

CRITICAL INSIGHTS

Herman Melville

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In a June 1851 letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville meditated on the vanity of literary fame as he completed the composition of *Moby-Dick*: "All Fame is patronage. Let me be infamous: there is no patronage in that. What 'reputation' H.M. has is horrible. Think of it! To go down to posterity is bad enough, any way; but to go down as a 'man who lived among the cannibals'!" (*Correspondence* 193). Melville's fear of going down to posterity only as a chronicler of Polynesian cannibals—his role in his first book, *Typee*—is ironic on several counts. We should first note that Melville's whimsical prediction was ironically fulfilled, for in his lifetime *Typee* was reprinted more often than any of his other books and was the work most often cited as the kind of work the author should be producing instead of his later, more philosophically challenging fiction. The stigma of being only known to posterity as the author of *Typee* was also ironic in that one of the main reasons for his fleeing the Typee Valley as recounted in that book was the fear of being forever identified with the tribe by receiving their tattooing; yet his book would ineluctably mark him in a comparable manner. It was also ironic to be exclusively associated with the Polynesian cannibals of *Typee* because after the book was first published, both his publishers and reviewers cast doubt about whether Melville had actually experienced everything recounted in the narrative—or even whether he had ever been in the Typee Valley. (Such doubts continued even after the unexpected reappearance in Buffalo, New York, of Toby, Melville's lost companion in the narrative, a few months after the book was published in 1846.) And it was ironic for posterity to think of *Typee* as Melville's supreme achievement because in that work he had been forced by his American publisher, Wiley and Putnam, to expurgate significant portions of the text in its revised edition because of the offense they caused to the nation's religious establishment, this being the edition that was reprinted in America throughout Melville's lifetime.¹

Yet the final irony with regard to *Typee* as an index of Melville's literary achievement is that it is in fact a work for which Melville had little to be ashamed. For *Typee* continues to attract readers and critics who are drawn to the narrative's stylistic grace, youthful exuberance, exotic appeal, and engaging combination of dramatic and discursive components in its semi-autobiographical evocation of Melville's "captivity" among the Typees on the island of Nukuhewa in the Marquesas Islands sometime within a period of four weeks—July 9 to August 9, 1842—that Melville stretched out to four months in the narrative. Modern commentators on *Typee* have explored a variety of critical approaches relating to questions of genre, biography, literary sources, primitivism (i.e., the "noble savage"), sexuality, ethnography, colonialism, and imperialism, among others. Yet another likely reason for the work's continued appeal is also doubtless its imaginative incorporation of mythic elements; in this case, the archetypal Western myth of paradise, the Garden of Eden, and the Fall. Much of Melville's later fiction and poetry would show a masterful handling of mythic paradigms, and we may track the beginnings of this process in his first book. In *Typee*, Melville dramatizes the dominant Western myth of human origins and moral transgression, but he also critiques, satirizes, and ironically reshapes it, in the process revealing both the complexity of such myths and their continuing relevance for the modern world.²

The Judeo-Christian myth of paradise is based on the biblical story recounted in Genesis 1–3, which has had an immeasurable influence on Western history and culture.³ Familiar as the story may be, we must still provide a basic outline in order to frame the following discussion. The biblical paradise ("enclosure"), or Eden ("delight"), was a garden of beautiful trees providing attractive fruit with a branching river running through it. Having been created by God from the soil, Adam was designated as keeper of the garden and instructed not to eat the fruit of the tree of good and evil on pain of death; he was then provided with a female helper, Eve. Unshamed of their nakedness, Adam and Eve enjoyed their garden until the "subtle" serpent tempted Eve by claiming

that by eating the forbidden fruit, "your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). Eating the attractive fruit, Eve shared it with Adam, but they were quickly caught by God while hiding among the trees, newly ashamed of their nakedness after hearing God's voice. Despite Adam's attempt to blame Eve for his actions, they both faced penalties for their transgression, namely, pain in childbirth for Eve and forced labor for Adam: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" (Gen. 3:19). The serpent would also be punished by experiencing eternal enmity with the human race. Exiled from paradise for their transgression, a guilty Adam and Eve forever abandoned their blissful garden.

Thus was enacted the divine curse of "original sin" that, according to Christian tradition, has permanently tainted humanity. The key creator of this doctrine was St. Paul, who traced humanity's collective guilt, as manifested in sin and death, to the Fall of Adam (Rom. 5:12). This mythic doctrine was in turn reinterpreted for medieval Catholicism by St. Augustine and for Protestantism by John Calvin, whose punitive theology was bequeathed to the New England Puritans and their doctrinal successors. One of the major interpretations of the paradise myth was that the loss of innocence was a "fortunate fall" because it allowed for the redemptive mission of Christ (as depicted in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*), or that it catalyzed the moral growth of Adam and Eve (as symbolically represented in some of Nathaniel Hawthorne's fiction). It should be noted that from its very beginnings, the Judeo-Christian myth of paradise incorporated elements from cognate Greco-Roman traditions of the Golden Age, the Elysian Fields, the Happy Isles, and Arcadia, in which primordial or posthumous human life was characterized by peace, harmony, ease, and natural abundance. Such mythic ideas were found in the writings of Hesiod, Homer, Plato, Theocritus, Virgil, Ovid, and others. The Western paradise myth thus forms a composite tradition with a variety of features beyond the biblical story. Christianity theorized that, although paradise was a permanently forbidden realm, it might still exist somewhere in the world, and medieval

and Renaissance writers and map-makers accordingly located it somewhere to the east in a variety of locations including Palestine, Mesopotamia, and India. Writers in the era of global exploration also associated paradise with various primitive peoples who allegedly revealed human nature in its original goodness, as embodied in the "noble savage" living in a state of nature. As an imaginative construct, then, the myth of paradise has shaped the Western imagination as an archetypal parable of lost innocence and simplicity, and a sign of discontent with the mixed blessings of civilization.

