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Melville's *Typee*: Toward the Poetics of Hybridity

Based on the author's four-week stay in the Polynesian island of Nukuhiva between July and August 1842, *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life*, Herman Melville's first book, enjoyed wide popularity immediately after its publication in 1846, and even when the author died, in 1891, this first literary effort was mentioned in obituaries as one of the major achievements in his whole career—and indeed, once the author acquired canonical status after WWI, the book was still praised as "an account of escape from the conventions and the economic ideals of the time" (Howard 300). However, with the rise of New Criticism, *Typee* started to be dismissed as an immature apprentice novel and consequently became neglected.[1] The critical interest in the book eventually revived in the 1980s, thanks mainly to the rise of postcolonial studies. Being a record of the contact between an American traveler and aboriginals of the South Pacific, *Typee* appealed to scholars interested in exploring the dynamics of the cultural confrontation between the West and the so-called primitive populations.

From then on, *Typee* has continued to fascinate scholars, intrigued by Melville's surprisingly modern take on representational strategies, ironic relationship with the reader, and ability to anticipate postcolonial critique of Western ethnographic authority. In this essay, I would like to focus on one important aspect of Melville's modernity in *Typee*: the connection of the prominent hybrid figures in the economy of the tale to the peculiarly circuitous and at times troubled writing and publication history, which resulted in the appearance of several versions of *Typee* differing in title, length, vocabulary and content.[2]

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1 See again the comment in Howard, "But with the development of a newer criticism, more concerned with the suggestiveness than with the substance of literature, *Typee* received less attention" (Howard 300). As an illustration, Howard quotes comments by Warner Berthoff, according to whom *Typee* showed "an imaginative power in reserve" (Howard 301).

2 The first edition, with the title *Narrative of a Four Months' Residence Among the Natives of a Valley in the Marquesas Islands; or, A Peep at Polynesian Life*, was published by John Murray, in England, on 27th February 1846. In the United States, the text came out

It is the formalist school that has mostly insisted on the contiguities between the content and the structural organization of a literary work. Viktor Shklovsky, in *Theory of Prose*, stated that "the content (hence 'the soul') of a literary work is the sum total of its stylistic devices" (qtd. in Fokkema and Bosch 17). Drawing on this formalist assumption, I will argue that the key role played by hybrid characters as well as the peculiar use of narrative techniques which undermine the traditional basis of travel writing—the genre Melville wanted his book to belong in—conflate to make "the soul" of *Typee* significantly hybrid, and this quality in turn yields new ways of representing the encounter between Europeans and primitive populations.

However, far from being the result of a conscious plan, the book both in the content represented and its production, can be seen as an accidental outcome of a voyage, a voyage of exploration in the territories of literary modernity. Much like Columbus accidentally landing on the American continent, both Melville and Tommo stumble into a "new province" of hybridity. Whereas Tommo, the narrator and protagonist of *Typee*, realizes the ineffectiveness of European-made strategies for the appropriation and control of the exotic space of Nukuhiva, Melville comes to understand the fundamental hybridity of literary composition, and the possibilities inherent in expanding the boundaries of traditional genres, in this case the travel narrative. Both Tommo and Melville embark on trips that end in the same manner, that is with the recognition that hybrid forms prove to be more suitable than traditional ones in channeling the complexities of the encounter of cultures. It is no accident that, in the famous letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne in June 1851, Melville stated that until his twenty-fifth year[3]—approximately the time when he started writing *Typee*—he had no "development" at all. It is the approach to literature—and the firsthand experience of the many issues involved

as *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life During a Four Months' Residence in a Valley of the Marquesas* in March 1846, published by John Wiley, and included some alterations to the original text. In July, the second American edition came out, expurgated of about 30 pages of sexual, political and religious content, but with the addition of "The Story of Toby." In September Murray reissued the first edition with "The Story of Toby" and the title *Typee; or, A Narrative of a Four Month's Reisdence Among the Natives of a Valley of the Marquesas Islands; or, A Peep at Polynesian Life*. Through the years, several pirated versions were also available. See Howard, "Historical Note."

3 "My development has been all within a few years past. I am like one of those seeds taken out of the Egyptian Pyramids, which, after being three thousand years a seed and nothing but a seed, being planted in English soil, it developed itself, grew to greenness, and then fell to mould. So I. Until I was twenty-five, I had no development at all. From my twenty-fifth year I date my life" (*Correspondence* 193).

in telling a simple tale of adventure and getting it published—that kickstarted the cultural growth of Melville.

