’s woes. He accentuates this innocence by presenting her as particularly unsullied, her “general loveliness of appearance” the product of a charmed life. For Tommo, Fayaway has:

The easy unstudied graces of a child of nature . . . breathing from infancy an atmosphere of perpetual summer, and nurtured by the simple fruits of the earth; enjoying a perfect freedom from care and anxiety, and removed effectually from all injurious tendencies, strike the eye in a manner which cannot be pourtrayed. (66-67 sic)

Such descriptions abound and point to a conflicted appraisal of her true nature: is she unsullied, “breathing from infancy an atmosphere of perpetual summer,” or is she a sexually experienced woman? As if to deny the tension in this unanswered question, Tommo continues to laden her figure with such womanly perfection that, as her name (like “Far-away”) intimates, she becomes nearly mythical. If she can serve as a model for

him at all, either personally or creatively, her hold on him is certainly tenuous. The depth of his guilt appears stronger than her appeal.

Tommo continues to increase the psychological stakes by alluding to their sexual relatedness—“This picture is no fancy sketch; it is drawn from the *most vivid recollections* of the person delineated” (67 emphasis mine). By distancing himself from her full nature, however, he not only controls his sexual feelings for her, but he appears to reject her as a model for his identity claims. This allows him to stress her eroticism without the accompanying guilt of sexual transgression, a feat accomplished when he relapses to her initial, and innocent, portrayal:

Her free pliant figure was the very perfection of female grace and beauty.

Her complexion was a rich and mantling olive, and when watching the glow upon her cheeks I could almost swear that beneath the transparent medium there lurked the blushes of a faint vermilion. (66)

While her “perfection of female grace and beauty” is not unlike that of the markedly feminine Aphrodite, the “blushes” of “faint vermilion” that “lurked” beneath her skin still suggest the erotic. The tension between the narrator’s experience of Fayaway and his denial of that sexuality persists, and extends not only the false dichotomy between purity and sexuality, but creates additional narrative tension that attests to Tommo’s underlying conflict between masculine and feminine. Unable to resolve this difficult issue, he is unable to fully embrace the femininity Fayaway embodies, either personally or creatively, and determines he must keep it at arms length.

Melville's readers sense this. Even in the mid-1800s, and perhaps due to such underlying sexual tensions, did eager young men make pilgrimages to "the renowned author of *Typee*" (Stedman, *Introduction* 7) to learn more particulars of his relations with Fayaway. It must have been clear to them that Fayaway functioned not only as an alluring and unattainable nymph, but as a fully sexual, and attainable, woman. And her portrait becomes only more sexualized as Melville proceeds:

The face of this girl was a rounded oval, and each feature as perfectly formed as the heart or imagination of man could desire. Her full lips, when parted with a smile, disclosed teeth of dazzling whiteness and when her rosy mouth opened with a burst of merriment, they looked like the milk-white seeds of the "arta," a fruit of the valley, which, when cleft in twain, shows them reposing in rows on each side, imbedded in the red and juicy pulp. (66)

Much critical speculation has centered on this passage. For some, including Samuel Otter in *Melville's Anatomies*, Fayaway's mouth suggests "an appetite that knows no limits" and represents a metaphorical womb: it is a projection of Tommo's desire to plant his "seed" in her (25). For others, such as William Heath, images of mouth, womb, and seed indicate that Fayaway is a sexually experienced Marquesan woman; for others, such images make her a symbol of 'Mother Earth' (Gaia), and the passage is a metaphor for creativity: Fayaway, as Mother Earth, is creator. Although eco-feminist Donna Coffey cautions against this image of woman as inherently closer to nature than man since it

perpetuates women as especially noble savages (132), the beauty, sensuality, and orality of this portrayal is potent.

Once again, evidence of Fayaway's heightened sexuality is followed by a highly negative and fearful scene that counteracts its sensual effect: Tommo's visit to the valley's Taboo groves—another sacred, traditionally feminine space, but one of an entirely different nature. A masculine site, this Taboo Grove is forbidden to women, and guarded by fully loaded muskets. The juxtaposition of these passages exposes Tommo's great ambivalence about such heightened sexuality, as the Taboo Grove is the site of the Typees' most abhorred ritual, and one he has feared since landing on the island—that of the unspeakably awful rite of cannibalism. This damp, dark, and ambiguous landscape bears no resemblance to the playful bathing parties with the nymphs, or to erotic close-ups of Fayaway. Instead, it presents “the scene of many a prolonged feast, of many a horrid rite” (69) that alludes to the tribe's untamed, savage, and cannibalistic nature. Fayaway's idealized and innocent femininity cannot hold up when contrasted to this dangerous, masculine site. In addition to preempting the feminine, it consolidates the island's unruly, explicit, and feminized sensuality, and may represent Melville's fear of the limitations placed on him by this unmanageable encounter with femininity—limitations that he has not yet overcome in his evolving narrative identity.

As mentioned, much of this ambivalence has been foreshadowed by those “strangely jumbled anticipations” experienced when Tommo first reached the island, and by his long and dangerous passage to reach the Typee valley. That journey included a five-day passage through tough, unrelenting canes, fever, leg injury, downpours, hunger,

thirst, and despair. The cane field's "steely" enclosure threatened to block his association with the consoling feminine presence, and have become analogous to the masculine norms he must overcome—pointing early to the difficulty of accessing the feminine landscape and its elastic thought and narrative. Sharp tonal reversal, three pages after displaying Fayaway's sexual nature, provides more evidence of Melville's ambivalence towards these negative, and repressed, aspects of the feminine. Here in the Taboo groves, dark, threatening images offset the feminine sexuality he has lately experienced, and are perhaps a projection of his fear and revulsion.

Description of the dark "grove," like earlier portrayals of the symbolically feminine "valley" or "chasm," are wholly negative and provide a metaphorical link to his confused gender and identity feelings. I am suggesting that these negative images and sharp tonal shift are expressions of his confused feelings about Fayaway's sexuality, and cause him to invert his portrayal and reject the feminine in order to guard against the "spell" of such threatening feelings. Unable to overcome the guilt of his pleasure quest, he repents through a severe and masculine characterization of sexuality. For although these Taboo groves can cast the same enchanting "spell" over him, they are menacing:

Beneath the dark shadows of the consecrated bread-fruit trees there reigned a solemn twilight—a cathedral-like gloom. The frightful genius of pagan worship seemed to brood in silence over the place, breathing its spell upon every object around. Here and there, in the depths of these awful shades, half screened from sight by masses of overhanging foliage, rose the idolatrous altars of the savages . . . within which might be seen,

in various stages of decay offerings of bread-fruit and cocoanuts, and the putrefying relics of some recent sacrifice. (70)

This is no charmed landscape of sensuous ease, but one in which a “frightful genius of pagan worship” casts a “spell” on all. And that spell is not one of feminine “enchantment” but one of horror and disbelief. At this site, he gives in to the forces that bar his entry to the feminine world and accepts prevailing opinion that the feminine world is a fearful place of eros, ease, nature, and confinement—but not of intellect. These disturbing images—unlike the enchanted, mythical symbols surrounding Fayaway and the carefree nymphs—highlight the island’s savagery, paganism, and a pre-literate “silence” that “broods” over the place. This “silence” is particularly attributed to virginal or untouched places, supporting my claim that such spaces might also be seen to reflect a writer’s greatest fear: that his pen will be silenced.

At some level, as Mitchell Breitwieser aptly states in “False Sympathy in Melville’s *Typee*,” Tommo does not want to become prisoner to the island’s feminine charms and fears being made “captive” to its “captivation” (26). Minimally, he is highly ambivalent about such captivation, as his tonal shifts indicate. This ambivalence may also mirror his struggle as a young writer seeking a way to narrate his story. For as much as such feminine consolation and sought-after “elasticity of mind” are needed for original, creative thought, they do not provide the influx of ideas and dialogue that derive from contact with a wider intellectual climate. In *Typee*, the nymphs and Fayaway are mute and contribute no significant dialogue: in fact, theirs is the realm of sensuality and “insensibility,” but not of ideas or language. Embodying their culture’s preliterate state,

they provide access to new horizons and an elasticity of mind, but also threaten to “sink” Tommo into “that kind of apathy” wherein he loses “all knowledge of the regular recurrence of the days of the week” and any intellectual aspirations (90). In addition, by not accommodating his aspirations for truth telling, these nymphs threaten not only to capture him in a life of sensuality and ease, but to exert a similar control over his narrative. They threaten a kind of narrative captivity.

An ongoing preoccupation with “manhood” is apparent throughout *Typee* and may be pertinent to this discussion. As Tommo attempts to enter the feminine landscape he must fight his way through the masculine forces that repel him: the landscape of steely canes, rigid manners, and strict moral and literary conventions that threaten to impede his progress. Three elements of Tommo’s selfhood—symbolized, in Daneen Wardrop’s formulation, by leg, penis, and pen—are impacted by this confrontation. The harsh and dichotomous masculine world threatens his mobility and access to the feminine world through his leg injury; once there, it threatens his manhood by prohibiting sexual exploration; and, finally, it threatens his creativity by confronting him with the silence that is at the heart of its experience. The deterring masculine seems to say: if you rebel and enter the feminine world, you are at risk of losing your freedom, your masculinity, and your voice. Tommo’s five-day trial through the resistant cane fields belies his fears of losing control of himself and his narrative in this feminized landscape. As Tommo openly admits, “appalling darkness and the dismal sense of our forlorn condition, almost unmanned” him from that first “horrid night” on the island (42). The preoccupation with his swollen and injured limb, as Daneen Wardrop and others point out, may also be seen

as a barometer of the control that Tommo exerts over his own fate while on Nukuheva, or, to many, as psychosomatic evidence that Melville was *unmanned* by his encounter with Marquesan exoticism: Tommo even plainly states more than once that the “painful malady” “nearly unmanned” him (158). In this Oedipal interpretation, his injured leg is a phallic symbol demonstrating his castration fears, and evidence of “his wounded nature and also of his inability to function as ‘natural’ man” (Martin 71).

As Robert K. Martin concludes of this analogy, the feminized island life that Fayaway promises presents two options for the young protagonist: to gratify his sensual desire and become a criminal in his own culture, or not to gratify his desire at all. He explains Tommo’s difficult predicament:

Putting it another way, the gratification of desire, the search for pleasure, the Quest for the Golden Land, is always antisocial. The conflict is essential to all of Melville’s work, for he seems to have recognized early Freud’s insight that personal desires must always be suppressed by society, in order to provide the additional energy needed for work. (71)

The ease and joy of island life and the beauty and uninhibitedness of the Marquesan women cannot ultimately be supported if he wants to abandon authority and return home a man, for “the ‘fathers,’” in Freud’s scheme, “will do all they can to punish those who defect, who run away from responsibility” (Martin 71).