In *Typee*, Melville plays multiple variations on this myth, for the Typees manifestly live in a Polynesian Eden, yet it is an ambiguously pre- and postlapsarian paradise whose ultimate moral identity remains ambiguous. Tommo is thus an American Adam who eagerly explores this exotic Eden while showing its consistent superiority to modern Western culture; but he must eventually flee the Typee Valley in a quest for moral freedom even as his flight inadvertently causes a symbolic Fall for the Typee. As a romantic rebel against the oppressive powers of Christian dogma and Western cultural chauvinism, moreover, Melville is also an outspoken critic in *Typee* of contemporary missionary Christianity and European imperialism; for it is missionaries and their commercial and political coadjutors who will ultimately precipitate the larger Fall of the inhabitants of the Typee Valley, the Marquesas, and the islands of Polynesia generally.

Typee begins with the narrator's evocation of weariness at being at sea on an American whaler for half a year with an abusive captain and rough crew. In this condition his yearning for land becomes a kind of acute sensory deprivation, as he longs "for a refreshing glimpse of one blade of grass—for a snuff at the fragrance of a handful of the loamy earth!" (3). The general longing for land in this case coincides with the ship's proximity to the Marquesas Islands, which in the contemporary civilized world were still identified by sensationalistic clichés about its primitive inhabitants, including such features as "Naked hours," "cannibal banquets," and "heathenish rites and human sacrifices" (5).

While evoking the exotic appeal of the Marquesas as a South Sea island paradise, however, the narrator quickly deflates the alien identity of this culture by revealing the familiar presence of American, British, and French interests in the area, as well as recounting a series of comic vignettes on the ostensible nature of their primitivism; for these involve nothing more than minor violations of Western codes of etiquette in the natives' disrobing of a missionary's wife and the indiscretion of a Marquesan queen in revealing the tattoo on her backside.

Having established a ribald tone suitable for a novel of nautical picaresque, the narrator also quickly establishes himself as an informed commentator on the island of Nukuhewa, where his ship is headed for provisioning and where the French navy has only recently claimed the island as a French colony. In Western traditions of paradise, the paradisaical island is a persistent feature, and it proves so again in the sheer natural beauty of the harbor and the greeting that the natives of Nukuhewa give to the narrator's ship, the *Dolly*. For coming into the island's chief bay, the ship is quickly surrounded by a flotilla of canoes, floating coconuts, and naked young women who board the ship and offer the narrator a first glimpse of the beauties that the island has to offer: "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" (15). The young women are in fact there to give the sailors an exuberant erotic welcome, in keeping with the mores of their native religion and its celebration of sexuality (which the missionaries considered a symptom of their pagan depravity). There ensues a scene of "riot and debauchery" in which the narrator blames the "unholy passions of the crew" (15) for the drunken orgy—with likely transmission of venereal disease—that takes place, thereby establishing a motif of native innocence and European-American corruption that will continue throughout the narrative and color its depiction of Marquesan life.

Once the *Dolly* has arrived in port, the narrator is determined to jump ship, citing as his excuse the limited terms of his contracted services and the tyrannical behavior of the captain in prolonging the ship's cruises and inflicting violence on the crew. The allure of the island of Nukuhewa is evident from the ship, with a shoreline of "deep and romantic glens" (24), each with cascades and waterfalls, backed by towering mountain peaks. The geography of the island has created a series of isolated valleys, the one closest to the bay being occupied by the tribe of friendly Happars and the next valley by the much-feared, allegedly cannibalistic Typee who, the narrator notes, had fought the American naval captain David Porter about three decades earlier; indeed, the latter's scorched-earth campaign in the Typee Valley at that time had turned the tribe into fierce enemies of the white man. Already beginning to dispel the myth of innate depravity in this tribe, the narrator notes that it is the invading whites who have been guilty of poisoning the native goodness of the islanders, whose initial friendly welcome (like the earlier naked young "houris" in the harbor) makes them "fold to their bosoms the vipers whose sting is destined to poison all their joys; and the instinctive feeling of love within their breasts is soon converted into the bitterest hate" (26). Western intruders are thus the stinging serpent in the Eden of Polynesia.

The narrator's plan in jumping ship is to climb to the mountainous heights above the bay until his ship departs, avoiding all contact with the natives who might want to capture him for a ransom, or in the case of the Typee, might want to consume him—although the latter seems a remote possibility at this point. Finding a fellow crewman named Toby who is equally dissatisfied with conditions on the ship, the narrator and his companion decide to abscond together and are soon able to execute their escape during their official shore leave. The narrator and Toby's ensuing five-day ordeal into the interior of the island reveals the geographical ignorance and seriocomic naïveté of the adventurous young sailors, whose exhausting trek provides an archetypal sense of remoteness and inaccessibility to the paradise that they eventually discover

in the Typee Valley. Appropriately enough, the uninhabited region behind the mountain they have climbed suggests a mythical antiquity, "the interior of the island having apparently been untenanted since the morning of the creation" (44). Moreover, on a symbolic level Tommo (as he is later identified) and Toby are obliquely compared to the Satan of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, whose approach to the newly created realm of paradise bears similarities to Tommo's description of their approach to the Typee Valley.

Early in their flight, Tommo and Toby had thus resorted to crawling along the ground to remain unseen, "screened from observation by the grass through which we glided, much in the fashion of a couple of serpents" (39). Then, in the process of Tommo and Toby's challenging climb through the interior landscape of the island, we first hear about Tommo's leg injury, which critics have viewed as serving a variety of symbolic functions. Following their first wet night out in the open, Tommo begins to experience shivering and fever, and notices another symptom of illness: "One of my legs was swelled to such a degree, and pained me so acutely, that I half-suspected I had been bitten by some venomous reptile, the congenial inhabitant of the chasm from which we had lately emerged" (48). The mention of a snake as the hypothetical (but incorrect) source for Tommo's leg injury, seen within the larger context of the novel's archetypal symbolism, hints that he will carry the Judeo-Christian legacy of original sin as he approaches the borders of the Typee paradise. Tommo's leg injury may thus evoke the divine curse on the serpent in the Eden narrative, for the latter creature would allegedly "bruise" the "heel" of the descendants of Adam and Eve in their eternal enmity (Gen. 3:15). Yet another relevant biblical source here is St. Paul's assertion that all human "members" were captive to sin; for besides the law of God, "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Rom. 7:23; see also 6:19, 7:5). In Tommo's case, his sinful "member" is a diseased leg that will pain and incapacitate him during part of his stay with the Typee, pro-

viding a psychosomatic index to his initiation into their seemingly prelapsarian way of life.