Melville and the Travel Form

A crucial turning point in the history of *Typee* scholarship was the publication in 1984 of Janet Giltrow's "Speaking Out: Travel and Structure in Herman Melville's Early Narratives," which questioned the then prevalent tendency to approach the book as work of fiction and advocated the recovery of Melville's own original view of *Typee* as narrative of facts.[4] According to Giltrow, "disconcerted by *Typee*'s repeated and irreverent trespass of the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction, critics have tried to establish order by isolating its most conspicuously fictive aspects and then treating the whole book as a covert novel, or near-novel" (18). In other words, commentators had mostly ignored the genre which had originally provided Melville with a solid blueprint for organizing his own adventure: travel narrative. This oversight, very much in keeping with New Criticism's exclusion of the so-called "minor" or "popular" narrative forms from the literary discourse, resulted in excluding the wealth of possible meanings inherent in the book's relationship with travel writing. The perspective inaugurated by Giltrow not only made it clear how some of the features of the book that had puzzled, if not frustrated, the commentators—such as digressions, minute descriptions, and an unconvincing finale—were constitutive elements of the travel genre, but also, by identifying the model to which *Typee* referred, suggested that the parameters against which Melville's literary skills, or lack thereof, had been measured, had to be radically changed. In *Typee*, what matters is less a comparison with Melville's later fiction—a confrontation quite unflattering for the author of *Typee*—than a comparison with the available models of travel narrative. This way, it is possible to see Melville's problematic position within the tradition of travel literature and his precocious intellectual maturity.

4 Of course, *Typee* can only partly be accepted as a narrative of facts and is not immune to the "taint of fiction" that puzzled the publishers John Murray and John Wiley as well as some of the contemporary reviewers. However, Leon Howard reports how one Frederick Saunders, "a reader for the house of Harper," recalled a council at the publishing house which rejected it on the grounds that "it was impossible that it could be true and therefore was without real value" (278). Melville, then, was well aware that his manuscript had to be offered as a narrative of facts in order to be sold, and, consequently, he was not telling the whole truth when he assured his publishers about the absolute veracity of everything narrated in his work.

Travel narrative has played an important role in the cultural history of Europe and the West, being one of those cultural practices that, by providing a narrative counterpart to the voyages of exploration, contributed to the creation of a European and Western identity vs. the rest of the world. As Edward Said has pointed out, travel writing did not just represent crucial episodes of the colonial enterprise but participated in colonialism, in the Western "scramble" for non-European territories. According to Said, "the power… to represent what is beyond metropolitan borders derives from the power of an imperial society, and that power takes the discursive form of a reshaping and reordering of 'raw' or primitive data into the local conventions of European narrative and formal utterance" (*Culture* 119).

White people writing up their own travel experiences, in a manner reminiscent of a chartered mining company in Latin America or Africa, appropriate the "immaterial goods" necessary to create a narrative work. Moreover, they assemble these "goods" to fit the consumption patterns of Europeans, "the local conventions" of the specific market. Therefore, when traveling inividuals turn into travel narrators, they undergo a transformation whereby these conventions are internalized and provide the filter through which the adventure is told: they become a representative individuals, a sort of ambassadors of European civilization whose deeds and views are supposed to demonstrate its ascendancy in the world scene. The narrative thus conceived represents the experience of travel in a way suitable for a narrative that highlights European (and Western) prominence in the World.

Thus, in Melville's time, travel writing relied on a politics of representation whereby the white explorer was granted the privilege of producing the text and consequently the knowledge about the foreign populations encountered during the voyages of exploration. The latter were approached as passive objects of investigation, primitive "others" with no right to take part in the production of knowledge about themselves. As summarized by Edward Said: "the authority of the observer, and of European geographical centrality, is buttressed by a cultural discourse relegating and confining the non-European to a secondary racial, cultural, ontological status. Yet this secondariness is, paradoxically, essential to the primariness of the European" (*Culture* 70). Moreover, the white traveler, according to Marie Louis Pratt, is a "seeing-man", whose "eyes passively look out and possess" (7) the landscape and the people encountered in the course of the voyage. This role is carried out through "classifying, assigning value, interpreting, exotizing, and normalizing those cultures with which he comes into contact" (Ivison 116). Thus, the textual appropriation by white authors reflects the relation of power in the colonial encounter. This ideological baggage came with a toolbox of narrative strategies, discourses, patterns that reinforced the

fundamental inequality between White and the Other, and ultimately proved the inferiority of non-Europeans.