Later, towards the end of *Typee*, Tommo responds to these castration fears by sufficiently curbing his sensual impulses to avoid his feminized fate. He aligns the feminine with repulsive visions of cannibalism and tattooing, which then must be

avoided. But now, his deepest fear—that he will be “unmanned,” lose control, and be silenced through the island’s feminine yet savage indolence, pleasure, and sexuality—is on display. And while these constant fears of being eaten, tattooed, or made a captive of in this enchanted landscape may be castration fears, they may also be expressions of ambivalence about “writing the unwritten” that shows up through his “disabled” “leg/penis/pen” (Wardrop 138). For Martin, they might also “more usefully viewed simply as impediments to his integration into the Typee community” and to a feminized state of mind, for they signal that “although [Tommo] has defected from the ship, he has not entirely defected from its values” (Martin 71).

As his enchantment wanes, Tommo’s ambivalence towards the island feminine heightens and he distances himself from it and its people. Now he points out that the nymphs, though beautiful, will probably not age well. He cites his encounter with a group of elders at the Taboo grove, where he is horrified to witness the “hideous old wretches” on whose “decrepit forms” “time and tattooing seemed to have obliterated every trace of humanity.” Unlike Fayaway’s delicate tattoos and “rich and mantling olive” skin, theirs exhibits a “frightful scaly appearance” while “their flesh,” in parts, “hung upon them in huge folds.” Their bony heads, rather than “flowing” with “ringlets,” are “completely bald” while their faces are “puckered into a thousand wrinkles.” The elders sit “in a state of torpor,” seeming to warn Tommo that youthful ease and sensuality lead to hideous decay, and alerting him to the wages of sexual sin (71). Once again, they reinforce the silence and torpor of the feminine landscape. Since Fayaway embodies both idealized innocence *and* sexualized femininity, these reversals may well be projections of

Tommo's ambivalence concerning the two contrasting faces of the Mother: one her positive, nurturing aspect, and the other her negative, threatening aspect. More simply, they may be an expression of Tommo's castration fears.

This ambivalent pattern also fulfills Annette Kolodny's template for American pastorals—whether they be journeys to Paradise, the idyllic garden, or, in this case, a South Seas island—wherein, at the “*deepest psychological level*” a “single, dominating metaphor” is the experience of “regression from the cares of adult life” and a return to “the primal warmth of womb or breast in a feminine landscape” (6, emphasis mine). Different in *Typee* is Tommo's shock at encountering an exotic, historically matriarchal, yet still “coherent” culture in which “profligate sexuality received every sanction” (Heath 54) while still a youth struggling with issues of personal individuation and expression.

Despite his anxiety, there are times when Tommo embraces their relationship and is less guilt ridden. One such occasion is the oft-cited “canoe scene”—when he and “the gentle nymph” enjoy a romantic day together on the lake, and perhaps where they consummate their relationship. They “recline” in the boat on the “very best terms possible with one another” while his “eye wander[s]” around the “*bewitching* scenery.” Fayaway smokes a pipe, showing “a young and beautiful female” to best “advantage,” and Tommo experiences such satisfaction that he is “transported to some *fairy* region” (97, emphasis mine). This scene is the text's halfway point and the climactic scene of the feminine island's enchanted power over him:

As I turned the canoe, Fayaway, who was with me, seemed all at once to be struck with some happy idea. With a wild exclamation of delight, she

disengaged from her person the ample robe of tappa which was knotted over her shoulder . . . and spreading it out like a sail, stood erect with upraised arms in the head of the canoe. . . .

In a moment the tappa was distended by the breeze—the long brown tresses of Fayaway streamed in the air—and the canoe glided rapidly through the water, and shot towards the shore. (97)

Although Melville surely implies a liaison, the extent of their sexual encounter is left ambiguous in the text. It can be seen, nonetheless, that Fayaway slips off her robe and displays herself bare-breasted in the bow of the canoe. This is hardly a discreet act. Shortly after, by assuring the reader that “Many a time afterwards was this feat repeated” (97), Tommo emphasizes the depth of their involvement and slyly confirms its sexual nature.

Many critics have offered psycho-sexual interpretations of this scene. Heath points out, for instance, that it is the only setting in *Typee*—unlike other details of the Marquesan landscape that can be corroborated—that is completely fabricated: no lakes even *exist* in the Marquesas. For him, the boat ride on this mythical lake represents Tommo’s fantasy of return to the feminine womb. Others note that Melville’s language is sexually suggestive: the terms “erect,” “upraised,” “head,” “straight,” “distended,” “mast,” and “shot” are replete with phallic undertones. The canoe, a symbol of the phallus, “glides” rapidly through the feminine “water” and “shoots” towards the shore in another unmistakably sexual metaphor. But even this canoe scene, representing the apex of the island’s feminine power, retreats into an anxious and masculinized narrative—as in

the scene at the Taboo Grove. And *Typee* continues along this pattern: the text flirts with positive representations of femininity only to follow them with threatening, negative representations.

Nonetheless, before Melville is done, Fayaway takes on an even more threatening and symbolic role when, after the canoe trip, there is a scene remarkably like a wedding. In this wedding scene, Fayaway and Tommo prepare for a traditional festival. As testament to her feminizing influence, he is dressed as she is: barely clad in a tappa robe and only “girt about” with a “short tunic.” He removes his robe and presents himself to her, native-like, but “with the slow and dignified step of a full-dressed beau.” Like a bridegroom, he joins the woman he would match “against any beauty in the world” (114-15), that is, until his fears of captivity through marriage elicit further anxiety and discomfort.

In addition to Fayaway’s explicit sexuality are multiple related aspects of feminized Marquesan culture to unsettle Melville’s social mores. Its culture’s primary characteristic, after all, was one of “profligate sexuality” (Heath 54), which included remnants of a matriarchal society and polygamous marriage customs. Even infidelity and promiscuity were rare due to the variety of permitted heterosexual outlets and to practices of “autoeroticism, homosexuality, and bestiality” on the island (Heath 50-51). In many cases, women took more than one husband. Men were not manly, by Melville’s definition, and work was engaged in as little as possible. Tommo could not make sense of their religion, customs, or language. Theirs seemed to be a culture in decline, given the impressive architecture of the Ti and yet the rotted state of their idols. And perhaps most

importantly, Marquesans seemed to have no concept of selfhood or personal identity, a concept surely necessary to a young man seeking to develop a mature self, and to an emerging artist.

In fact, for Breitwieser, Tommo's most important observation about Marquesan life was that:

. . . *there is no such thing as a self there*: the Typees do not understand personal identity as a free-standing entity that can assess the value of its participation in various moments of interest and desire and that can consequently conceive of itself as living a unified and internally teleological life. The history of a Typee's day, Tommo contends, is the history of a life. Without a free sense of his life's direction, the Typee's life is one long nap. (Breitwieser, *False* 22, emphasis mine)

The Typees' indifference to his struggle for self-definition means that Tommo cannot realize "personal sovereignty" (19) on the island, causing him to relinquish the romantic notion that the tribe has what he seeks. And although their life seems initially a good antidote to the "corrupt teleology of colonialist 'enlightenment,'" rigid masculine norms and narratives, and a place for him to explore his artistic promise, its "indifference to Tommo's own vital plan," according to Breitwieser, "nauseates him, as least in those increasingly rare moments when he can conjure enough sense of self to realize that identity is dissipating into isolated instants of sensation." He enjoys the nymphs, yet is aware that his selfhood is disappearing in their presence. Though the Typees are "*free to* do any number of things interdicted in America," they are not "*free from* the

entanglement of consciousness in the simplicity of here and now” (Breitwieser, *False* 22-23). And this seems particularly true of the way that Melville finally interprets the nymphs and Fayaway.

Because the Typees’ cultural shortcomings coincide with that tension between “sensual indolence and moralistic rectitude” in Melville’s own personality, the “primitive world” he enters on Nukuheva may well be “perfectly designed to speak to both his deepest fears and desires” (Heath 54). Reconciling this conflict requires his eventual flight from the island and perhaps a return to stricter, Protestant values. At the end of his voyage, however, and despite his feelings for her, Tommo deserts not only the feminine island and its landscape, but his lover, Fayaway. He leaves her on the beach “sobbing indignantly” (170) as he flees to the safe, masculine world of a waiting Australian ship, a story taken up in *Typee’s* sequel, *Omoa*. And this, it seems, is his last and final statement about the feminized world she represents.

CHAPTER II
TYPEE'S FEMINIZED MEN

After first eagerly anticipating and then marveling at the island's feminine charms, Melville's narrative ambiguity and tonal shifts in *Typee* reveal increasing ambivalence towards the feminine. His vivid images of Fayaway display both positive and negative aspects of this femininity, and especially embody ambivalence towards her sexuality and her sexual influence over him. His eagerness to escape the rigidity of the masculine world leads him to encounter the feminine world, and his narrative voice is impacted through contact with its "elasticity of mind" and wholly different metaphorical landscape. The gender and identity issues aroused through this confrontation, however—embodied in *Typee's* narrative tension—prohibit him from making good use of its influences.

In Melville's narrative, the character of Tommo represents his younger, undeveloped self, a young man whose personal growth, I believe, mirrors Herman Melville's evolution as a writer. Other critics, such as Robert K. Martin, refer to this composite narrator/author figure as his "hero/self" (70). While Tommo is drawn to Fayaway's extreme beauty, innocence, and consolation, her sexuality provokes conflicted and threatening feelings. How can he become a man—or become a writer—he seems to ask, if he cannot separate himself from the feminine m/Other? And how can he be a civilized being if he is "contented to lead a quiet and lazy life" (Sealts, *Melville As Lecturer* 175)—to borrow a line from Melville's own 1858 lecture "The South Seas"—

allowing ease and sensual pleasure, and maybe even sexuality and marriage, to make a captive of him on a far-away island? Perhaps, to justify his flight Tommo must conclude that the feminine cannot be trusted. Or perhaps entering the feminine world through *Typee* will resemble his well-beaten path into the sacred Taboo groves, a path “as difficult to travel as the recesses of a wilderness” until he grows “more familiar with its impediments” (69).

Kory-Kory: The Savage Feminine

While Tommo is alternately charmed and confronted by Fayaway and the nymphs, the narrative tension surrounding these figures does not even approach that associated with other feminized figures in *Typee*, including the feminized male servant Kory-Kory. Tommo’s faithful servant ministers to him constantly and appears more regularly in the text than other primary characters, yet exerts far less emotional, erotic, and narrative influence. Although closely allied with nature and surrounded by its feminine enchantments and consolations, he is neither the source of this enchantment nor even closely associated with it, as are other feminized figures. Despite his “devoted” service, Tommo is openly contemptuous of Kory-Kory, and gender and identity conflicts are barely activated in his presence. It is unknown whether the lack of connection stems from Melville’s fear of confronting his own potential homoerotic tendencies, but it appears that as a feminized and apparently homosexual male, Kory-Kory’s ambiguous position on the gender spectrum repels the narrator.