Having reached an elevated prospect on their long trek, Tommo and Toby gain a distant view of the Typee Valley that they will eventually reach, without knowing who its inhabitants are. Tommo now pulls back the curtain, as it were, on the Edenic beauty of the valley: "I chanced to push aside a branch, and by so doing suddenly disclosed to my view a scene which even now I can recall with all the vividness of the first impression. Had a glimpse of the gardens of Paradise been revealed to me I could scarcely have been more ravished with the sight" (49). Tommo thus sees the "palmetto-thatched houses" of the native inhabitants, as well as the stunning natural landscape; for the "crowning beauty of the prospect was its universal verdure" (49). The valley is similarly distinguished by numerous "silent cascades, whose slender threads of water, after leaping down the steep cliffs, were lost amidst the rich herbage of the valley" (49). In its proliferation of trees and fresh water, the Typee Valley clearly evokes the landscape of Eden, where "out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food" and where the river flowing out of Eden is divided into four abundant streams (Gen. 2:9-10). At this point, the valley exists in a "hushed repose" that Tommo is fearful to break "lest, like the enchanted gardens in the fairy tale, a single syllable might dissolve the spell" (49). The Typee Valley will in fact prove to be an Edenic "enchanted garden" where Tommo will assume the role of Adam and a single word, "cannibal," will threaten to dissolve the garden's spell.

Although Tommo and Toby have gained a view of a paradisiacal realm, they still don't know whether it is inhabited by friendly Hap-par or fierce Typee, so they forge ahead on their journey across the challenging landscape. In his feverish condition, Tommo has a raging thirst, but when he drinks from a stream at the foot of a gorge, he experiences a shock reminiscent of the fallen angels in Pandemonium who have been transformed into serpents in Milton's *Paradise Lost* and who then enact a grotesque version of Satan's recent temptation of Eve

by biting into ashen apples (X:547–71). As Tommo now notes, “Had the apples of Sodom turned to ashes in my mouth, I could not have felt a more startling revulsion. A single drop of cold fluid seemed to freeze every drop of blood in my body” (53). Tommo and Toby are clearly not fallen angels, but their journey through the chaotic landscape of sharp ridges and deep chasms highlights their status as alien intruders traveling through a seemingly primordial realm of creation; indeed, their final dramatic descent into the valley is a “fall” of sorts, involving clambering down hanging vines and then jumping into a palm tree top.

True to the valley’s underlying mythic identity, the first inhabitants that Tommo and Toby meet are a youthful Adam-and-Eve-like couple, “slender and graceful, and completely naked, with the exception of a slight girdle of bark” (68). Though fearful, the young couple mischievously proceed to mislead the two sailors about the identity of the valley, affirming it to be Happar, and then take them down to their community. It is only by chance that Tommo, under the impassive scrutiny of the chief Mehevi, correctly answers the chief’s query whether the tribe is Happar or Typee, and the two are forthwith welcomed into the Typee community, as consummated by their exchange of names.⁴ Despite the fact that some of the imagery of their journey has depicted Tommo and Toby as quasi-Satanic interlopers into a seemingly unspoiled Eden, the duplicity of the young couple and the chief’s immediate mention of hatred of the Happar both demonstrate that the Typee are not total moral innocents; indeed, the ensuing interplay of pre- and postlapsarian motifs among Tommo, the Marquesans, and their European colonizers gives the narrative its complex thematic texture.

With their fortuitous identification of the tribe as Typee, Tommo and Toby are henceforth part of the community, as Tommo is given infellectual medical treatment by the local medicine man and introduced to a surrogate family of Marheyo (a kindly father figure), Tinor (his industrious wife), Kory-Kory (Tommo’s body servant), and Fayaway (his female companion). He also begins his explorations, with Kory-Kory’s help, of the setting of the tribal community, including the Taboo

Groves of consecrated bread-fruit trees, the Hoolah-Hoolah Ground (devoted to religious rituals), and the Ti (dedicated to male sociability and feasting). Although Tommo’s situation is almost luxurious in its many enjoyments, he remains anxious and depressed about his ultimate fate, still unsure what his alleged cannibal hosts ultimately mean to do with him. This anxiety is exploited for comic purposes when Tommo and Toby wake up in the Ti one midnight shortly after their arrival and see the wild celebrations of a feast taking place, and Toby mordantly jokes that the natives are getting ready to consume their new visitors. When it turns out that they are merely being invited to join the feast, Toby again jokes that the meat they are given to eat is a “baked baby” (94), but it is pork from the island’s wild pigs.

The exotic locale where he now resides is clearly alien and at times overwhelming to Tommo, but as he increasingly takes on the role of amateur ethnographer, he gains perspective on the natives’ culture by occasionally providing incongruous comic comparisons between Typee life and the familiar domestic worlds of Western civilization. Thus, when presenting Tommo “some outlandish kind of savage sweetmeat or pasty,” Tinor is said to resemble “a doting mother petting a sickly urchin with tarts and sugar-plums” (85). When preparing to carry the disabled Tommo, Kory-Kory looks like “a porter in readiness to shoulder a trunk” (89). And when Tommo is returning with the remains of his first feast to his new domicile with a group of followers, “the superannuated warrior [Marheyo] did the honors of his mansion with all the warmth of hospitality evinced by an English squire when he regales his friends at some fine old patrimonial mansion” (96). Such incongruous comparisons bridge the gap between primitive and modern cultures, creating a sense of a universal human community.