In *Typee*, this toolbox is subverted. A paradigmatic episode—a sort of declaration of intent—appears in the first pages of the book, where the reader finds a comic episode that introduces the theme of native resistance to Western representation and strategies of cultural appropriation. The episode describes an official ceremony organized by the French, the occupants of Nukuhiva at the time of Melville's visit, to celebrate the arrival of an American merchant ship. Two figures, surrounded by French soldiers, stand out at the center of the reception committee: the French-appointed King of Nukuhiva and his wife. The regal couple are dressed in the Western fashion to make an impression on the Americans, to show them the beneficial and civilizing effect of the French occupation. As Goudie has aptly summarized, the royals "suggest native capitulation to not only European fashion but also to the ideology that lies behind it" (225). Symbolically, the idea of dressing natives in European garments hints at the Western desire to "clothe the world in imperial fabric" (Goudie 225). The result, however, is not as dignified and solemn as expected:

> Their appearance was certainly calculated to produce an effect. His majesty was arrayed in a magnificent military uniform, stiff with gold lace and embroidery, while his shaven crown was concealed by a huge chapeau bras, waving with ostrich plumes. There was one slight blemish, however, in his appearance. A broad patch of tattooing stretched completely across his face, in a line with his eyes, making him look as if he wore a huge pair of goggles; and royalty in goggles suggested some ludicrous ideas. (*Typee* 16)

The use of Western clothes cannot hide some of the very visible marks of local culture, such as the tattoo on King Mowanna's face. But it is the Queen, with her transgressive behavior, who challenges Western expectations. She first approaches an old sailor, attracted by the "inscriptions in India ink" that cover his arms and chest, then takes his clothes off and "gaze[s] with admiration at the bright blue and vermillion pricking, thus disclosed to view". Finally, "the royal lady, eager to display the hieroglyphics on her own sweet form, ben[ds] forward for a moment, and turning sharply around, thr[ows] up the skirts of her mantle" (16).

The exposition of her nudity is a double act of defiance: on the one hand, it is directed against the Western sense of prudery, while on the other, it is a metaphor for the liberation from the status of colonized subject.[5] This episode is also important because it anticipates the pattern of conflict between Western representations and native reactions that will be central to the development of

5 Not surprisingly, the episode was omitted from the Second American edition.

the narrative, a strategy employed by the author to question attempts at imposing static roles and attitudes on the indigenous inhabitants of the island.

Throughout the book, the narrator Tommo repeatedly admits the irrelevance of the knowledge conveyed by the previous travel accounts of Nukuhiva—William Ellis's *Polynesian Researches* (1829), David Porter's *Journal of a Cruise Made to the Pacific Ocean* (1822), or Reverend Charles Stewart's *A Visit to the South Seas* (1831)—as well as of his own attempts to rationally explain the behavior of the natives, in particular to understand the circumstances in which cannibalism is practiced. Moreover, Tommo discovers that his affiliation with a "superior" civilization does not automatically translate into a privileged position in the colonial environment. His whiteness, in fact, relegates him to the margins, and his fate depends on the goodwill of the Typees. In the following sections I will demonstrate two specific techniques of subversion used by Melville: the presentation of Tommo not as an exploring subject, but as an object investigated by the natives, and the presentation of the natives that defies accepted notions of savagery.

From a Subject of Knowledge to an Object of Investigation

After having jumped ship and escaped into the interior of Nukuhiva, Tommo and his companion Toby roam through the wilderness and finally meet a group of natives. A ritual exchange of names follows, which then turns into a paradigmatic episode highlighting Melville's own reworking of the conventions of travel writing and of its ideological apparatus:

> [I] hesitated for an instant, thinking that it might be difficult for him to pronounce my real name, and then with the most praiseworthy intentions intimated that I was known as 'Tom.' But I could not have made a worse selection, the chief could not master it: 'Tommo,' 'Tomma,' 'Tommee,' everything but plain 'Tom.' As he persisted in garnishing the word with an addictional syllable, I compromised the matter with him at the word 'Tommo.' (92)

The narrator's "praiseworthy intentions," betraying a feeling of superiority on his part, define the natives as humans unable to reproduce complex phonetic combinations. That is why he identifies himself through a monosyllabic name. The savages, however, do not receive this name as he gives it and add a second syllable. This is a paradigmatic moment: traditionally, the privilege of naming was granted to the white colonizer. For instance, the US captain David Porter, in the act of annexing the Marquesas archipelago renamed a group of islands after George Washington and called Nukuhiva's main harbor Massachusetts Bay.