On the island Kory-Kory is Tommo’s constant companion whose singular attentions, more than any other character, embrace what Caleb Crain refers to, in “Lovers

of Human Flesh: Homosexuality and Cannibalism in Melville's Novels," as the "peculiar voluptuousness" of the feminine island (32). He carries Tommo around on his back, "insisted upon feeding me with his own hands" (68), "tenderly bathed my limbs" (69), and infantilizes him—treating him as a "froward, inexperienced child" (69). It is only in reluctant half-compliments that Tommo concedes that the servant "never for one moment left my side, unless it were to execute my wishes," as when "carrying me to the stream, and bathing me in its refreshing water" (82). He is "devoted," a "best natured serving-man" (64), "honest fellow" (69), "faithful fellow" (82), "trusty valet" (97), and a "devoted servitor" (82), but as Crain reminds us, in the whaling world with which Tommo and Melville both were acquainted, expressions of physical intimacy between men were inextricably related to the imbalanced power dynamics of the ship and "almost always implied a loss of control over the body." Such loss of control, in turn, suggested "a compromise of the self and a disintegration of identity" (41). Perhaps what Tommo rejects in Kory-Kory, then, is not only his ultra-feminized nature, but potential loss of control over his own body, a resulting loss of self, and the prospect of establishing a voice that would align him with forbidden male-male sexuality. And his fear of alterity, of not only "losing one's identity as European" (Iverson 122) but of replacing it with a perverse expression of gender and sexuality, is defended against in the narrative through mockery and hostility.

In fact, the servant's intense solicitude so closely resembles that of the special South Seas same-sex relationship *aikane*—or, in Melville's term, *tayo*—mentioned earlier, that his unnatural personal attentions might also frighten Tommo, who

experiences homosexual panic in response. This can help explain why Tommo interprets Kory-Kory's faithfulness as a liability and as proof of his overall weakness. In commentary devoid of sensual or erotic overtones he expresses annoyance over Kory-Kory's maternal "bustling about" to "secure my personal comfort" and likens it to that of a pesky grandmother (83). While it is not clear if these anxieties are caused by unwanted sexual advances or by the more generalized threat of homosexuality, Tommo's panic—or, as Crain characterizes it, his "desperate defense" (33)—is exhibited in both his strong aversion to Kory-Kory and in his complete rejection of the extreme boundaries of sexuality and femininity that he represents. The servant becomes the extremely feminized male that he must reject in order to internalize the more fluid and intermediate femininity of Marnoo, on whose individual and narrative figure he is able to model himself.

Here, given the psychological foundation of my argument, it may be useful to summarize a few broad concepts to clarify my view of the threats posed to Tommo's identity by his contact with the feminine. Psychologically, the task of individuation required that Tommo assert his identity as a man, separate from the feminine. This required that he adhere to especially rigid social (civilized), gender (masculine), and sexual (heterosexual) identities. As Iris Marion Young interprets Nancy Chodorow's theory of gender identity in *"Throwing Like A Girl" and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory*, in order to be identified as a man, a young man's gender anxiety is generally greater than a young woman's because he must distinguish himself not only from his mother but also from other men. This is particularly important since the boundary between gay and straight men is so permeable (Young 38, paraphrasing

Chodorow). Further, employing the Freudian terms of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Crain asserts that such a psychosexual environment can readily host a kind of homophobia known as “homosexual panic.” In Sedgwick’s opinion, this extreme expression of homophobia is its “most private, psychologized form,” because it is not only directed at gay men but at all expressions of male-male intimacy. The complex amounts to “social blackmail” (qtd. in Crain 33), in Sedgwick’s estimation, because it “controls affections and relations between men—of any orientation—by obliging them to eternal vigilance” (Crain 33, paraphrasing Sedgwick). Since homosexual panic “predates the identification of the homosexual as a ‘species’ by more than a century,” it is pertinent to a discussion of nineteenth-century experience (33).

Critics have established that before the publication of *Typee* Melville was acquainted with the cultural institution of male friendship in Polynesia. Among other readings, he was familiar with earlier explorers’ accounts of homosexual practices on the islands and with Dana’s *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840), which includes an account of traditional same-sex relationships among Polynesian men. Although the term “homosexuality” was not yet in existence in the 1840s, Crain cites Robert Suggs’s 1995 ethnographic study which asserts that recent anthropology has indeed “confirmed” that “homosexual activity existed on the island of Nukuheva” at that time, and was considered, even among some married men, “normal practice,” especially when women were scarce. Furthermore, studies find that adult men were not stigmatized for such behavior even when such expression was “habitual” and “combined with female mannerisms and a woman’s socio-economic role” (Crain 31, paraphrasing Suggs). If

Tommo were attracted to another man and acting out of homosexual panic, Sedgwick might argue, he would have to resort to “paranoia and projection of the sort Freud outlined” to defend against that attraction. His resulting desire would be converted to “revulsion, horror, and even violence” and the only way, according to Sedgwick, for the “threateningly attractive” prospect of such homosexuality to be “relieved” would be through a violent act (Crain 33, paraphrasing Sedgwick).

While not an act of physical violence, Melville’s meanly satirical characterization of Kory-Kory nonetheless displays a level of hostility consistent with such a psychological defense mechanism. And despite rebuking himself for how “heartless” it is “to write thus” of Kory-Kory, since it is owing to his “unremitting attentions the very existence I now enjoy” (65), even Tommo’s remorse is followed by a derisive and unflattering description of the big man’s curious physique:

Kory-Kory, though the most devoted and best natured serving-man in the world, was, alas! a hideous object to look upon. He was some twenty-five years of age, and about six feet in height, robust and well made, and of the most extraordinary aspect. His head was carefully shaven with the exception of two circular spots, about the size of a dollar, near the top of the cranium, where the hair, permitted to grow of an amazing length, was twisted up in two prominent knots, that gave him the appearance of being decorated with a pair of horns. (64-65)

Melville’s focus on Kory-Kory’s physical attributes—as in more appreciative renderings of Fayaway, the nymphs, and, later, Marnoo—most clearly recalls tropes of classic

colonial discourse wherein, as David Spurr indicates, “the *body* of the primitive is that which is most proper to the primitive” and “the sign by which the primitive is represented” (qtd. in Ivison 119, emphasis mine). Although he is “robust and well made,” like Marnoo, Kory-Kory exhibits “the most *extraordinary* aspect” (64, emphasis mine). In sharp contrast to Fayaway’s Westernized beauty—a beauty that distinguishes her from common islanders—it is Kory-Kory’s *ugliness* that confirms his savagery. Unlike Fayaway’s flowing hair—but like other “shaven-crowned” savages on the island (99)—he is bald except for two spots which are “twisted up in two prominent knots” like “a pair of horns,” making him look like a beast or devil.

Unlike the delicately tattooed Fayaway, the servant’s “entire body” is also “covered” with “representations of birds and fishes and a variety of most unaccountable-looking creatures,” creating a spectacle “a little curious” to Tommo’s “unaccustomed sight.” In fact, far from resembling the classical physical perfection of Fayaway, or later, Marnoo, the “savage valet’s” body “suggested” to Tommo “a pictorial museum of natural history”—calling to mind nineteenth-century ethnographic distinctions that aligned “savage” races with strange and “unaccountable-looking” animals (64-65). Melville’s use of the scientific term “the cranium” to describe Kory-Kory’s head further supports this claim. Unlike Fayaway and more appreciative views of femininity, in other words, Kory-Kory wilts under Tommo’s disparaging “colonial gaze” (Ivison 121), becoming a hideous “*object* to look upon” (64, emphasis mine).

In Melville’s characterization, and as the term “object” implies, the “savage valet” is no longer unique or individualized, but objectified. Now, as a result of his appearance

and tattoos, Kory-Kory is deeply associated with nature, animals, and savagery. He is not only “Othered,” but comes to embody an *ultra-feminized* “Other”: a more feminine, more savage, and more threatening embodiment of native culture than any other islander with whom Tommo is closely associated. In his presence, traditional Western distinctions are flipped: within categories of gender he is masculine, although his actions are feminine; within categories of sexual identity he exists on the outer boundary, as a homosexual; and in the realm of culture, he is marked as a savage and a captive. In his presence Tommo’s anxiety grows and his narrative view moves from naïve, “sympathetic sailor” (Karcher, “Herman Melville” 2552), alternately attracted to and fearful of the feminized landscape, to critical, sardonic outsider. Because Kory-Kory exists on the fringe of Western categories of identity, he becomes seen as a perversion and even as a freak.

So it is both fitting and significant, given his unique status as the ultra-feminized m/Other in *Typee*, that he is aligned with the majority of male warriors who are “face-tattooed” (99). Kory-Kory is the only one of the three central islanders to possess the dreaded facial tattoos, which are later shown to be subtle markers of racial and sexual difference. Importantly, his “triple hooped” facial inscription reminds Tommo of “the grated bars of a prison window,” providing a link to the concept of *captivity* that especially surrounds Kory-Kory’s character. From Tommo’s perspective, the servant is imprisoned by his perverse feminization: portraying him as a captive demonstrates not only his savage Otherness, but also his frightening lack of power. Moreover, he also threatens to feminize Tommo through domestication on the island—still hobbled by his inflamed leg, he is made an invalid and a captive. Having resigned himself to a feminized

fate with Fayaway, Tommo has more reason to reject the role of domesticated captive via Kory-Kory. Surely, such a limited character cannot be up to the task of selfhood, or assist in the process of individuation.

Kory-Kory's appearance, however, may also help decipher Tommo's inordinate hostility towards his servant, who, after all, tends to him faithfully and might rightfully expect better treatment. If Fayaway provoked fears of sexual ease and the captivity of marriage and Marnoo will provoke fears of a loss of sexual identity and power, Kory-Kory's effeminate nature and barred, facial tattoos provoke all of these fears. This threatening combination of fears—loss of power by being marked as feminine Other and too closely associated with savagery to ever return to civilization—overwhelms Tommo's sense of who he is and causes him to reject the servant. Whatever insights into self, culture, and narrative he may gain through greater relatedness is not worth the challenge to his Westernized identity as a strong, civilized, and heterosexual young man. In fact, it is not clear that Kory-Kory even contributes any insights of value to a young man seeking an original identity and voice that is, at the same time, culturally acceptable.

It is apparent that Tommo accounts for Kory-Kory's powerlessness and captivity by his limited homo-social status. This "wearyed faithful servitor" (96) is no dynamic traveler with life lessons to impart a "curious" youth—a young man "willing to encounter some risks in order to accomplish my object" (31)—but is relegated to a limited and proscribed role on the island. Worse, he seems content in that role. In fact, it is no accident that he is called a "servant," for, as Margaret Hunt points out, the term "slavish" had special connotations in the travel genre, literally denoting individuals with a slave

mentality or with “no autonomy or spirit of intellect and little or no desire or capacity to change their state for something better” (343). This parallel between Kory-Kory’s homosexual status and his weak, domesticated captivity in his own village is demonstrated when, to Tommo’s incredulity, the native is wholly uninterested in ever leaving Nukuheva: he does not even want to imagine a place as spectacular as the “Polynesian heaven” where, Tommo gushes, “women far lovelier than the daughters of earth were in abundance.” Rather, the servant merely concedes that it must be “A very pleasant place” but “not much pleasanter,” he guesses, “than Typee.” Kory-Kory’s unnaturally feminized characteristics and narrow horizons make him a true savage: “very happy” where he is, but apparently neither adventuresome nor concerned by his restricted status (121). This is wholly unappealing to an inquisitive narrator (or author) whose “heroic nature,” Tommo informs, demands “the biggest share of the pudding” or none at all (99).