Throughout his prolonged residence in the Typee Valley, and especially after Toby’s departure in chapter 14, Tommo observes that virtually every aspect of the life of the natives—their physical appearance, natural environment, social relations, laws and institutions—evokes various aspects of the paradise tradition in the West. One of the first

things that strikes Tommo about the Typees is their impressive physical beauty, which resembles that of the first mythical humans. (In Milton's epic, Adam and Eve before the Fall are accordingly "Godlike erect, with native Honor clad / In naked Majesty seem'd Lords of all" [*Paradise Lost*, IV.289-90].) Thus, the morning after their arrival in the Typee Valley, Tommo and Toby are visited by the chief, Mehevi, who, "from the excellence of his physical proportions, might certainly have been regarded as one of Nature's noblemen" (78). Among his Typee surrogate family, Tommo notes that Marheyo "was a native of gigantic frame" (83), while Kory-Kory, though covered with unsightly tattooing, was "about six feet in height, robust, and well made" (83). Most captivating of all was Fayaway, a "beauteous nymph" whose "free pliant figure was the very perfection of female grace and beauty" including a "rich and mantling" olive complexion, oval face, full lips, brown hair, soulful eyes, soft hands, small feet, and beautiful oiled skin (85-86). In Tommo's catalogue of physical attributes, we see a traditional Petrarchan "blazon" of female beauty; moreover, Fayaway's "soft and delicate" hands and "diminutive" feet compare favorably to those found in aristocratic and genteel women of the West. In a deliberately provocative image, Tommo notes that Fayaway "for the most part clung to the primitive and summer garb of Eden. But how becoming the costume!" (87). Typee corporeal beauty, with its echoes of paradise, is thus epitomized by Tommo's Eve-like companion. Not surprisingly, Fayaway and the other young Typee women wear a rich variety of flowers for ornament, using them for necklaces, chaplets, bracelets and anklets; for "the maidens of the island were passionately fond of flowers, and never wearied of decorating their persons with them" (87).

Tommo later adds to this portrait of personal beauty among the Typee who in "beauty of form surpassed anything I had ever seen"; indeed, "nearly every individual of their number might have been taken for a sculptor's model" (180). The contrast between such "naked simplicity of nature" (180) in the natives and contemporary European gentlemen and dandies would show the hidden artifice that cre-

ates the latter's visual appeal: "Stripped of the cunning artifices of the tailor, and standing forth in the garb of Eden,—what a sorry set of round-shouldered, spindle-shanked, crane-necked varlets would civilized men appear!" (181). With the ironic gusto of a Thomas Carlyle, Melville strips civilized man of his sartorial deceptions, revealing the grotesque form beneath. In addition, the Typee all have flawless white teeth due to "the pure vegetable diet of these people, and the uninterrupted healthfulness of their natural mode of life" (181); for as Tommo subsequently mentions with rhetorical indirection, the venereal disease ("one of the most dreadful curses under which humanity labors") introduced by the West to Polynesia has not affected the Typee, hence their physical health remains intact.

Mention of the "garb of Eden" worn by many of the Typee women raises the question of sexuality in the valley, and it is here that Melville necessarily walks a fine line between truth and fiction in his narrative. In most evocations of paradise over the last two millennia, physical relations between Adam and Eve are depicted as chaste and innocent; for example, the sexual relations in Milton's epic are only delicately hinted, as Adam and Eve perform "the Rite / Mysterious of connubial love" (*Paradise Lost*, IV.743-43). Among the Marquesans, however, the whole culture was devoted to a celebration of sexual relations, which were allegedly pleasing to their gods. Young men and women sought to enhance the appeal of their sexual organs and were authorized to spend their adolescent years in unbridled sexual activity. We will never know whether Melville enjoyed any of this sexual freedom during his stay in the Typee Valley; for in *Typee* he maintains a strategic decorum. Tommo's dalliance with Fayaway is thus largely free of signs of eroticism, being instead defined by the conventions of pastoral romance. Tommo's infected leg would seem to put a damper on any sexual activities during much of his residence; indeed, his most suggestive erotic scene is a quasi-Byronic picture of therapeutic massage when Fayaway and other young women rub down Tommo's various "limbs" with fragrant oil: "And most refreshing and agreeable are the

juices of the 'aka,' when applied to one's limbs by the soft palms of sweet nymphs, whose bright eyes are beaming upon you with kindness; and I used to hail with delight the daily recurrence of this luxurious operation" (110).⁵

The erotic potential of this scene is more fully expressed by the immediately ensuing description of Kory-Kory's energetic routine in starting a fire to light Tommo's pipe by rubbing a stick against a grooved log, which he mounts like a horse. As numerous commentators have noted, the description here doubles as a disguised version of male sexual arousal and orgasm. A brief excerpt from the detailed description conveys Melville's ribald analogy: "As he [Kory-Kory] approaches the climax of his effort, he pants and gasps for breath, and his eyes almost start from his sockets with the violence of his exertions. . . . The next moment a delicate wreath of smoke curls spirally into the air, the heap of dusty particles glows with fire, and Kory-Kory almost breathless, dismounts from his steed" (111). In the Eden of Typee, "the most laborious species of work" (111) thus seems to be lighting a fire to be able to smoke a pipe, an activity that covertly doubles as a male sexual performance. In this subversive parody of the curse in Genesis, Kory-Kory only works hard to light a fire (or have an orgasm), unlike the oppressed Adam who must labor in the sweat of his face to feed his family (Gen. 3:19).

One of Tommo's favorite activities once his leg has improved is to swim among the young women in a lake in the valley, or go boating in a canoe with Fayaway after she has been exempted from the general taboo on women in boats. (Significantly, a lake is a feature of Milton's Eden [*Paradise Lost*, IV,261–63] but not the geographical Typee Valley.) It is in the latter activity that Fayaway famously shows her artless ingenuity by making her tappa robe into a sail, after which Tommo asserts, in the incongruous accents of genteel courtship, that he is now the "declared admirer of Miss Fayaway" (134). Despite his regular exposure to Fayaway's full frontal nudity, Tommo's romantic vocabulary remains chaste and conventional.