In Melville's book, conversely, the name-giving privilege belongs to the Typees, and the episode anticipates how the natives would also perceive Tommo through their own cultural lenses. Melville shows how Tommo differs from the hero of travel narrative as he becomes an object of inquiry and appropriation by the Typees, eliciting from them a true ethnographic curiosity.

As David Spurr notes, "in classic colonial discourse, the body of the primitive becomes as much the object of examination, commentary, and valorization as the landscape" (23). And, in fact, Tommo does his best to carry out his duties. Especially after the disappearance of Toby—who had left the Typee valley escorted by some natives in order to procure medical help for Tommo at the French encampment and did not return—the book takes on a decidedly descriptive tone, with chapters informing the reader about the physical features, social organization, daily routine and language of the natives, as well as particular celebrations such as the Feast of Calabashes. The narrator documents Typee culture for the satisfaction of his readers in Europe and America. In so doing, however, he establishes a relationship between Western and Marquesan cultures which is far from equal: the latter, in fact, gains legitimacy as culture worth documenting only because the former legitimizes it as such.

In spite of his ethnographic inclination, however, Tommo refrains from theorizing about some of the cultural practices he witnesses. When trying to make sense of the taboo, he admits: "I saw everything but could comprehend nothing" (212), a comment that pertains to a number of other situations in the book. For instance, when he describes a Typee priest, who listens to a wooden idol and claims that he hears messages from the pagan god, Tommo is far from concluding that this is a show of humbuggery for the benefit of the tribe: "I shall not presume to decide," he comments (210).

In *Typee* the body of the white man becomes an object of scrutiny and, eventually, of appropriation. Tommo is held captive and, through the taboo, his mobility is limited to specific parts of the valley, where the natives can easily control him and make sure he would not run away. As Alex Calder notes, the repeated utterance of the word "taboo" constructs around Tommo an invisible barrier of prohibitions restricting his mobility. As the narrator makes wow to "never again perpetrate a similar piece of ill-manners… forbidden… by the mandates of the taboo" (*Typee* 262), he adapts to a situation wherein "his sense of location in space is defined rather more by their [the Typees] perception of him than by his perception of them" (Calder 34). The taboo limits Tommo's mobility, which is at odds with the freedom of movement that travel writing customarily allows the white explorer. In particular, taboo highlights the places where Tommo is not allowed to go, among them the beach: "my instinctive impulse was to hurry down to the beach.… As soon as Mehevi noticed… the

impatience I betrayed to reach the sea, his countenance assumed that inflexible rigidity of expression which had so awed me on the afternoon of our arrival" (145). This restriction is symptomatic of Melville's reversal of the patterns of traditional travel writing. As Franco Moretti has shown, the coast is the focal location where Western travelers developed their colonial mobility.[6] Thus, placed in the interior of the island, Tommo is once again less a subject who creates his own exotic adventure than an object of curiosity in other people's adventure.

There is a possibility that the subjugation of the white invader will become a definitive appropriation when the tattoo artist Karky, excited by the whiteness of Tommo's skin, expresses his intention to draw a tattoo on it. Karky does not accept the offer of an arm, the most Tommo would allow the artist to decorate, but wants to draw on the prisoner's face: "When his fore-finger swept across my features, in laying out the borders of those parallel bands which were to encircle my countenance, the flesh farily crawled upon my bones" (258). With his fingers, the artist draws the imaginary lines of an indigenous design that "etch[es] lines of deviation on a face that had been imagined as composed of standard lines" (Otter 19), changing irreversibly the modality by which the white man's face would be perceived by his own countrymen, who would no longer recognize him as a legitimate member of their society. A face tattoo would complicate immensely Tommo's return home, making him look like a freak, relegating him to the margin of social life, and denying him the status representative Western individual entitled to write a travel account.[7]

"What an object he would have made of me!" (260), explains Tommo, though he is already aware that he is a curiosity in the eyes of the natives. And he plays such a part, confessing that he "anticipate[s] from every new comer the same extravagant expressions of curiosity and regard" (165). That is why Tommo reacts with "great indignation" when a stranger, who seemingly enjoys a high esteem among the natives, and who will later be indentified as Marnoo, gives him an "unexpected slight" (165) and barely notices him. The narrator thus experiences the same fate that the colonial practice has imposed on the "other"—being made into an object of investigation, performed in accordance with the "local language" of the natives.