Melville’s portrayal of Kory-Kory as a weak, ultra-feminized male betrays a level of anxiety beyond that experienced with Fayaway and the nymphs, and activates Tommo’s defenses regardless of the servant’s unattractiveness. In addition to being repulsed by his ugliness, Tommo is equally repelled by Kory-Kory’s unsophisticated character and lack of authenticity, noting occasions when the native eagerly exaggerates his limited knowledge and skills, perhaps in an effort to attract Tommo’s interest. When there is an intertribal skirmish, for example, the big servant stays behind with the old and sick, fussing and fretting, and “appeared to think that we were in the midst of great events” as he “sought most zealously to impress me with . . . their importance” (94).

Tommo dismissively relates how the Marquesan exaggerates his tribe's boldness in war through "ecstasies" of "pantomimic illustrations," when actual tribal casualties amount to only "one forefinger and part of a thumb-nail" (94). And rather than fight battles and act courageously, as a man might, Tommo shows how the native stays as close to him as a mother to a child, attending to his every need.

In addition to his lack of courage, Kory-Kory is not a particularly original or creative thinker. An essentially conservative character, he uncritically upholds "notions of propriety," "religious ordinances," and taboos that, for instance, prohibit women from entering canoes. When Tommo questions the necessity of such rules and lobbies for "Fayaway's emancipation" from them—even making his case before Chief Mehevi—Kory-Kory is "horrified" and "inveighed against" such intervention, deeming such an original proposal "too monstrous to be thought of" (96). In this reaction the servant is not only unlike Tommo, but also markedly unlike Marnoo, who, as a matter of course, appeals to both men and women, and who, in like manner, approaches Mehevi to secure Tommo's freedom. In this sense, Kory-Kory is seen to uphold the rigid binaries of the masculine world that Tommo seeks to escape. In fact, Kory-Kory's thinking is more akin to "the minds" of so many other "simple savages," who are generally "unoccupied by matters of graver moment" (104). Meanwhile, as alluded to in the fire-making scene in Chapter 14, although Kory-Kory's efforts to attract Tommo are desperately frustrated, his own quest for Tommo's company invokes only heightened unease and tension between them. The real quest for truth and individuation so important to Tommo, and for his narrative development, remains unexamined.

Reinforcing Kory-Kory's ineffectual and inauthentic nature is his mode of speech, which consists of rudimentary gesture, proverb, and gibberish. In her doctoral thesis "Resisting the Vortex: Abjection in the Early Works of Herman Melville," Jennifer M. Wing posits this speech pattern as part of a broader characterization of the Typee language as impulsive and semiotic, and one whose primitive and "incomprehensible sounds," to her mind, disturb Tommo "deeply" (27). Daneen Wardrop agrees that in this Typee "valley of pre-consciousness . . . of pre-signifier ecstasies and drives" (147) Kory-Kory's mode of speech becomes emblematic of all that Tommo cannot grasp of Typee language, religion, and culture. In Wardrop's view, the youth is annoyed by the servant's frequent use of repetition and word doubling (even his name, Kory-Kory, is redundant) and by the embellishment of words with additional syllables (Tom becomes Tommo, for example). And among all these disturbances in the language itself it is Kory-Kory who becomes the target of his "most severe ridicule" (148), perhaps because his speech is part of a broader pattern that emphasizes threatening *differences* between the civilized Westerner and the savage Other—differences that do not flatter either himself or the Typee character.

Tommo mocks Kory-Kory's use of simplistic proverbs, sarcastically noting that the servant is "often enlivening" his discourse with the "short, smart-sounding sentences" which "plainly intimated, that in his opinion, they settled the matter in question" (122). Unlike Fayaway's knowing silence and Marnoo's intelligent eloquence, which are potentially interesting narrative qualities, Kory-Kory's glibness of speech illustrates the most negative aspects of the islander's "slavish" character: not only that he is ignorant

and powerless, but that he does not understand his own limitations. Tommo makes note of Kory-Kory's "unintelligible and stunning gibberish" and scoffs at his additionally unfortunate tendency to get sidetracked and to "launch out . . . rather diffusely into other branches of his subject." Eventually he complains that the servant's aimless banter "actually gave me the headache," as a husband might complain of a tiresome wife (77-78).

Kory-Kory is neither as powerful, fluid, and eloquent as Marnoo proves to be, nor as beautiful, innocently sexual, and intelligent as Fayaway; rather, Tommo sees him as a weak, effeminate, freakish Other—slavishly content with his unenviable status. Weary of the servant's pretensions and certain that he does not offer a valuable role model, Tommo's mocking dismissal of Kory-Kory may be understood not merely as a classic example of "homosexual panic" but as a flat-out rejection of the limits to selfhood placed on one by homoeroticism. For Tommo, who seeks personal and creative growth, Kory-Kory demonstrates that the payoff for crossing such gender and identity boundaries is null.

It is ironic then when this "powerless" servant is able to threaten Tommo with the one thing he most fears on the island: getting facially tattooed. Of all three main characters, it is only the "faithful" Kory-Kory—himself abhorrently "marked" by these nineteenth-century indicators of savagery and homosexuality—who suddenly turns "traitor" and assists the malevolent tattoo artist's attempts to "inscribe" Tommo's face. A successful effort would subject Tommo to his will and symbolically "write" him as a savage, a homosexual, and illiterate. Perhaps because of this, Tommo's fear that he will

be forced to “comply” with the feared “operation of tattooing” on the island seems irrationally potent.

Tommo is “Horried at the bare thought of being rendered hideous for life” if the Typees’ tattooing “wretch were to execute his purpose upon me” and “struggled to get away” from these tattooing attempts, as if desperate to escape an attack or rape. He imagines the tattooist “engrafting his tattooing upon my white skin” and his “flesh fairly crawled,” while “half wild with terror and indignation”—in language recalling his early, frightening encounter with the resistant cane fields—he “continued his attack on my face” (149-50). Like the unexpectedly threatening canes that deter his access to the island, Kory-Kory’s attempts to assist in this indelible “writing” of his being also represent an impediment to the authentic feminine landscape he seeks. To avoid such sexual and savage inscription, Tommo concludes that he must leave the island rather than risk being made “a convert of,” a peremptory decision witnessed by this brief but paranoid later passage, just before he departs:

This [tattooing] incident opened my eyes to a new danger; and now I felt convinced that in some luckless hour I should be disfigured in such as manner as never more to have the *face* to return to my countrymen. . . .

These apprehensions were greatly increased by the desire which King Mehevi . . . now manifested that I should be tattooed. . . . What an object he would have made of me! (150-51)

This tattooing episode marks the last narrative turning point in *Typee* and seals Tommo’s ambivalence towards his entire island experience. The idea of being converted into an

“object”—of becoming *like* the limited Kory-Kory, and of being written *on* instead of being able to write others—is more than he can bear. Tommo is “fairly driven to despair” at the prospect of such a tattoo, and his “unconquerable repugnance” (151) at such “annoying requests” escalates, “until at last my existence became a burden to me; the pleasures I had previously enjoyed no longer afforded me delight, and all my former desire to escape from the valley now revived with additional force” (151). In what many agree is a quick, “tacked-on” (Wardrop 152) finale, Tommo packs it in, determined to leave Nukuheva.

In much the same way that the tattooed inscription threatens Tommo, the facial tattoo may be seen as the ultimate threat to a Westerner on the island. For the facial tattoo would mark Melville, in the person of Tommo, as a feminized, homosexual savage like Kory-Kory: if Samuel Otter’s psychosexual lens is applied, Chief Mehevi, the Oedipal Father figure, would demand the tattoo; Kory-Kory, his emissary, would seek to enforce it; and the facial tattoo itself would mark Melville’s lack of control over all—the Father, the culture, his sexual orientation, and his own selfhood (Otter 10). Kory-Kory’s own facial tattoo, which reminds Tommo of the bars on a prison cell, may be symbolic of all the boundaries he has broken, his imprisoned status, or a warning against breaking such rules; Tommo would no doubt fear a similarly horrid tattoo for any homosexual transgression. That his hero/self Tommo denies such a definition by rejecting Kory-Kory and the facial tattoo makes it clear that Melville has reached the limits or boundaries of his self-definition and has no intention of being “outed,” either literally or figuratively, by the tattoo. He will not allow Typee culture to inscribe him, but will reestablish his quest,

reassert his power, and prevail over such hostilities by taking pen in hand, as Daneen Wardrop surmises.

In rejecting the facial tattoo, Tommo not only obstructs the Typee's attempts to inscribe him, but also, as Wardrop points out, refuses incorporation into Typee culture by means of inscription. In doing so, he triumphs, symbolically, over the narrative. If *Typee* can be seen as an extended test of *who will write whom* on the island, as she asserts, Tommo's rejection of the pre-literate tribe's only form of inscription, the tattoo, is clear proof that he has determined to prevail by writing *them*. As evidence of this psychological and creative resolution, Tommo's leg heals, he is re-sexualized by reclaiming his manly, heterosexual status, and he leaves the island and takes up the pen. In her formulation, all three such psychosexual symbols—leg, penis, and pen—are thus resolved to his advantage.

While Kory-Kory promotes this resolution by providing the extreme sexual boundary against which Tommo defines himself, he becomes, as a result, that which must be rejected. In Kory-Kory's person not only are Tommo's most feared boundaries crossed—those of gender, sexual orientation, and identity—but it is additionally evident that rather than freeing the servant, they appear to restrict him. Finally, Kory-Kory does not speak a language that is coherent or meaningful to Tommo. That Kory-Kory is surrounded by the enchanted feminine but does not participate in its elasticity demonstrates what happens when one ventures beyond the boundary of sexualized femininity into male effeminacy—a fixed and rigid boundary that Tommo himself is not willing to cross.

Marnoo: The Attractive Stranger

Tommo encounters various aspects of femininity on the island and, as a result, is forced to confront sexuality, the prospect of marriage, and Kory-Kory's feminized perversion of gender. His anxiety heightens in the presence of the nymphs and their chief embodiment, Fayaway, and as other fears and dangers associated with the feminine island—cannibalism, tattooing, and captivity—are raised. When he is not basking in its indolence and pleasurable attentions, his interactions with the feminine m/Other and its representatives are seen as frightful, incomprehensible, or limiting. Fayaway, the exemplary woman, employs no speech at all and can't even narrate her own story—she is as limited and prelingual as the hushed landscape she inhabits. Kory-Kory, the ultra-feminized male, speaks in dialogue but employs banal proverbs, useless redundancies, and gibberish. He is unoriginal, powerless, and makes no sense. Worse yet, both of these figures seek to confine Tommo in a limited life on the island that will serve neither his self-development nor his voice.

In these relationships, as Robert K. Martin points out, *Typee* adopts not only the form of the travel narrative but also of the *captivity* narrative, a form that expresses the narrator's "ambivalence about his imprisonment," even if by appealing and sensual means—as with Fayaway and the nymphs. The form is "particularly ambivalent" because the protagonist is often a woman who marries her captor, making her rescue "at once a salvation and a new captivity" (70). By adopting the genre, Melville not only "identifies his hero/self with the captive *woman* and exposes his own ambivalences about the return

to civilization” (70, emphasis mine) but expresses ambivalence about any “new captivity” through marriage, male partnership, or tenancy on the island.