Not only do the beauty and nudity of the Typee natives convey an Edenic impression, but their physical environment is also suggestive of the realm of paradise. Thus, there are no seasons—a traditional sign of the Fall—in the Typee Valley; for "there day follows day in one unvarying round of summer and sunshine, and the whole year is one long tropical month of June just melting into July" (213). In fact, an aura of timelessness seems to hang over the valley, for "the history of a day is the history of a life" (149). Following his companion Toby's departure to help secure his release, Tommo accordingly begins to lose "all knowledge of the regular recurrence of the days of the week" (123). Another key feature of the biblical Eden and paradise tradition is the flourishing condition of the natural world, including the harmony of all living creatures and the lack of predation. So, too, in the realm of the Typee, the "birds and lizards of the valley show their confidence in the kindness of man" (212). Tommo describes "a beautiful golden-hued species of lizard" that "at all hours of the day showed their glittering sides as they ran frolicking between the spears of grass or raced in troops up and down the tall shafts of the cocoa-nut trees" and were "perfectly tame and insensible to fear" (211). In like manner, "frisking play'd / All Beasts of th' Earth" in Milton's prelapsarian Eden (*Paradise Lost*, IV,340–41). Among the Typee, the solitudes are "unbroken by the roar of beasts of prey" and there are "no venomous reptiles; and no snakes of any description to be found in any of the valleys" (212). On a comic note, Tommo remarks that even the native flies are remarkably—and annoyingly—tame (212). In addition, there are innumerable "bright and beautiful birds" flying through the valley with variegated plumage of "purple and azure, crimson and white, black and gold; with bills of every tint—bright bloody-red, jet black, and ivory white" (215). Another required feature of paradise is the presence of majestic fruit-bearing trees, and this is true as well of the Typee valley, where the bread fruit and coconut palm nourish and otherwise contribute to the health and welfare of the natives.

The paradisiacal aura of the Typee valley can be viewed ironically with regard to the natives' religious beliefs; for instead of a jealously restrictive Judeo-Christian god overseeing the activities of Eden, we find a set of grotesque-looking idols seemingly powerless to control their human subjects. Indeed, the latter manipulate them for their own mysterious ends. Thus Tommo is surprised that the supreme Typee god Moa-Artua carried by the warrior-priest Kolory is a diminutive figure wrapped in white tappa cloth with a human head at the top that looks like a "mere pigmy in tatters" (175). In a bizarre ritual, Kolory first caresses the god like a baby but then yells at it, hits it, and strips off its clothing before putting it away in a trough; and the process is then repeated until the god allegedly speaks a message to the priest. With irreverent humor, Tommo expresses mystification as to why this peculiar little figure is the chief god: "Moa Artua was certainly a precocious little fellow if he said all that was imputed to him; but for what reason this poor devil of a deity, thus cuffed about, cajoled and shut up in a box, was held in greater estimation than the full-grown and dignified personages of the Taboo Groves, I cannot divine" (176–77). The comic anthropomorphizing of the god here is subversively ironic, as is the possible analogy with the two chief gods (Jesus and Yahweh) of the Christian world. All of this allegedly shows that the Typee, as a free people living in a perfected social state, "were not to be brow-beaten by chiefs, priests, idols, or devils" (177). The Typee irreverence toward their gods is also seen when Tommo and Kory-Kory encounter a decayed wooden idol leaning against a bamboo temple. When Kory-Kory attempts to prop it upright, it unexpectedly falls on his back, causing him furiously to beat and yell at it in a way that makes Tommo "shocked at Kory-Kory's impiety" (179). In this ironic reversal of Western archetypal history, it is the gods, not their human creations, who "fall" and are punished in the Typee Eden.

In chapter 17, following Tommo's earlier feeling of despair at his evident "captivity" among the Typee—which is probably based on the tribe's recognition of him as a bargaining chip for future exchanges

with whites—Tommo's leg seems to heal and he experiences a greater "elasticity of mind" (123). This enables him to survey Typee society more carefully, leading to an outspoken representation of the Typee as morally superior to Europeans due to their closer approximation to the condition of traditional ideas of paradise. Partly drawing on the notion of the "noble savage," the narrator offers a defense of the simple life of the Typee: "In a primitive state of society, the enjoyments of life, though few and simple, are spread over a great extent, and are unalloyed; but Civilization, for every advantage she imparts, holds a hundred evils in reserve" (124). Even the worst moral depravity of the Typee, their alleged cannibalism, pales in comparison with the Western barbarities of drawing and quartering, a form of capital punishment only recently made illegal in England, and the relentless development of military technology among all civilized nations which, in a judgment worthy of Jonathan Swift—as in Lemuel Gulliver's proposal of giving gunpowder to the King of Brobdingnag—reveals "white civilized man as the most ferocious animal on the face of the earth" (125). The narrator's ensuing notion that "so far as the relative wickedness of the parties is concerned, four or five Marquesan Islanders sent to the United States as Missionaries might be quite as useful as an equal number of Americans dispatched to the Islands in a similar capacity" (125–26). Such a suggestion looks back to Swift's depiction of Gulliver meditating on the civilizing possibilities of sending some Houyhnhnms to England to teach the latter some of their virtues, in a process of reverse colonization.⁶

Tommo goes on to note that the Typee, with a "perpetual hilarity reigning through the whole extent of the vale" (126), are instinctively happier than civilized Europeans; and he enumerates an extended list of the many features of European life that are missing in the Typee Valley: "There were none of those thousand sources of irritation that the ingenuity of civilized man has created to mar his own felicity. There were no foreclosures of mortgages, no protested notes, no bills payable, no debts of honor in Typee. . . . No beggars; no debtors' prisons;

no proud and hard-hearted nabobs in Typee; or to sum up all in one word—no Money! That 'root of all evil' was not to be found in the valley" (126). Such a roster of the missing items of civilized life in a paradisiacal society has a long pedigree, going back to such works as Hesiod's *Works and Days*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Montaigne's "Of the Cannibals," Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. The shaping power of the paradise tradition can be seen, too, in the conclusion that the primitive innocence and happiness of Typee society stems from the absence of money, the love of which is the supposed "root of all evil" according to the New Testament (2 Tim. 6:10). The innocence of the Typee thus originates with a lack of the basic features of modern commercial society, including the latter's pervasive signs of misery and oppression.