6 According to Franco Moretti, the colonial narrative is essentially linear, connecting the interior towards the sea. In *Typee*, instead, it is the natives who restrict Tommo's mobility and forbid him access to the beach. See *Atlas of the European Novel* 58–64.

7 See Evelev.

Resistance to the Western Vision

The reversal discussed above—with Tommo's transformation from subject who "creates" knowledge into an object who is examined—testifies to a more general mechanism at work in *Typee* whereby what is expected from the main character, as an exemplary white man, is challenged. In the like manner, the repertoire of images, representations, vocabulary and knowledge that the West had produced in centuries of relationship with otherness is examined and questioned. In this section our attention will be focused on the topic of cannibalism, as illustrative of the white man's effort to understand an alien culture and fit it into its own categories of thought.

As several commentators have noticed, Tommo's exploration of Nukuhiva, quite significantly, starts before he even sets foot on the island. In fact, after a long time at sea, the announcement that the ship *Dolly* would head towards the Marquesas island for supplies, strikes the fancy of the narrator, who is immediately overwhelmed with images associated to the location:

> 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. (13)

This list is a "collection of dreams, images, and vocabularies available" (Said, *Orientalism* 73), the body of knowledge produced by whites about the Polynesian populations, the knowledge that exists only in textual form, built and channeled through a series of travelogues. What is important to stress here, however, is that the catalogue lays out an imaginary landscape that the narrator/protagonist is supposed to rely on to find his way into the complexities of the unknown environment.

Typee will only partially make good on its promise to provide exotic excitement for the reading public. Although Melville describes the beauty of the landscape and of the aboriginal women, he will prove to be disappointingly frugal with the last item in the list quoted above: "heathenish rites and human sacrifices." In fact, Melville's book does not provide any conclusive evidence of cannibalism. As Sanborn points out, *Typee* is "Melville's attempt to expose the ambivalence at the heart of the *discourse* of colonialism, as embodied in the discourse on cannibalism" (77; original italics). The natives' reluctance to perform cannibal rites in front of Tommo functions as a paradigm for their refusal to be encapsulated within the simplistic categories of the Western catalogue of exoticisms.

The emphasis on the last item on the list is not accidental, as cannibalism plays a crucial role in the construction of civilized whiteness as opposed to primitive/savage otherness, being the one cultural practice that could unquestionably be defined by Western thinkers as the decisive proof of the difference, and superiority, of the Euro-American civilization. Cannibalism is the ultimate sign of savage primitivism, the one factor that allows the white traveler to perceive himself as both different from and superior to the aborigine. For this reason, the search for evidence of cannibal practices becomes central in the last part of the book and, when no substantial proof is found, the protagonist—in order to resist assimilation to the Typees—will decide to fabricate the evidence.

As soon as Tommo and Toby desert from the whaler *Dolly* and escape into the forests of Nukuhiva, the reader learns about the existence of two tribes, the Happars and the Typees, and while the former enjoy "a reputation of gentleness and humanity" (67), the latter are known as "cruel savages" (68). Thus, when the two sailors finally fall in the hands of the Typees, the narrator asks himself: "What might not be our fearful destiny?" (96). Chapter 12 seems to provide an answer and fulfill the promise of exotic excitement. When Toby sees a fire in a distance, he thinks it is "the fire to cook us, to be sure; what else would that cannibals be kicking up such a row about if it were not for that?" (118). A sense of suspense is created when some natives approach the two Americans, but it disappears when it turns out that the islanders want to offer them food.