Although Tommo also discovers potentially transformative “elasticity of mind” in the feminized landscape, he cannot employ it to develop a narrative identity because its model excludes initiative, intellectual rigor, or originality. The nymphs, Fayaway, and Kory-Kory lead a pleasurable though “uniform and undiversified” life, in which “one tranquil day of ease and happiness follows another in quiet succession” (107). Tommo witnesses broad sexual freedom among them, including sexual expressions with “homosexual implications,” but these arouse such anxiety that he is forced to not only “finally reject the Typees,” but to “flee them” (Martin 74-76).

An important aspect of Melville’s ambivalence toward the feminine island, as seen, is his projection of such fraught sexual and identity issues onto its landscape and people. I am suggesting that this ambivalent pattern is expressed in *Typee*’s corresponding narrative tension, a tension that further parallels Melville’s struggle to define his voice. This ambivalent pattern is seen, and intensified, when Tommo encounters another native figure among the island’s “gentle . . . male population” (133), the feminized yet powerful, and apparently bi-sexual, Marnoo. In Marnoo’s case, however, I contend that this figure *does* hold a key to Melville’s narrative development, as his fluid, intelligent, and masterful voice exemplifies the kind of “elasticity” of mind, gender, sexuality, and narrative that arrests Tommo through outright captivity, rather than through imprisonment. Immediately drawn to the powerful and articulate figure, Tommo discovers in Marnoo the voice he wishes to speak.

Melville's primary use of the travel narrative accommodates his psychological and creative tasks well. According to Martin, the format not only allows him to introduce open sensuality and a critique of societal mores into *Typee*, as previously noted, but also allows him to employ the island as a potential site for the "exploration of alternate sexuality":

For 19th century homosexuals, in search of both justification for themselves and a possible realization of their desires, the journey to an exotic landscape offered the possibility of locating a place where there might be others like them, a place where [male-male] friendship might play its legitimate part in social life. (69)

In Martin's reading of *Typee*, this dynamic helps explain why Melville's characterization of Nukuheva so closely resembles that of W. H. Auden's "garden-island": a distant and isolated place, that is, where "no conflict" exists between "natural desire and moral duty," and a place of unfettered sexual freedom (70).

The island locale suits this purpose well, Martin points out, because it is a natural setting for "exploring the part that male friendship might play in the life of a man, if only he could be transported from the world of his own Western culture" (69). Its beautiful and distant landscape, still engaged today for purposes of Western sex tourism, can easily stand for and make available forbidden homosexual desire. As Melville himself tellingly remarked in his South Seas lecture, the "city of London and the South Seas" were known as the best places for a man to "most effectively *disappear*" at that time (Sealts, *Melville As Lecturer* 174, emphasis mine). This supports Martin's argument that Melville saw

Nukuheva as an anonymous, safe place for uninhibited sensual exploration or experimentation, and, as I read *Typee*, for experimentation with a more inclusive and fluid narrative style. On Nukuheva, Tommo's interactions with servant Kory-Kory and rover and tribal "outsider" Marnoo introduce him to alternative forms of sexuality historically pathologized by Western culture, and perhaps, in doing so, allow him to investigate his own sexual orientation and gender identity. As in the captivity narrative, these experiences allow him to exchange his Western identity for the attraction of "gaining a new identity as the Other" (Iverson 122). This exploratory approach to his own individuation melds well with his growing search for a narrative approach, in much the same way that I claim his quest for the island mirrors the quest for a new "landscape of mind," and the island itself becomes a safe *narrative* place for finding his voice.

Of the two transitional males in *Typee*, it is the handsome Marnoo, who appears in the text much less frequently than Kory-Kory—Marnoo is seen in only one-half of Chapter 18 and in a few mentions thereafter—who leaves the stronger impression. Tommo is infatuated with "the stranger" (95) as soon as they meet. More significantly, Tommo approaches him with the same irrational, ambivalent, and emotionally charged mixture of desire and fear with which he responds to Fayaway and the prospect of heterosexual ties, revealing a parallel between the two feminized characters. With Marnoo, however, this experience is intensified.

As with Fayaway, Marnoo stands apart from ordinary natives and is the exceptional Marquesan. Indeed, at first sight, Tommo declares that the "stranger" is "one of the most striking specimens of humanity that I ever beheld" (98), in sharp contrast to

his first mention of Kory-Kory, whom he describes as a “hideous object” to look upon (64, *op cit*). From the start, he is more beautiful, more intelligent, and more civilized than the other men. Like Fayaway, and unlike the “shaven-crowned and face-tattooed natives in general” (99), he has long hair, especially light skin, and feminized features: the reader learns that his “cheek was of a feminine softness” while his “rich curling brown” hair “twined about his temples” in “little close curling ringlets, which danced up and down” (98). He even dresses in the robe of a woman and speaks in “musical accents” (100), much like Fayaway and the nymphs.

Despite such feminine characteristics, the warrior also exemplifies the colonial trope of masculine physical perfection to which Iverson refers (119). Tommo describes him thus when they first meet:

The stranger could not have been more than twenty-five years of age, and was a little above the ordinary height; had he [been] a single hair’s breadth taller, the matchless symmetry of his form would have been destroyed. His unclad limbs were beautifully formed; whilst the elegant outline of his figure, together with his beardless cheeks, might have entitled him to the distinction of standing for the statue of the Polynesian Apollo; and indeed, the oval of his countenance and the regularity of every feature reminded one of an antique bust. (98)

By making classical references to Apollo, “unclad limbs,” “antique bust,” and “beardless cheeks,” Melville’s portrayal evokes those of Plato’s young male consorts. In stark contrast to Kory-Kory’s lack of appeal, Marnoo’s portrait reveals an immediate and

intensely physical attraction. Others note how Melville's portrayal perpetuates that "strange mixture" of savage and classical beauty present in Rousseau's idealization of the "noble savage" (Martin 73). But this time, when Melville "beholds" this "striking specimen of humanity" and subjects him to the longingly desirous "colonial gaze" (Iverson 229), he fares much better than Kory-Kory—with his objectified and beast-like hideousness. As if to heighten the sexualized effect, Marnoo is introduced to the reader in Chapter 17, soon after Tommo experiences altered "elasticity of mind" with the nymphs and immediately following the erotic boating scene in which Fayaway disrobes, thus extending their sexualized tone. As this narrative placement infers, Marnoo rests at the heart of *Typee*'s feminine power and influence.

As seen in this portrait, the figure of Marnoo is neither fully feminine nor fully masculine. His sexual preference and even his gender are unclear. While he is a warrior with a powerful, manly physique, descriptors such as "elegant outline," "beautifully formed" and "oval . . . countenance" are feminized, and might be confused for similar descriptions of Fayaway. In addition to such composite male-female features, another short passage conveys his reluctant admission that "when a boy, he had been carried to sea by the captain of a trading vessel" and thus traveled and lived "part of the time with him" in Western lands (101). Although he later returns home, the confession alludes to his ill-defined sexuality by raising questions about the nature of that relationship. It prefigures the biography of the native Queequeg, Ishmael's partner, whose "profound desire to learn" causes him to seek out a Western whaling vessel, but whose "dauntlessness," by contrast, ensures that he "never saw the captain's cabin" (*Moby-Dick*

Ch 12, 89). In this sequence Marnoo is the transitional native figure that allows himself to be influenced by outside mores and cultures, yet ultimately returns home, while Queequeg is his more evolved self—a self-assured traveler whose “dauntlessness” allows him to retain his imperial presence. One narrative evolution for Melville, it appears, leads to the next.

In addition to his liminal sexuality, Marnoo moves easily between the worlds of men and women, as both Typee men and women “throng” around him (98). When he talks, he addresses “his discourse” to “the females as well as to the men” (100). Both of these aspects help solidify his unusual status as one who can live anywhere and who compels both men and women. Marnoo is thus characterized as a transitional, androgynous figure, existing in-between the masculine and the feminine, the heterosexual and the homosexual. By exhibiting aspects of both genders and orientations, he upsets the rigid Western gender dyads: male-female and heterosexual-homosexual. Like Melville’s concept of “Truth, who loves to be centrally located” (143 *op cit*), this native embodies a union of opposites. Marnoo, in short, presents a unique and novel hybridity.

In addition to gender and sexual binaries, other Western dichotomies vanish in Marnoo’s presence. Like Fayaway, he disrupts the civilized-savage dyad. He is neither as savage and unrestrained as a true native, nor as domesticated and repressed as a true Westerner. Neither captor nor captive, but with exceptional freedom and abilities, he roams fluidly between both cultures and tribes. As Wardrop concludes, “his cultural loyalties are divided, and he seems to mix well in any environment” (150). Despite being a tribal outsider to the Typees—indeed, the “cannibalizing” Typees are infamous for their

lack of receptivity to local tribes—Marnoo is exceptionally popular with its members, who make a “prodigious riot” when he arrives and display a “striking devotion” to him (98-99). In fact, the Typees greet his entrance into the valley with great fanfare, calling out with “every tongue,” “Marnoo!—Marnoo!” (98). Unlike Kory-Kory’s introduction in Chapter 11, in which his physical appearance is described as hideous and his character so unremarkable that its description can wait until later (64), Marnoo receives just the kind of instantaneous fanfare and raucous, multilingual reception from his audience that a young writer might desire. Marnoo, it is apparent, belongs to both worlds, and can speak to and for both.

At first, Tommo cannot make sense of Marnoo’s freedom of movement on the island. Confined by his own cultural assumptions and inexperience, he is unable to interpret the enigmatic figure whose actions appear “altogether unintelligible,” and whose existence finally compels him to inquire: “from whence he had come?” (101). It is only over time, Robert T. Tally maintains, that Tommo is able to embrace Marnoo’s vistas into experiences and genres whose truth “cannot be adequately represented.” For Tally, Marnoo is seen as a precursor to that “central feature” of Melville’s entire “literary cartography”—the question of “how to depict ‘true places’” (187). He is the first central character in *Typee* to be seen as free. Now he is free and unfettered, it turns out, because, in his own words, “‘Ah! Me taboo,—me go Nukuheva,—me go Tior,—me go Typee,—me go everywhere,—nobody harm me,—me taboo.’” He roves between tribes, unharmed, because, as Tommo explains, “his person, to some extent, is held as sacred” (101). Still, as much as Tommo is puzzled by both his “singularity of conduct” and by his

protected, sacred status, he is more intrigued than bothered. And although he becomes “not a little piqued” by “the temporary withdrawal of all attention” from himself, his jealousy is quickly replaced by sheer interest and admiration (99).

Marnoo’s magnetism and the ease with which he crosses the boundaries of culture, gender, and sexuality allow him not only to displace Tommo as the island’s locus of attention, but, in some minds, also “relegates Tom to the feminine position” (Iverson 122). Although this position is consistent with the captivity narrative, the young narrator appears not to mind the new, inverted outlook. In fact, he seems to relish the opportunity to get close to this “enigmatical stranger” (101). Witnessing Tommo’s intense fascination, I offer that this elevated intensity results from his *identification* with Marnoo, since Tommo himself received taboo status shortly after arriving on Nukuheva. Marnoo’s status thus echoes his own position as protected and revered “demi-god” on the island (Heath 59), and may unconsciously signal a kindred temperament or mate. In this way, Marnoo becomes a compelling and approachable model for Tommo’s emerging personal and narrative self.