The depiction of the happy simplicities of Typee society continues in chapter 27. Here again we read about the nonexistent evils of the Typee, now in relation to their absence of any formal legal code, made possible by "an inherent principle of honesty and charity towards each other. They seemed to be governed by that sort of tacit common-sense law which, say what they will of the inborn lawlessness of the human race, has its precepts graven on every breast. The grand principles of virtue and honor, however they may be distorted by arbitrary codes, are the same all the world over" (201). In this invocation of instinctive laws governing the human race, Melville draws on St. Paul's address to a group of early Christians who embody the "Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in the fleshly tables of the heart" (2 Cor. 3:3). Having Christian virtues without Christianity, the Typee possess a "universally diffused perception of what is *just* and *noble*" (201), so that they don't fear acts of theft or murder, despite the existence of personal property among them: "Each islander reposed beneath his own palmetto thatching, or sat under his own bread-fruit-tree, with none to molest or alarm him" (201). The evocation of Typee security here draws on the well-known depiction in the Old Testament prophet Micah of a future blessed age when men wouldn't "learn war any more.

/ But they shall sit every man under his vine and fig tree: and none shall make them afraid" (Micah 4:3-4). Again, the Typees instinctively possess the virtues of Christianity without needing its flawed version brought by the Western missionaries.

As earlier in chapter 17, Melville again provides a sharp contrast between civilization and "savagery," reiterating that the former "does not engross all the virtues of humanity" (202). Indeed, Typee social relations are so exemplary that Tommo marvels on their possession of virtues that compare favorably to those in the West who formally study morality and repeat the Lord's prayer every night. Among other virtues, the Typee exhibit an extraordinary "unanimity of feeling" (203) and spirit of cooperation in their actions. Their women are respected and not overburdened with work, and they exhibit a generalized form of social love like that preached by Paul in early Christianity: "The natives appeared to form one household whose members were bound together by the ties of strong affection. The love of kindred I did not so much perceive, for it seemed blended in the general love; and where all were treated as brothers and sisters, it was hard to tell who were actually related to each other by blood" (204). Again showing themselves as belonging to the kind of peaceful society found in the paradise tradition, the Typee outdo the virtues of nominal Christians of the West, who were instructed by Jesus to "love one another" (John 15:1).

One of Melville's polemical purposes in the creation of an Edenic aura around the Typee Valley was to critique the actions of Westerners in despoiling the primitive innocence and pristine beauty of comparable Polynesian Edens. Indeed, one of his most outspoken passages juxtaposes the paradisiacal circumstances of the Typee with the relentless encroachment of Western civilization, which has been spearheaded by the missionaries and is now virtually assured by the recent French annexation of the Marquesas. The passage begins with an ironic dismissal of the divine curse of hard labor:

The penalty of the Fall presses very lightly upon the valley of Typee; for, with the one solitary exception of striking a light, I scarcely saw any piece of work performed there which caused the sweat to stand upon a single brow. As for digging and delving for a livelihood, the thing is altogether unknown. Nature has planted the bread-fruit and the banana, and in her own good time she brings them to maturity; when the idle savage stretches forth his hand, and satisfies his appetite.

Ill-fated people! I shudder when I think of the change a few years will produce in their paradisiacal abode; and probably when the most destructive vices, and the worst attendances on civilization, shall have driven all peace and happiness from the valley, the magnanimous French will proclaim to the world that the Marquesas Islands have been converted to Christianity! and this the Catholic world will doubtless consider as a glorious event. Heaven help the "Isles of the Sea!" [see Isaiah 24:15]—The sympathy which Christendom feels for them has, alas! in too many instances proved their bane.

How little do some of these poor islanders comprehend when they look around them, that no inconsiderable part of their disasters originate in certain tea-party excitements, under the influence of which benevolent-looking gentlemen in white cravats solicit alms, and old ladies in spectacles, and young ladies in sober russet low gowns, contribute sixpences towards the creation of a fund, the object of which is to ameliorate the spiritual condition of the Polynesians, but whose end has almost invariably been to accomplish their temporal destruction! (195)

We see here how Melville's projection of the likely future of the Marquesas, based on his observation of the more advanced decline of native cultures on the islands of Tahiti and Hawaii, posits the "destructive vices" and general influence of "civilization" as the cause of the future Fall of Marquesan native society. Moreover, in a grotesque irony, it is the naively ignorant agents of Christian charity, in the comfortable setting of secure bourgeois parlors in America and England, who are

the ultimate perpetrators of this evil because they have led the field in collecting money for missionary enterprises.

Melville's outspoken indictment continues with a recital of the unholy alliance of Christianity and civilization in the eradication of paganism from the face of the earth along with the pagans themselves, while pointing out the similarities between the fates of the American Indians—referring to the era of Indian removal in the 1830s—and the Polynesians in the process of genocide: "Let the savages be civilized, but civilize them with benefits, and not with evils; and let heathenism be destroyed, but not by destroying the heathen. The Anglo-Saxon hive have extirpated Paganism from the greater part of the North American continent; but with it they have likewise extirpated the greater portion of the Red race" (195). The same process is now happening to the "pagan" inhabitants of Polynesia: "Among the islands of Polynesia, no sooner are the images overturned, the temples demolished, and the idolaters converted into *nominal* Christians, than disease, vice, and premature death make their appearance" (195). The principal consequences of the Fall—hard labor, sin, and death—are thus inadvertently inflicted on the Polynesians by the missionary and commercial invaders from the West; and the inhabitants of paradise must now sweat for their daily bread because their natural resources have been requisitioned by the invaders.

Even though Melville is a fierce defender of the Polynesians against Western religious, commercial, and political depredations, Tommo is ultimately ambivalent about his extended residence among the Typee, for he is never totally comfortable in the valley, given his anxieties about his captivity and the absence of Toby's companionship. As commentators have noted, one of Tommo's underlying reasons for wanting to leave the Typee Valley is the regressive, infantilized condition he is forced to assume there, as well as the childlike quality of life among the Typee generally. Significantly, both these conditions confirm a common interpretation of the Eden myth as an allegory of childhood maturation. Constantly carried around the valley like a child by his

faithful attendant (and implicit jailer) Kory-Kory, Tommo is fed regularly and sleeps a good part of the day and night like the other natives who "pass a large portion of their time in the arms of Somnus" (152). Tommo is also treated like a child by the Typee; for example, when he is first having his leg painfully pounded by the tribe's medicine man: "Mehevi, upon the same principle which prompts an affectionate mother to hold a struggling child in a dentist's chair, restrained me in his powerful grip" (80). So, too, when Tommo is first given Kory-Kory as his valet, the latter, "as if I were an infant, insisted upon feeding me with his own hands" (88).