This is a key episode because, as Sanborn puts it, "the anticipations that Tommo has steadily heightened over the course of the narrative suddenly look comically excessive; inflated out of all proportion to the actual situation" (83). Tommo is now convinced that "the horrible character imputed to these Typees appeared to me wholly underserved" (121). Therefore, if the Typees are not cannibals, they must sure be "a human, gentlemanly, amiable set of epicures" (121). This reversal of perspective is no surprise, because the Western catalogue of stereotypes about the primitive "other" makes another representation available to Tommo—the myth of the Noble Savage that sees primitive people as creatures living in harmony with nature and following the natural laws of humanity, uncorrupted by the evils of civilization, such as money and work. And the Typees seem to fit in such a portrait: "the jealousies, the social rivalries, the family dissensions, and the thousand self-inflicted discomforts of refined life, which make up in units the swelling aggregate of human misery, are unknown among these unsophisticated people" (152). This edenic image, however, proves to be yet another ideological attempt to impose an identity on the natives and does not succeed in producing real knowledge about the Typees. The tribe refuse to be encapsulated in the category of simple and childlike creatures, and the second part of the book includes several episodes that illustrate this. There are various situations when the narrator

experiences, witnesses or learns about the aggressiveness of these "unsophisticated people," thus realizing the falseness of the myth of the Noble Savage. As it has already been shown in more detail in the previous section, by means of taboo and tattoo the Typees both limit Tommo's mobility and attempt to assimilate him. Also, Tommo learns in Chapter 17 of a violent fight between the Typee and the Happars (155–158). These and other episodes deprive Tommo of any certainty about the Noble Savage representation being a useful tool to correctly understand the natives and their behavior.

The evidence of cannibalism, however, would settle the issue for good. However, the savages did not seem willing to reveal it. In the end, just before the end of his sojourn among the Typees, Tommo accidentally bumps into what he has been looking for so desperately:

> I observed a curiously carved vessel of wood, of considerable size, with a cover placed over it… prompted by a curiosity I could not repress, in passing it I raised one end of the cover; at the same moment the chiefs, perceiving my design, loudly ejaculated, 'Taboo! taboo!' [sic!] But the slight glimpse sufficed; my eyes fell upon the disordered members of a human skeleton, the bones still fresh with moisture, and with particles of flesh clinging to them here and there! (280)

The bones are taken as the proof that Typees do practice cannibalism. But there is no absolute certainty that these bones, even if human, are the leftovers from a cannibal feast. As Alex Calder aptly comments, "it would have been easy to allow Tommo a more unmistakable discovery… but Melville has taken care to write in a manner that neither confirms nor denies Tommo's circumstantial inference" (36). On the one hand, such a development of the plot can be just a clumsy attempt to make up for the lack of exotic adventure. On the other, the discovery functions as a shock that, by identifying the hosts as cannibals, makes it clear that Tommo will not prefer the simple natural life of the Typees and will not assimilate, a condition that enables his return home.

This sequence is a crucial component of the whole book, as it hints at the workings of colonial travel writing. In fact, it implies that travel writers often make mistaken observations and reach false conclusions. There is "a vast deal of unintentional humbuggery in some accounts we have from scientific men" (*Typee* 203), as a result of using unreliable sources or insufficient acquaintance with the natives.[8] Melville narrates the episode in a way that shows the bones as a signifier

8 For instance, in *Typee* one of these scientific man is blamed because "according to his own statement, was only at one of the islands and remained but two weeks, sleeping every night on board his ship, and taking little kid-glove excursions ashore in the daytime, attended by an armed party" (203), a situation that does not grant the observer the closeness necessary to understand Marquesan cultures.

of the failure of the Western ideological schemes, at the same time suggesting a history that exists beyond myths, prejudices and stereotypes. *Typee* does not reveal the mystery that lies in "the souls" of primitive people and, instead, gives expression to the conflicting representations of the "other." By frustrating the readers' expectations, Melville uncovers the artificial construction of truths held as self-evident and undermines the ideological apparatus of Western travel narrative.

Hybrid Characters

So far, the present analysis has dealt with the ways in which *Typee* reverses or defies some of the constitutive devices of the travel narrative, especially those that granted the white subject a privileged position within the text, both as an ethnographic observer and a depositary of knowledge. As has been demonstrated, Tommo gives up both these roles. Melville's book, however, is remarkable not only for the way it criticizes the traditional narrative form, but also because it hints at new strategies for representing the colonial encounter by suggesting possible ways of transcending the binary logic of the travel narrative. In fact, whereas the white subject fails as the agent who accumulates knowledge, Melville postulates a new type of subjectivity, the hybrid subject who, as Tommo's Marquesan adventure proves, seems to be better equipped to negotiate his place in the environment.