In fact, the very characteristics that make Marnoo an unlikely islander are the very traits that make him more like the civilized Tommo—an observation reinforced by the many parallels drawn between the two figures. Like the twenty-three-year old American who has been exploring the world from the bow of a whaler for two years, Marnoo is also a worldly traveler, an outsider belonging fully to no place or culture—and, not unlike Melville’s most famous wanderer, Ishmael—neither fully savage nor civilized, white nor black. However, unlike Tommo’s more innocent, undeveloped self, Marnoo’s “manner,”

Tommo concludes, “was that of a traveler conscious that he is approaching a comfortable stage in his journey” (98). He is, in other words, a mature, fully realized self; he is an embodiment of Tommo’s potentiality.

At the same time, Marnoo’s demeanor mystifies Tommo, for his travels have caused him to be knowledgeable in ways that Tommo “could not understand.” Unlike Fayaway, whose intelligence is instinctual and prelingual, and Kory-Kory, who pretends to have knowledge and experience that he does not possess, Marnoo’s comprehension of colonial politics, for instance—as when he “related circumstantially the aggressions of the French” to fellow natives little versed in colonial politics—can only be understood to result from his “travel-stained appearance” and knowledge of things beyond his ken (99). Luckily, it is this same mysteriously all-knowing aspect that allows Marnoo to straddle the boundary between the “savage” island and the broader “civilized” world, a talent important later when it enables him to assist in Tommo’s escape. Like Queequeg, who will pledge to “gladly die for” Ishmael “if need should be” (*Moby-Dick* Ch 10, 84), and whose coffin eventually ensures Ishmael’s escape from the wrecked *Pequod*, Marnoo’s role in freeing Tommo from his island captivity also represents a fluid inversion of the traditional captor-captive dyad. His intelligence and worldliness ultimately free Tommo, in contrast to Fayaway and Kory-Kory’s domestication, which confines, silences, or marks him.

Tommo enumerates other ways in which Marnoo, to whom he is profoundly attracted, is unlike Kory-Kory and other “savage” Marquesan warriors. Although he and Fayaway are more beautiful and intelligent than ordinary islanders, it is Marnoo alone

who is distinguished by being *articulate*. For, Tommo notes, “gifted with a higher degree of knowledge than the inmates of the valley” (100), this multi-lingual “prophet” speaks both Happar and Typee languages. And although he uses gesture to “compensate” for the “imperfections of their oral language,” Tommo explains, he is also capable of employing sophisticated “ironical terms” of speech. During one address to the Typees, for example, Marnoo “sneers” scornfully at the “wondrous intrepidity of the French, who, with five war-canoes and hundreds of men, had not dared to assail the naked warriors of their valley”—an ironic comment that Tommo himself might have levied. As a bonus, Marnoo is also funny, for his “hasty witticisms” to the tribe are “sure to be followed by peals of laughter”—a narrative quality surely important to Melville, as evidenced in much of his later work (100).

Based on its prominence in the text, Marnoo’s facility with language is critically important to Tommo. He continues to extol Marnoo’s powerfully attractive liminality and oratorical “powers,” as “versatile as they were extraordinary”—and his speech before the Typees leaves a lasting impression:

Never, certainly, had I beheld so powerful an exhibition of natural eloquence as Marnoo displayed during the course of his oration. The grace of the attitudes into which he threw his flexible figure, the striking gestures of his naked arms, and above all, the fire which shot from his brilliant eyes, imparted an effect to the continually changing accents of his voice, of which the most accomplished orator might have been proud.

(99)

The active and engaging language, “versatile,” “flexible figure,” “striking gestures,” “powerful grace,” “fire” of his eyes, and most of all “natural eloquence,” suggests a passionate and authentic originality that resembles the elasticity and ease of the nymphs. But unlike the nymphs and other highly feminized figures—and in sharp contrast to Kory-Kory’s platitudes and unquestioning adherence to timeworn rules—Marnoo’s figure is invested with the composite qualities of grace and strength, passion and intelligence. It is apparent that he exemplifies not only flexibility, but also eloquence and influence—something the other feminized figures do not. Not limited by one approach, perspective, or “truth,” Marnoo’s example, Tommo—and Melville—discover, is the original note he hopes to strike.

Unlike the nymphs, Fayaway, and Kory-Kory—but like Ishmael—Marnoo can also hold an audience, another unique narrative quality to admire. Tommo is amazed at how this passionate and “flexible figure” with the “inspired voice of a prophet” is capable of suspending his listeners in an erotic trance, for “the effect he produced” on the crowd, the reader learns, “was electric.” “One and all,” Tommo exults, “stood regarding him with sparkling eyes and trembling limbs,” while “smiles and blushes” covered the Typees’ faces (100). And while this “fire” in his voice may speak to both his passionate nature and his sensually heightening influence, it also speaks to Tommo’s desire to not only observe such “elasticity” in action, but to adopt it for his own—to seek a similarly powerful way to engage a Western audience.

Chief among his many appeals, however, is Marnoo’s most astounding ability to speak *English*. When, in his feminized persona, he finally approaches Tommo—who is,

after all, a foreigner longing to hear his native tongue spoken again—he seductively “murmured” in “musical accents” the English phrases “‘How you do?’ ‘How long you been in this bay?’ ‘You like this bay?’” (100) as though fully aware of the magnetic effect of his words. And as much as Tommo is seduced by the novelty and exceptionalism of this character—by his wide-ranging, composite “voice” and extraordinary grasp of audience and language—a “language,” Tommo reiterates, that also happens to be his “own language” (163), this meeting surely demonstrates that he is also personally seduced by the liminal figure.

Following much orchestration and subterfuge on the part of Marnoo, their first conversation is the most intimate exchange in all of *Typee*. After initially evading Tommo’s inquiry of “how he had acquired his knowledge of English,” Marnoo confesses his relationship with the captain of a trading ship. They engage honestly and deeply with one another, and Marnoo even reveals how he has used strategy and timing to impact their meeting—skills undoubtedly useful to a writer. Here is a brief excerpt of that first conversation:

When I asked the now affable Marnoo why it was that he had not previously spoken to me, he eagerly inquired what I had been led to think of him from his conduct in that respect. I replied, that I had supposed him to be some great chief or warrior, who had seen plenty of white men before, and did not think it worth while to notice a poor sailor. . . . he appeared vastly gratified, and gave me to understand that he had

purposely behaved in that manner, in order to increase my astonishment, as soon as he should see proper to address me.

Marnoo now sought to learn my version of the story as to how I came to be an inmate of the Typee valley. (101)

In this “meeting of equals,” Tommo reinforces the depth of their relationship and his acute susceptibility to the Marquesan’s charms, witnessed when he struggles to maintain personal sexual and gender boundaries in his presence. When he first sees Marnoo, for example, he is immediately “Struck by his demeanour” and—in a confession replete with sexual innuendo—“involuntarily rose as he entered the house.” Here, in a prefiguring of Ishmael’s manly and “stiff prejudices,” that in the face of his love for the native Queequeg “bend,” and become more “elastic” (*Moby-Dick* Ch 11, 87), it is as if Tommo himself suddenly becomes more elastic in Marnoo’s presence—the male-male attraction that was so repulsive to him with Kory-Kory is now permissible. Rigid sexual mores, stiff women’s clothing, harshly indelible tattooing, and the steely canes that all sought to deter his entrance into the feminine valley enter into a more fluid personal and narrative space, “bending” in the face of this captivation. He quickly yet fearfully embraces this transitional, ill-defined Marnoo, just as Ishmael, five years later, will fully embrace the wholly tattooed and unapologetic figure of Queequeg in Melville’s most hybrid narrative, *Moby-Dick*.

The Marquesan’s influence is so strong that Tommo’s gender and sexual roles get confused, and he becomes Marnoo’s suitor. After “rising” to greet him, he offers Marnoo a seat, “But,” pouts Tommo, now imagining himself a spurned suitor, “without deigning

to notice the civility” or “my existence, the stranger passed on, utterly regardless of me.” Immediately following, however, he compares himself to a female “belle” and Marnoo to a female “exquisite” (99). Such flexible gender reversals prevail in his interaction with Marnoo, and—while pointing to the mutable gender and sexual roles of both participants—also point to Tommo’s willingness to “try on” the personal and narrative flexibility that Marnoo exemplifies.

Inhabiting this new, inverted role is also scary for Tommo, whose gender anxiety is so incited that he nervously reflects—as a young woman might—that he is “very much inclined to believe” that Marnoo is “a sad deceiver among the simple maidens of the island” and not one to be trusted (100). In this choreographed mating ritual Tommo’s world is inverted: masculine is feminine and “primitive” has the upper hand over “civilized.” Marnoo’s control exceeds Tommo’s expectations, upends more of his innocent assumptions, and creates a sense of heightened unease in the narrative. Like the masterful yet questionably trustworthy Ishmael’s, Marnoo’s narration keeps Tommo not only “enchained,” but guessing (99).

From the outset, however, Tommo’s great attraction to Marnoo is mediated by the same “Calvinist conscience” that concludes his relationship with Fayaway. This rigid, moralistic doctrine would likely find ambiguous sexual practices blurring the distinctions between male and female, black and white, and homosexuality and heterosexuality, more threatening than traditional heterosexual practices. It is also likely, however, that despite internalizing the moral code of the Dutch Reformed Church of his youth, Melville landed on the islands fully expecting such encounters, or was at least acquainted with feminized

males, male-male friendships, and other non-Western sexual mores practiced by Marquesans—practices fairly well known to sailors of the period and described earlier. After all, he had referred to Nukuheva as “Buggerry Island” (sic), an allusion to sodomy (and among the only terms available to describe male homosexual activity then) in an earlier, unrevised edition of *Typee*.

In fact, insists Martin, Melville’s entire writing career provides evidence of a longstanding interest in the topic of homosexuality. He points out that Melville’s oeuvre consistently distinguished between “homosexual practices as might occur on a ship, frequently involving force and arising more out of necessity than out of affection,” and in relationships reflecting “a passionate love between men,” which, he believes, Melville “repeatedly described” as “an ideal and sought a place” for in his work (70). Whether or not Melville had homosexual desires, the presence of sexual practices on the island deemed aberrant and immoral in American culture provoke intense emotions in young Tommo, and his close proximity to the attractive and transitional character of Marnoo creates a highly charged and anxious personal landscape.

As a young man engaged in self-definition, Melville would be expected to construct protective sexual and gender boundaries around himself in order to assert his identity as a man, separate from the feminine. At the same time, it is conceivable—given the tension between compliance and rebellion in his personality—that he chafed at these artificially rigid boundaries in his personal life, much as Tommo strains at boundaries placed on him by Fayaway and Kory-Kory, the feminized figures he hoped would free him from such rigid self-definitions. By extension, I suggest that his emerging narrative

self chafes at similarly artificial and rigid constraints of limiting literary traditions, and that, as an emerging writer, he seeks a new, more elastic, narrative model. This view is supported by Nina Baym's claim that Melville created *Moby-Dick's* structure to give Ishmael's voice "the freest possible range" because he found genre requirements such "an impediment to his imagination" (918).