Yet it is not only that the Typee treat Tommo like a child; for they themselves in many respects live in a juvenile world. Tommo notes, for example, that after a brief skirmish with the neighboring Happar, he hears only "some straggling shouts from the hillside, something like the halloos of a parcel of truant boys who had lost themselves in the woods" (129). In his chapter describing their religion, Tommo notes that "in the celebration of many of their strange rites, they appeared merely to seek a sort of childish amusement" (174). So, too, in their acts of devotion to their gods, the Typee looked like "a parcel of children playing with dolls and baby houses" (176). Tommo's perception of the Typees' child-like behavior is again on display when he improvises a popgun out of a three-foot length of bamboo for a child with whom he was playing. He was then besieged by others of all ages, clamoring for the same toy gun. After making several more, he delegates this job to a helper and soon the whole community is playing with these guns, and "green guavas, seeds, and berries were flying about in every direction" (145).

As in other literary depictions of paradisiacal societies, the "uniform and undiversified" (149) life of the Typees is also problematic to an outsider like Tommo, whose recurrent desire for knowledge about Typee life reveals that his view of the world is conditioned by Western traditions of intellectual inquiry and aspiration, as opposed to the contented insularity and stasis of Typee society. The contrast is perhaps best observed in the scene when Tommo and Kory-Kory observe the

bamboo mausoleum of the dead warrior chief. In a seven-foot coffin canoe, the effigy of a deceased chief is seen strenuously rowing "as if eager to hurry on his voyage" (172), but facing him in the canoe is the *memento mori* of a human skull. After Kory-Kory explains that the chief is "padding his way to the realms of bliss, and bread-fruit—the Polynesian heaven" (172), Tommo asks him whether he would like to accompany the chief there. He tellingly replies that he is happy living in the Typee Valley as it is, on the prudent principle that "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush" (173). Tommo, on the other hand, is haunted by the image of the dead chief, which he often visits, viewing it as embodying a model for human aspiration after the unknown; and he accordingly addresses it in the allegorical accents of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*: "Paddle away, brave chieftain, to the land of spirits! To the material eye thou makest but little progress; but with the eye of faith, I see thy canoe cleaving the bright waves, which die away on those dimly looming shores of Paradise" (173). In sum, Kory-Kory and the other inhabitants of the Edenic Typee Valley see life with a contented material eye, whereas Tommo sees it as a ceaseless journey towards a posthumous paradise; hence it is not surprising that a few chapters later he himself is headed back to sea on the next phase of his journey.

The first event that causes Tommo actively to seek release from his benign captivity in the Typee Valley occurs when it becomes evident that to remain within the tribe he must receive their tattooing, an overt sign of giving up his individuality and becoming permanently identified with a "savage" society. Although the depiction of the tattoo artist Karky is initially comic in its conflation of Western traditions of the fine arts with this local creator of epidermal designs using mallet and shark's tooth (Karky is humorously seen "touching up the works of some of the old masters of the Typee school" [218]), the pressure on Tommo to be tattooed becomes more serious when the chief Mehevi supports it; and when it becomes clear that nothing less than his face must be so disfigured, he is increasingly horrified by the possibility. Thinking that the tattoo was connected with making a religious "convert" of him (220),

Tommo realizes that receiving such tattooing would cause a fundamental change in his Western identity. Tattooing thus becomes a reminder of Tommo's status as an alien within the Polynesian Eden; but this is not nearly as anxiety-inducing as his discovery of the archetypal evil of cannibalism among the Typee.

Tommo's ultimate exposure to this sensationalized Polynesian practice occurs in chapter 32 in an obligatory climax that looks back to comparable scenes in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and the writings of Pacific explorers such as James Cook, G. H. von Langsdorff, David Porter, and Charles Wilkes. At this point in Melville's narrative, the pain in Tommo's leg has mysteriously returned, indicating that the infection might be permanently disabling unless outside medical attention is sought; it may also indicate that the anxieties newly aroused by the Typees' desire to see him tattooed include a reminder of his alien Western heritage of having potentially sinful bodily "members." Even more upsetting, Tommo's eye-opening witness of Typee depravity occurs in two phases, both of which may be obliquely associated with the Fall.

The first event that causes Tommo alarm is his discovery that three mysterious packages wrapped in tappa hanging over his head from the ridge pole of Marheyo's house were in fact preserved human heads. Tommo had earlier noted without comment that "heads of enemies killed in battle are invariably preserved and hung up as trophies in the house of the conqueror" (194). In the past, Tommo had asked to see the three packages that hung over his head but had been refused, even though he had previously been allowed to see some of the natives examining the contents of other suspended packages. On this occasion, Tommo forces his way into the circle examining the three packages and fleetingly sees three preserved human heads—one of which is "that of a white man" (233)—before the natives cover them up, explaining that these were Happar warriors slain in battle. It should be noted here that it is Tommo's irrepressible, Adam-like *libido sciendi*, or desire for knowledge, that leads to his discovery of the heads, which hang from the ridge pole of Marheyo's house like the fruit of the tree

of good and evil (ironically, this "fruit," unlike the fruit in Eden, is utterly repulsive to the sight). The discovery of the white man's head causes Tommo's imagination to run rampant with speculation about Toby's—or his own—possible murder and subjection to cannibalism, even though the Typee have treated him kindly and vowed they never ate human flesh.

Not having seen any evidence of cannibalism in the valley so far, Tommo hopes that if it exists at all, it happens on rare occasions and that he will never see direct evidence of it. Yet only a week after his discovery of the three heads, Tommo makes an even more shattering discovery of signs of cannibalism among the Typees. While lounging in the Ti, Tommo hears a war-alarm, followed by an engagement against invading Happars. The bodies of three slain enemy wrapped in leaves and suspended from a pole carried by two men then appear. Tommo is encouraged by Kory-Kory to leave the scene, but he wants to remain; however, the ferocious-looking and now wounded warrior Mow-Mow insists that he immediately depart. The next day Tommo hears drumming and learns that a feast is taking place, but only for the chiefs and priests of the valley. On the third day, everything seems to have returned to normal, although Tommo's suspicions have been aroused and as he walks in the Ti he "observed a curiously carved vessel of wood, of considerable size, with a cover placed over it, of the same material" (238). This carved tree trunk, like the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Eden, yields the ultimate revelation when Tommo looks under the cover and sees "the disordered members of a human skeleton, the bones still fresh with moisture, and with particles of flesh clinging to them here and there!" (238). Told that this is the remains of a pig, Tommo pretends to acquiesce, but his discovery confirms his previous suspicions and his determination to leave this newly fallen paradise.

