

Through an “Impenetrable Thicket”: Penetrating Depth and Alterity in Melville’s *Typee*

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INTRODUCTION

Herman Melville was preoccupied with the representation of depth and alterity throughout the 1850s. For example, *Moby-Dick* (1851) thematizes depth through the white whale that lies deep beneath the ocean’s surface, an inscrutable, enigmatic creature that infuriates Captain Ahab. Depth represents not only the physical condition of what lies beneath but also the epistemological perspective of those who dare look deeply. In his soliloquy in “The Quarter-Deck,” Captain Ahab famously casts doubt on what is visible by declaring, “All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. . . . If man will strike, strike through the mask!”¹ However, Starbuck, his first mate, argues against Ahab’s perception of the whale as a deeply symbolic figure: “I came here to hunt whales, not my commander’s vengeance.” To this Ahab retorts, “Starbuck; thou requirest a little lower layer” (163), exhorting him to abandon his superficial financial motive for hunting the whale and to perceive its existence as more significant. In his fatal fight with Moby Dick, Ahab sees the monster “[r]ising with his utmost velocity from the furthest depths” (557), and he ultimately dies by being thrown into the depths of the sea: “[Ahab] was shot out of the boat, ere the crew knew he was gone. Next instant, the heavy eye-splice in the rope’s final end

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flew out of the stark-empty tub, knocked down an oarsman, and smiting the sea, disappeared in its depths” (572). What lies deep beneath the surface gains more symbolic value by being hidden from view, at least for Ahab, as it leads him to the realm of the invisible. This theme of invisible depth informs Melville’s commitment to representing an inscrutable existence that eludes understanding. The paring of depth and inscrutable alterity is further explored in “Bartleby, the Scrivener” (1853), in which the eponymous character’s psychological interiority is given unfathomable depth. Bartleby’s private desk, which, to the narrator, signifies Bartleby’s secret interiority, is described as possessing “deep . . . recesses.”² To the narrator’s disappointment, he finds nothing in Bartleby’s desk but a small sum of money, which fails to explain his mysterious existence. Furthermore, with Babo’s “hive of subtlety” in “Benito Cereno” (1855) and Black Guinea’s “secret emotions” in *The Confidence-Man* (1857), Melville’s works in the 1850s continually foreground the inscrutability of the other through the spatial trope of depth, which serves to place the enigmatic other beyond facile understanding.³

Certainly, the representation of depth in Melville’s works has garnered critical attention, which, however, almost exclusively focuses on *Moby-Dick*. For example, in *Surface and Depth: The Quest for Legibility in American Culture*, Michael T. Gilmore discusses *Moby-Dick* in detail, with only brief references to other works by Melville. For Ahab, Gilmore argues, the whale represents “the ‘nameless,’ ‘hidden,’ ‘inscrutable’ thing that torments him.”⁴ Against the critical grain that traces the origin of Melville’s engagement with depth and alterity to *Moby-Dick*, in this essay I contend that Melville’s concern as such actually dates back as early as his first novel, *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life* (1846), albeit in a fashion distinct from his later elaborations, as it thematizes less the existence than the lack of depth. In his summation of criticism on *Typee*, Douglas Ivison observes that the novel has been interpreted as being “without the apparent depth of subtlety and complexity of his later works.”⁵ However, the lack of depth in this work points not to the superficiality of Tommo’s perspective but to his hidden, complicated psyche, which he fails to properly understand himself. Tommo is a protagonist who, unlike Ahab, does not risk looking deeply into the inscrutable other. As is well evidenced by Ahab’s tragic fate, the act of looking at, or reading into, something too deeply can jeopardize one’s life, as one becomes entangled with the other. Ahab reads too much into the white whale’s symbolism, so much so that he risks his life to capture it. However, Tommo, despite his strong desire to uncover deep secrets

about the Typees, especially their cannibalistic ritual, ultimately fails—or refuses—to look deeply, fearful that deep immersion in their culture might endanger his identity through assimilation into their cultural order. While Ahab's existential entanglement with the whale costs him his life, Tommo survives to flee the Typees, ultimately succeeding in boarding an Australian vessel.