Tommo's existing voice, informed by the psychological tasks he grapples with at this time, is interesting yet immature. While it reflects preliminary stages in his individuation and narrative development, it may be seen as a precursor to later, developed narrative voices such as the strong "I" voice of Ishmael in *Moby-Dick*. And it is in the South Seas, in the complex figure of Marnoo, that Melville discovers the model for resolving these personal and narrative struggles that lead to his later, mature voice. In *Typee*, as a result of his complex psychological tasks, he embraces not only the liminal Marnoo, but also his liminal voice.

Despite religious strictures and the threat posed by bi-sexuality to rigid Western social, gender, and sexual identities, Tommo's quest for individuation demands that he follow his unexpectedly strong and persistent feelings for Marnoo. But this relatedness has its costs. As stated, the divergent feelings of "attraction and repulsion" (32) expressed in Tommo's relation to Marnoo closely resemble his reaction to Fayaway, his female love interest. As one critic notes, both relationships flirt with forbidden realms of sexuality and gender that create an emotional double bind of "delicious shudders" in *Typee* (Crain 33). Tommo's extreme feelings for Marnoo, however, are different from the "homosexual panic" experienced in Kory-Kory's presence, and betray a more complex male attraction.

Perhaps Marion Young's assertion that a subject such as Tommo will react "with fear, nervousness, and aversion" to representatives of the feminine m/Other (whether that figure is female or male) "because they represent a threat to identity itself," better explains this dynamic. "People from groups marked as different," she continues, "fulfill the function of what lies just on the other side of the borders of the self, too close for comfort and threatening to cross or dissolve the border" (qtd. in Wing 47). Although perplexed and unbalanced by Marnoo's proximity to his "borders of the self," rather than deny these feelings Tommo appears to incorporate them into his development. He allows himself to woo and be wooed, to write and be written. The high esteem he accords Marnoo's unusual capacity for "foreign languages," for example—in contrast to his dismissive view of Kory-Kory's simplistic, proverbial language—causes him to pronounce Marnoo's "great ascendancy" over all the other natives (101). As a result of their strong connection to one another, his ambivalent attraction is experienced less as a "homosexual panic" and threat to his self-definition than as a corollary model upon which to fill in the "gaps" of his own self-understanding. It is seen as an opportunity to invent new forms that are themselves multi-lingual, composite, and powerful.

Tommo's experience nonetheless betrays fear and anxiety. It even culminates in later, more negative portrayals of Marnoo, which are perhaps a projection of his revulsion toward the homoerotic attraction. Towards the end of their meeting, for instance, Tommo even "greatly feared" his vulnerability to this man "of no little consequence" and "uncommon talents," worrying that Marnoo "might exert his powerful influence to do me mischief" (100). Further, when he finally solicits Marnoo's help to leave the island, he is

suspicious that the “stranger” may be “deceiving me,” which revives “frightful apprehensions” regarding his own “fate” that had, for a time, “subsided” in his “breast” (101). This anxiety heightens when Marnoo assures him that the Typees will never allow him to leave the valley. In a final reversal and complete inversion of the captor-captive dyad, Marnoo is now the free-roaming explorer and Tommo is the unlucky, helpless captive—his fate, both personally and narratively, left in Marnoo’s hands.

It is only when Marnoo departs into “the obscurity of the grove,” not to be seen again until the end of Tommo’s stay, that the sailor allows himself to recall his original eroticized attraction and “gave [himself] up to the most desponding reflections” over his departure (103). Since the intensity of these feelings seems inconsistent with mere concern over his physical captivity—especially since his captivity is deemed an “agreeable one,” for a “sojourn among cannibals” (90)—they conceivably point to Tommo’s additional grief at losing, in Marnoo, a potential love-interest or mate. This despondency evidences the unusually heightened influence Marnoo exerts over him. Alternatively, as Delbanco suggests, these intense emotions touch on “one artist’s [unsuccessful] struggle to express a dimension of human experience for which his own culture lacked a language” (*Melville in the '80s* 243); or, as Martin suggests, they even indicate Melville’s real-life sense of loss over “the abandonment of a potential for deep affection” with his actual friend and travelling “partner” Toby, a picture of whom, Martin reminds us, he kept all his life (75).

This puzzling and inverted parting scene, however, in which the native becomes captor and the Westerner becomes his captive, may perhaps also be elucidated by another

of Marnoo's unique characteristics: he is the only male figure on Nukuheva exempt from the dreaded facial tattoo. This is significant because the facial tattoo so common to South Pacific warriors profoundly threatened a Westerner's sense of identity in the nineteenth century. In addition to obscuring individual characteristics, the facial inscription identified one as a primitive, sexualized being. Tommo abhors the facial "blemish" (16) and displays an extreme reaction to the "fear of being marked as Other by being tattooed" (Iverson 122). Because the facial tattoo is inexplicably absent from Marnoo's appearance, it may also reveal a clue to his personal and narrative influence, especially true because all major characters in *Typee* are tattooed differently: Fayaway, who is minimally tattooed on face and body, is heterosexual yet silent; Kory-Kory, who is abhorrently tattooed on both body and face, is a sexual freak and nonsensical; and Marnoo, who lacks a facial tattoo but has bodily tattoos, is a sexual hybrid yet the island's most influential character. In Melville's further evolution, moreover, Queequeg is tattooed all over his body and face, like Kory-Kory, yet can be mistaken for "a white man" tanned all over into "a purplish yellow one" (*Moby-Dick* Ch 3, 48), demonstrating the fluid concept of race that Melville developed over time.

As Leonard Cassuto explains in "*What an object he would have made of me!*" *Tattooing and the Racial Freak in Melville's Typee*," the facial tattoo was especially known to separate the normal from the freak and the human being from the thing in the 1800s, and thus was the ultimate inscription of the feminized, savage Other. More than any other nineteenth-century marker, facial markings represented the triumph of savage over civilized, captive over captor, feminine over masculine, and threatened—if one

crossed its boundary—to invert not only one’s Western identity, but one’s masculine, heterosexual status. Samuel Otter stresses the racial anxieties aroused by such Marquesan “face patterns” in claiming that they defied categorization by being “unpredictable,” thus creating an uneasy sense of racial “incoherence”:

While the markings on individual Marquesan faces are permanent, the location and arrangement of these marks do not persist from face to face. The ethnological guarantee that the individual recapitulates the race is invalidated. Marquesan faces offer the horrifying prospect of indelibility *and* insecurity. (44-45)

Marquesan facial tattooing was “disturbing,” in other words, because it thwarted Western colonial impulses to rank human beings along racial hierarchies: “The ethnologist,” Otter claims, “sought to trace lines on the body in order to read racial character and separate and rank human types.” But in *Typee*, he says, “in a case of measure for measure, the Polynesian tattooist turns to the American observer, seizes him, flourishes his instruments . . . and threatens to return the gesture” (45). As a result, regardless of what “ornamental or social functions” these lines served in Polynesian culture, for many Americans of the nineteenth century the facial tattoo only indicated “lines of denigration” (45).

It is thus fitting that Marnoo, who, unlike Kory-Kory, is attractive and serves as a model for Tommo, is inexplicably exempt from these facial markings. Again, part of his approachability stems from such composite feminized and Westernized features: his hair, light skin color, and non-threatening, non-facial tattoos. His portrait serves as a prelude to Ishmael’s ultimate acceptance of Queequeg’s “bald head” and all-over “dark, purplish,

yellow” tattoos—which Ishmael first speculates must mark the native as “some abominable savage,” before he concludes that “a man can be honest in any sort of skin” (*Moby-Dick* Ch 3, 47-49). Later, despite all his “unearthly tattooings,” Ishmael is able to overlook Queequeg’s physical appearance entirely, admiring instead the intrepid “spirit” of this man, who, in his estimation, would be able to “dare a thousand devils” (Ch 10, 82). By contrast, Marnoo’s tattoos are restricted to his body, which is, in fact, “drawn all over with fanciful figures”: his back artfully covered with a feminized and gracefully rendered tree. Like Fayaway’s blue eyes and unlike the “dull green colour” (71) of the elders’ horrid tattoos, these markings are “of the brightest blue,” and when contrasted with the “light olive-colour” (98) of Marnoo’s skin, produce a “unique and even elegant effect.” They are also thoughtfully “designed” by an “artist” who “must indeed have excelled at his profession” (98). This description is not only uncharacteristic of island endeavors overall (recall that their religious idols are crumbling, and Tommo concludes that their culture is in decline), but invokes its opposite, the “civilized” or Western artistic paradigm.

Indeed, Marnoo’s back is even covered with the feminized and “beautiful ‘artu’ tree,” its “graceful branches drooping with leaves all correctly drawn and elaborately finished.” It is, Tommo proclaims, “the best specimen of the Fine Arts” he encounters on the island (98). Moreover this preoccupation with elaborating on native body markings—stemming from an eighteenth-century penchant for “tattoo talk,” as Edwards characterizes it—becomes a vehicle for making increasingly sexualized references to Marnoo’s body. The lovely tattooed artu tree’s “slender, tapering and diamond checkered

shaft,” the reader then learns, is “traced along the course of the spine,” while from the “rear view” it suggests “a spreading vine tacked against a garden wall” (98). The sexualized language “shaft,” “spreading vine,” and “garden” cannot be missed, while the striking “tree of life” tattoo, as Martin calls it, identifies Marnoo as “a life force,” and perhaps one among few remaining Marquesan men to retain “the original phallic power . . . otherwise disappearing from the islanders” (74).

Supporting the sexually heightened metaphors in this description are changes in Tommo’s demeanor. He becomes especially vulnerable and feminized in Marnoo’s presence, disappointedly reflecting that he might not be worthy of reciprocal attentions. In defiance of Western cultural conventions and by virtue of Tommo’s strong, if unarticulated, sexual attraction, Marnoo wields skillful control over the young American. And part of this extreme attractiveness, I conclude, may also be extrapolated to his narrative self. Tommo has allowed Marnoo’s powerful language and being to inscribe him, inside, and will soon transmute this influence into the power to write.

According to Crain, tattooing became associated with male-male intimacy in Melville’s time because there was little vocabulary to describe homosexuality; “both were associated with the South Seas,” “both categories were ‘unspeakable,’” and, in Melville’s work, both were treated with “the complex of ‘panic’” (35). In this way, Marnoo’s tattoos embody and reinforce his unique transitional status: he is savage (tattooed) yet civilized (they are designed, attractive, non-facial); he is feminine (beautiful, musical voice, aligned with nature) yet masculine (warrior, spear, with powerful oratory); he is homosexual (Apollo suggests homoerotic tension), yet bisexual

(appeals to both genders). Due to this fluidity of character, he blurs the boundaries between conventional Western categories and distinctions.

Symbolically, of course, Marnoo's tattoos can be seen as metaphors for the ways in which he defies characterization. The designs are elaborate and complex; they defy cultural conventions, and yet they are integrated. In contrast to Melville's uneasy "moral rectitude" and Tommo's anxiety and "bashful timidity" (69), Marnoo is comfortable in his own skin. He gracefully and effectively breaks down Western dyads between civilized and savage, captor and captive, masculine and feminine, heterosexual and homosexual. By virtue of his tattoos his position as the ultimate hybrid figure in *Typee* is reiterated, and he pre-figures Queequeg's puzzling yet ultimately acceptable tattoos, whose designs even *he* can't understand.