Following his failure to secretly slip out of his residence at night in order to escape to a neighboring valley, Tommo is eventually excited by the news that Toby has possibly returned to the Typee Valley by sea, and he is allowed to be carried a few miles towards the coast. Yet even

though the rumor turns out to be false, Tommo in desperation painfully hobbles part of the remaining distance towards the beach before his surrogate father, Marheyo, sympathetically pronouncing the words "home" and "mother," which Tommo has taught him, tells his son to carry his charge. At the beach, he discovers an English whaleboat manned by Polynesians, including a Hawaiian whom he recognizes from the *Dolly's* first arrival at Nukuheva and who is prepared to barter for Tommo's release—with cotton cloth, gunpowder, and a musket—in order to augment the crew of a nearby Australian whaler. In a dramatic scene worthy of James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking novels, Tommo then narrates his harrowing escape from the "savages." In keeping with his initial symbolic identity as a Miltonic serpent entering the Typee Valley, moreover, Tommo's violent exit is effecuated by actions that suggest he is inflicting his own symbolic Fall on the Typees. Thus, the divided opinion among the tribe regarding his fate results in fierce arguments and then open violence ("blows were struck, wounds were given, and blood flowed" [250]), an anomalous breakdown of the normally peaceful tribal relations that Tommo had previously noted. Then, after Tommo is able to make his way through the water into the waiting whaleboat, the latter is threatened by a group of Typee warriors who throw their spears at the departing boat and then swim out to intercept it. Only the one-eyed warrior Mow-Mow gets close enough to threaten the boat, and Tommo attacks him with the boat-hook, which "struck him just below the throat, and forced him downwards" (252), suggesting that Tommo has killed the most ferocious of Typee warriors. Even as a sympathetic Westerner, a complicit Tommo inadvertently brings sin and death to the inhabitants of the Typee paradise.

We have seen, then, that the paradise myth in *Typee* works on several levels. On the most basic, the Typee are depicted by the narrator as living in a secluded Polynesian Eden characterized by abundance, ease, beauty, and harmony. However, though an admirer of the Typee world, Tommo is also represented as an inadvertent violator of its primitive sanctity even as his experience there reveals the intellectual and moral

limits of Typee life. Yet the narrator is also a fierce defender of the Polynesian "savage" against the depredations of Western commerce and Christianity, which have revealed the West to be the relentless Titanic despoiler of this vulnerable Edenic world, inadvertently bringing about its tragic, and even genocidal, Fall. In Melville's intricate interweaving of various motifs of the Western paradise myth, we find many of the features that make *Typee*, and the astute young "man who lived among the cannibals," worthy of our closest critical attention.

Notes

1. The text used for the authoritative Northwestern-Newberry edition of *Typee*, which will be the edition cited in the present essay, is based on the second English edition, which kept the passages that were expurgated in the revised American edition and added "The Story of Toby" as a sequel. *Typee* is unique among Melville's novels in that a substantial, thirty-two-page portion of the manuscript has survived, discovered in 1983 in a trunk of Melville family papers in Gansevoort, New York. For a full analysis of the manuscript and the composition of the novel, see Bryant. On Melville's life in relation to the composition and publication of *Typee*, see Parker chapters 11, 18–22; see also the "Historical Note" in *Typee* 277–301. It is traditional to refer to *Typee* as a novel even though its generic makeup is a combination of travel writing and romance.
2. For a selection of critical writings on the novel up to the early 1980s, see Stern; see also Weidman. Thompson's Introduction to *Melville in the Marquesas* provides a selective review of criticism from 1985 through 2005. For more recent approaches, see the essays on *Typee* in Bannum, Kelley, and Sten. On *Typee* as a form of travel literature, see Gilroy. On the continuing controversy over how much of *Typee* is true to the author's experience on Nukuheva, see the essays in Thompson. On Melville's sources in *Typee*, see Anderson chapters 5–8 and Bryant chapters 14 and 15. On the idea of the noble savage in the narrative, see Beauchamp and Scorza. On Marquesan sexuality and *Typee*, see Heath. On *Typee* and contemporary American ethnographic writing, see Herbert and Elliott. On *Typee* and Western colonialism and imperialism, see Harvey; Blair, Rowe, and Calder. For other studies examining the theme of paradise in *Typee*, see Stanton, Miller, Rutland, Babin, Young, and Gollin.
3. On the history of the Eden and paradise myth in Western culture, see Delumeau; on paradise motifs in European and American literature, see Daemmrich.
4. The narrator's assumed name of Tom—which he changes to Tommo for ease of Polynesian pronunciation—is a possible tribute to Melville's deceased cousin Thomas W. Melvill (1806–1844), who briefly visited the Typee Valley as a midshipman in the U.S. Navy in 1829 and was later buried on Lahaina, Hawaii.

following his early death as a crewman on a whaler. See Parker 70, 74–75, 80, 141, 208, 350, 381. Melville's youngest brother, eleven years his junior, was also named Thomas.

5. In the manuscript version of this passage, Melville deleted allusions to the Ottoman sultan and Sardanapalus (i.e., Assur-danin-pal, a ninth-century BCE mythical king of Assyria) that more closely identify the scene with the writings of Lord Byron, whose poetic romances set in the Near East frequently refer to the Ottoman Turks and who wrote a well-known play on the life of Sardanapalus. See the transcription of the manuscript in Bryant 420–23.

6. "But instead of Proposals for conquering that magnanimous Nation [i.e., the Houyhnhnms], I rather wish they were in a Capacity or Disposition to send a sufficient Number of their Inhabitants for civilizing *Europe*, by teaching us the first Principles of Honour, Justice, Truth, Temperance, public Spirit, Fortitude, Chastity, Friendship, Benevolence, and Fidelity" (Swift 274).

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