There are two such characters portrayed in the book. The more prominent one is Marnoo, a Nukuhivan native who had been employed for three years by an Australian sea captain and can speak rudimentary English. After he came back to the island, Marnoo gained great esteem among the islanders and was named a "taboo," after which he could move freely all over Nukuhiva without incurring in any danger. The "civilized" Polynesian's counterpart is a white man gone native: the beachcomber Jimmy, who makes his appearance in the Sequel, which chronicles what happened to Toby after his separation from Tommo. Jimmy was an old sailor who could speak the Polynesian language and thus acted as mediator between the French occupants and the island tribes. He, too, was considered a taboo, and therefore had the right to move between the different areas of Nukuhiva without danger to his own life. What is more, he was the French-appointed king Mowanna's favorite, "and had a good deal to say in his master's council" (*Typee* 307).

Although the book gives more space to other characters, Marnoo and Jimmy play crucial roles in the dénouement of the tale: the liberation of Tommo and Toby. Marnoo, as Tommo acknowledges, told Kannaka, a native employed on a British vessel, about Tommo's captivity. Kannaka then led an expedition to the Typee bay and rescued Tommo. However, more complex and therefore "hybrid"

is the strategy employed by Jimmy to free Toby. Jimmy deceives both the American sailor and his Typee escort; he persuades Toby to come with him to the main harbor, promising they would come back to fetch Tommo, and assures the natives that they would return quickly. Jimmy's real plan, however, is to sell Toby to a whale-ship captain who needs crewmen. His fluency in both English and Marquesan as well as knowledge of taboos and superstitions make Jimmy the only one who can interact with both parties, and thus allow him to arrange events in a way that suits his purpose.

Jimmy and Marnoo illustrate how *Typee* ascribes power to those figures whose histories and identities do not fit into the polarity of the Western vs. the native opposition, but are found somewhere in between. It is appropriate to mention at this point the formalist distinction between the start of a story, in which two opposing principles collide, and the closure, which reconciles the differences. Melville's work reproduces this basic scheme by supplying a closing theme, that of hybridity, which provides a synthesis of the two opposite principles, the European and the native points of view, which have triggered off the story.

The relevance of hybridity, then, offers the reader a remarkable intuition anticipating fundamental future developments. The two hybrid characters hint at what anthropologist James Clifford has singled out as one of the "specific paths through modernity," the fact that "human future is something to be creatively imagined, not simply endured" (6). Jimmy and Marnoo, in fact, do just this: they have imagined for themselves a different future from their own countrymen, and this decision pays off in the circumstances when their hybridity brings a position of privilege.

Hybrid Texts

What Melville does in *Typee*, then, is to question some principles of travel narrative that, in the light of his personal experience in Nukuhiva, might have proven inadequate to represent what he had witnessed on the island. To Melville, these principles possibly looked like, to use Victor Shklovsky's terminology, "outdated" themes (228)—themes which become forbidden because fail to convey real meanings and only spread clichés—although the fact that colonialist writing flourished in the nineteenth century shows that Melville's view was not shared by readers or publishers. Therefore, his emphasis on the hybrid characters must strike one as remarkable by all means.

Some could object to the idea of Melville as prophet of modernity, and could rightly point out that this stress on hybridity does not emerge in the first editions of the book, those published in the early months of 1846, which did not contain the Sequel featuring Jimmy. In July of that year, the *Buffalo Commercial*

Advertiser printed a statement by Richard Tobias Greene, which attested that he was "the true and veritable Toby" of *Typee* and testified "to the entire accuracy of the work, so long as (he) was with Melville"; two weeks later, the paper published Toby's own account of his escape, mentioning the deception committed by the beachcomber. Silencing those reviewers who questioned the veracity of the book, Green's testimony provided Melville with material that he reworked in "The Story of Toby: A Sequel to *Typee*," an appendix published in the infamous American Revised edition of July 1846 and subsequent reissues.[9] Without the Sequel, there would be no Jimmy in *Typee*, and hybridity would be negligible as a theme in the book.