Literally, Tommo loses his "self-possession" (100) when introduced to such fluidity. If native speech marks one as preliterate and simple, and facial tattooing marks one as a sexualized, savage Other, neither offers freedom. Both are restricting. As pleasurable as life is with the nymphs, Fayaway, and Kory-Kory, it is limited by its lassitude and ignorance. As Tommo sees it, "with these unsophisticated savages the history of a day is the history of a life" (107). The fluidly multilingual Marnoo, on the other hand, can speak "in a language [the Typees] could not understand" (102), and yet when he does speak their language, he finds his very verbal expressions "reflected, as from so many mirrors," in their "countenances" (99). It is therefore Marnoo's ability to *influence* through language, not his mere ability to speak English, that Tommo significantly and symbolically refers to when he claims they speak "the same language"

(165 op cit). And it may also be that they speak the same language of friendship. One can easily see how Tommo's attraction to such intelligence, passion, and lingual abilities might result in an influential, fluid, and articulate model of selfhood. And it is this conjunction of qualities, modeled by the liminal Marnoo, that I contend galvanizes Tommo's personal and sexual identity, and triggers the development of his narrative identity.

Lastly, it is possible to draw parallels between inscription of the body or face, as in tattooing, and inscription of the page, as in writing. In Daneen Wardrop's reading of *Typee*, in fact, she posits Melville's central conflict as the question of whether he should represent, in writing, the innocently unwritten Typee culture. Should he write or be written? When he discovers he can either allow the Typees to inscribe him through tattooing—including all that such an act implies for his identity claims—or can maintain the upper hand and “write” them, he reasserts his power on the written page by inscribing them. This colonialist tension is reinforced not only throughout the history of Western domination of nonwestern cultures, but also because “far more troubling to Melville than cannibalism or the state of his injured leg,” Otter believes, is “the prospect that Tommo will be incorporated into native systems in a more enduring sense: not through metabolism, but through *inscription*” (10, emphasis mine). Unwilling to be labeled inverted or gay, the complex sexual attraction and anxiety experienced by Tommo for Marnoo is witness to Tommo's “need to signify” that becomes “painfully impossible to deny” until he can “bear down on his stylus” and write (Wardrop 142). Wardrop

summarizes the struggle by concluding that Tommo's violent departure from the island and Melville's subsequent publication, *Typee*, is its own response.

Most relevant to this thesis is that Marnoo serves as "a potential model for Tommo," and for Herman Melville as writer, as the young narrator considers following his lead and existing "in a liminal capacity, between cultures" (Wardrop 150). Marnoo makes this available to Tommo not only personally, but professionally. To be successful, such development will require that Tommo adopt some of the islander's considerable talents, for where Marnoo is accomplished, Tommo often falls short. Whereas Marnoo's elasticity—as evidenced by his fluid, integrated tattoos—is "graceful, powerful, and articulate," Tommo's is only "vexed, transitory, and often anguished." Tommo's actual contributions to the island are also "ineffectual and unproductive," as Wardrop concludes, "probably by the standards of either culture" (151). It can be seen that Tommo, Melville's developing self, requires Marnoo's inventive, powerful, and fully fluid authorial voice for his own artistic development. For just as Marnoo helps provide for his escape from the island, he also offers a parallel freedom to Melville's narrative self. When Marnoo leaves *Typee* and returns to his village, Tommo's intense anxiety and sadness may point not only to a lost chance at sexual discovery and an uneasy recognition of his own ambiguous and underdeveloped sexual identity, but also to the shortcomings of his emerging narrative identity, gaps that must be filled in with lessons from the transitional Marnoo.

CONCLUSION

In *Typee*, Melville's narrator Tommo engages with the feminine island and its representatives, the nymphs, Fayaway, Kory-Kory, and Marnoo. The island becomes an "anxious paradise" as it records the progress of his relationship to the feminine and the response to this quest from a contrasting male world. It is apparent that he arrives in the Marquesas seeking something that cannot be articulated, and that the island offers a protected place of exploration. Yet it takes courage to enter into relationship with an unknown culture and people, and especially with Marnoo, for whom Tommo experiences the most intense and conflicting feelings. Despite trepidation and the threatening prospect of being judged inverted or homosexual, however, Tommo persists in discovering what he seeks in the presence of the transitional character.

I submit that while engaged in individuation and a resolution of personal sexual and gender issues, Tommo finds and internalizes "elasticity of mind" on the island. This "elasticity of mind" presents a more feminine approach to the world, and provides entry into a more subjective, immediate, and fluid perception than that experienced through the rigid, dualistic lens of his Western culture. It is a precursor to that narrative fluidity found later in *Moby-Dick*, Melville's literary masterpiece. Tommo discovers this elasticity in the presence of the enchanted landscape and its feminine figures, Fayaway and the nymphs. The narrative tension leading up to this important scene vanishes when this fluid state of sensuality, pleasure, and immediacy is encountered, although he cannot sustain living in a nonverbal world restricted to sensation alone and must continue his search. It

is not a woman, a man, or free sexual expression alone that he seeks, but the symbolically “feminine” aspects of himself that he can integrate into a fuller expression of experience.

Melville, in the person of Tommo, is a nascent writer who also seeks a narrative identity for his emerging authorial self. Ultimately, he wants not only a creative voice, but a voice large enough to tell the “Truth.” Given his quick succession of books on the South Seas—the first five written in five years and culminating in the compelling “I” voice of narrator Ishmael in *Moby-Dick*—it is possible to parallel the resolution of his psychological struggles to the development of his narrative voice, and to identify his model for resolving them in Marnoo. Whereas Fayaway and Kory-Kory represent extreme representations of the cultural and gender spectrum—she the ultra-feminine and he the perversely feminine—both are limited by being either non-literate, or non-intelligible and untrustworthy. Marnoo, conversely, is the composite male-female figure that embodies powerful, feminized masculinity and the best of both cultures. And it is these liminal qualities that Herman Melville incorporates into his narrative style, and especially into Ishmael’s complex figure.

On the island, it is not only a question of “who will write whom,” as Tommo fears. The outcome of this struggle is fairly self-evident, given a historical record that prejudices literate Western culture over native, pre-literate culture. And it is apparent that Herman Melville “writes” the island in books based on his travels in the South Seas, including *Typee* and *Moby-Dick*. What is more interesting, perhaps, is *how* Melville chooses to write the island, and what of his personal Pacific experience gets incorporated into this mature voice.

Although the great novel *Moby-Dick* looms large over many parts of *Typee*, his first attempt at writing is perhaps Melville's most psychologically transparent. As a young man, he seeks not only to resolve the relationship to his mother, or the feminine, in order to become a man, but he also seeks to resolve his conflicted relationship with the father, or the masculine authority figure whose early death left his family without means. He arrives on the island confronting these psychological tasks while still young enough to lack a clear sense of self, and this gap provides the impetus and the freedom to define himself while there. As a result, his contact with the island plays a significant role in establishing a more feminine, fluid, and composite self, going forward—despite the obstacles, fears, and anxieties he must overcome.

The figures on the island, and especially the feminized male figures of Kory-Kory and Marnoo, allow him to resolve these issues by providing models for how to distinguish himself from the m/Other and become a man, while retaining powerful and fluidly feminized qualities. While the women represent a new, “elastic,” and erotically centered perspective, they are restricted by their ultra-sensuality and lack of verbal or written abilities. Perhaps due to his uneasiness with the sexuality they represent, their characterization rather reinforces his youthful, Western, gender binaries. Kory-Kory, the extremely feminized homosexual male, can act as a bridge to a new form of masculinity but is also verbally limited and burdened by his freakish position at the extreme reach of the gender spectrum. Hence, neither of these representatives can fulfill Tommo's needs. He must reject both—leaving them literally and figuratively “weeping violently” on the beach (168).

Marnoo, on the other hand, is a composite male-female figure able to fulfill both functions: he is a capable warrior, yet he is androgynous, bisexual, multi-lingual, articulate, and a cross-cultural traveler. Racially ambiguous, as is Ishmael, he is yet able to powerfully and fluidly incorporate both masculine and feminine, savage and civilized. Apollonian, attractive, intelligent, funny, and sophisticated, he can therefore be a legitimate model for a marriage of male to female, east to west, savage to civilized. In his figure accepted differences are resolved and rigid Western dyads are unified. He becomes not only a model for a new sort of masculinity—the feminized kind—but for a new sort of elastic narrative voice that emerges in the figure of Ishmael. In addition to providing a model for resolving Tommo’s struggles, Marnoo also provides a bridge beyond his psychological tasks into the world of adult work. This is why, when Tommo finally answers the question “How to be a man *and* be feminized?” his response becomes “be like Marnoo,” or maybe even, “become Ishmael.”

Marnoo’s influence on Melville is both personal and creative, for his emerging narrative voice is modeled on Marnoo. In contrast to the formulaic and constrained genre of travel writing, Melville even manages to infuse *Typee* with philosophical speculation, narrative digressions, sudden tonal shifts, personal observations, religious and political criticisms, and sexual and cultural complaints not usually permissible in the genre. His own narrative begins to take on the elasticity and fluidity of the liminal Marnoo, becoming neither fully travel narrative, novel, romance, or memoir, but a transitional and composite literary form—and precursor to other of Herman Melville’s literary inventions.

Melville, in the person of Tommo, openly admires Marnoo, and imbues more developed later narrators, most especially Ishmael, with much of his fluidity.

Marnoo's intelligence, passion, flexibility, and eloquence are apparent in Ishmael, as is his racial and social ambiguity. He controls his narrative and his audience in much the same way that Marnoo does his (Tommo sees this first-hand when he is Marnoo's subject). Marnoo is knowledgeable beyond reasonable expectation, as is Ishmael and his impossibly broad-reaching and encyclopedic grasp of whaling. And although Tommo cannot allow himself to engage sexually with the figure of Marnoo on Nukuheva, he can allow Ishmael to bed with Queequeg, tattooed from head to toe and openly worshipping his Congolese idol, on Nantucket—in the famous and comedic wedding scene in Chapter 11 of *Moby-Dick*. Tommo's attraction to Marnoo serves as a catalyst to incorporate his liminal voice into the narrative.

I maintain that this makes it possible to see Marnoo as precursor to Ishmael, and that Marnoo's influence cannot fully be seen or understood without examining the figures of the nymphs, Fayaway, and Kory-Kory that mark this development—or perhaps, as would befit such an influential and fluid model, to even see Marnoo in a composite civilized-savage/Ishmael-Queequeg figure. The fact that Marnoo's model of controlled fluidity infuses *Moby-Dick* to such an extent is testament to his power over its author. It is also possible that the challenge of adopting such narrative fluidity—lack of focus or clear point-of-view—is also witnessed in much of Melville's later writing. But in *Moby-Dick*, Melville is able to employ this device not only to write the island and rewrite the

travel genre, but to engage in a fuller quest for the art of “Truth-telling,” discovering a new narrative style in the process.

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