However, as John Bryant has argued, *Typee* is one of those text that most significantly defy the outdated notion of the finished literary work. Given the particularly troublesome and circuitous writing and publishing process, Bryant compares *Typee* to the *Bible* or the *Odissey* and labels it a "fluid text" that "exists in multiple material versions" ("Witness and Access" 17). In his introduction to the electronic version of *Typee*,[10] Bryant outlines a possible route through different stages which started from the raw material of Melville's own recollections of his adventure and ended in the different published versions. The critic writes that *Typee* "represents two experiences: a four-week adventure in the South Seas... and a several-month adventure in writing" ("Introduction" 20)—and also, we should add, in getting the work published. Importantly, this process is a journey that parallels the one performed by the main character. The outcome of this literary journey is, as Goudie sums up, a "hybrid text":

> *Typee* presents a narrator speaking in analepses and prolepses, in prefaces and sequels and appendices, in passages under erasure, in layered genres and literary conventions, in Marquesan vocabulary translated and untranslated, in direct discourse and indirect discourse and dialogue, in parody and hyperbole and reportorial language—a heteroglossic textual equivalent of the hybrid figures controlling the narrative (227).

This marked heteroglossic aspect is further reinforced by other features of the book, for example the specific uses of the existing travel accounts as sources.

In fact, Melville did not just borrow episodes from Porter, Stewart and Ellis, but also tried to undermine the validity of the sources by underlining the excessively biased attitudes of the authors towards the natives. One particular instance occurs when Melville takes phrases from Porter's account, and puts them in a

9 See Howard 287.

10 *Typee*. Fluid-Text Edition. Ed. John Bryant. The University of Virginia Press. Available at http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/melville/.

different context: whereas in the *Journal* "the line of smoking ruins" is seen as a consequences of the "mistaken pride" of the Typees,[11] Melville uses the same words to highlight a very different point of view. According to his version, first the natives "obliged their assailants to retreat and abandon their design of conquest," and thus,

> the invaders, on their march back to the sea, consoled themselves for their repulse by setting fire to every house and temple in their route; and a long line of smoking ruins defaced the once-smiling bosom of the valley, and proclaimed to its pagan inhabitants the spirit that reigned in the breasts of Christian soldiers. (38)

The diversity of textual strategies and the complicated history of publication make *Typee* a radically unstable text; and this instability accounts for its hybridity. It is neither a novel nor an ethnographic work, it criticizes imperialism and partakes of its discourse, expresses a literary ambition and stumbles on the innovative theme of hybridity.

Critics are right in pointing out that hybridity does not emerge in full force until the very end of the book. But, again, formalist criticism comes to rescue. Franco Moretti has demonstrated that, as in biology, evolution in literature is based on "divergence," and its history is full of "casual attempts, false starts, and ends" (*Graphs* 101). And what is the "Story of Toby," if not an evolution that occurred by chance? The same could be said of all the other features that make *Typee* an amazingly modern book. If Melville had not been asked by his London publisher to include more documentary material, Melville might have never consulted other travel accounts of the Marquesas and never decided to contest the prevalent colonialist assumptions about the indigene.

Conclusion

In *The Predicament of Culture*, James Clifford states that ethnography is a "hybrid activity," which "appears as writing, as collecting, as modernist collage, as imperial power, as subversive critique." It is "a mode of travel, a way of understanding and getting around in a diverse world that, since the sixteenth century, has become

11 "When I had reached the summit of the mountain, I stopped to contemplate that valley which, in the morning, we had viewed in all its beauty, the scene of abundance and happiness. A long line of smoaking (*sic!)* ruins now marked our traces from one end to the other ; the opposite bills were covered with the unhappy fugitives, and the whole presented a scene of desolation and horror. Unhappy and heroic people, the victims of your own courage and mistaken pride", vol 2, p. 105.

cartographically unified" (13). These words perfectly describe the vicissitudes of *Typee* and its author, from the collection of the material about the Polynesian adventure to the several published versions of the book. They also account for *Typee*'s heterogeneous nature, the outcome of crossbreeding between fact and fiction, exoticism and cultural relativism, copying and rewriting, humor and suspense. It is a narrative that overflows the boundaries of genre and the material limitations of a book. Its instability is the outcome of an unfinished journey, of a historical experience, of the cartographic unification of the world. Jimmy and Marnoo, the two hybrid characters, suggest possible outcomes of the "cartographic clash"—when individuals adapt to a changing environment by shedding some features of their own identity and acquiring others from alien sources. Likewise, in the course of the writing process, the *Typee* originally planned by Melville as a straightforward account of his own adventure in the manner of travel accounts shed some of the genre's features to accomodate the new textual impulses—the same process that, years later, would allow a tale about a white whale and a strong-willed captain to become *Moby-Dick*.

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