Despite these apparent differences, *Typee* and *Moby-Dick* share a common theme: to look deeply into the other is to endanger and even annihilate one's existence. Melville scholarship has performed comparative studies of these two works on topics ranging from cannibalism to the sea-narrative genre; however, at least to my knowledge, few have attempted to draw an analogy between Tommo and Ahab.⁶ In presenting inverted mirror images with regard to their approach to the inscrutable other—the Typees for Tommo and Moby Dick for Ahab—one can find the prototype of Ahab's fatal deep search into the other in Tommo's engagement with the Typees. Thus, in this essay, I seek to situate *Typee* as the origin of Melville's focus on depth and alterity, a topic that continued to preoccupy the author in his later works of the 1850s. In connecting Melville's first novel and *Moby-Dick*, I also argue that *Typee*'s engagement with depth—or the lack thereof—sheds light on Tommo's suspended state between individuality and community, a topic that receives more complete articulation in Ahab's struggle for individuality. I maintain that Tommo's simultaneous attempt and refusal to fathom the depth of the other is rooted in his shifting attitude toward how to place himself within a community. The lack of depth in Tommo's perception reflects his unconscious refusal to commit himself to the Typee community so as to secure his individual self. Given that problematic individualism is pursued in the figure of Ahab, understanding Tommo's engagement with the topic through the lens of depth will enable us to identify continuity and consistency in Melville's literary preoccupations, from his first work through to his major achievement.

DEEP APPEARANCE

Typee begins with Tommo's plunge into the depths of the Typee valley. Tommo and Toby's flight from the *Dolly* starts by "plunging into the depths of an extensive grove," and their subsequent journey follows a series of repetitive descents into deep ravines.⁷ They throw themselves "down the depths of the ravine" (53), and their progress is stalled by "a rocky precipice of nearly a hundred feet in depth" (59). Shortly after their entry into the

Typee valley, which is marked by going through an “impenetrable thicket” (66), Tommo and Toby finally encounter the Typees, who remain elusive in the depths of the woods: “I . . . caught a glimpse of two figures partly hidden by the dense foliage; they were standing close together, and were perfectly motionless. They must have previously perceived us, and withdrawn into the depths of the wood to elude our observation” (68). Thus, as if enticed by a series of mysterious depths, Tommo and Toby make constant progress into the Typee valley, only to find themselves among fearsome cannibals. Tommo’s continual progress into the valley is driven by his curiosity to see what is hidden in its depth. Even before the *Dolly* touches the shores of Nukuheva, Tommo feels “an irresistible curiosity to see those islands,” which he associates with “strange visions of outlandish things,” such as “*heathenish rites and human sacrifices*” (5, italics in original).

Although Tommo’s entry into the Typee valley is the result of his penetration into its geographical and physical depths, on a perceptual level, his penetration remains superficial since he can only look at appearances once inside the Typee village. Deep in the Typee valley, he is allowed only a glimpse at the surface through what occurs in front of his eyes. The lack of depth in Tommo’s perception comes from the fact that he can only make inferences about the Typee culture from what he sees. Therefore, there are many expressions such as “seem to” and “appear to,” phrases that significantly qualify the validity of his anthropological meditations on the tribe: “There seemed to be no cares, griefs, troubles, or vexations, in all Typee. . . . But the continual happiness, which so far as I was able to judge appeared to prevail in the valley” (126–27); and “To all appearances there were no courts of law or equity” (200).⁸ Although the list could continue, these examples suffice to show how Tommo’s understanding of the Typees is based on his unfounded conjectures, despite his four-month sojourn among them. As he himself rightly notes, he “saw everything, but could comprehend nothing” (177). On a similar note, Tommo remarks on the tribe’s mysterious taboo that somehow dictates their actions: “Situated as I was in the Typee valley, I perceived every hour the effects of this all-controlling power, without in the least comprehending it” (221). What is rather surprising about these qualifications is that Tommo, at the time of writing his narrative, is acutely aware of the limits of his understanding of the Typees. While making several seemingly in-depth observations about their culture from a privileged-insider perspective, in the same gesture, Tommo carefully distances himself from it by underlining his status as a temporary outsider who can only make inferences based on

appearances. This rhetorical maneuver, through which he presents himself simultaneously as both an insider and outsider to the Typee culture, informs his unique position regarding the Typees.

Nowhere does the lack of depth in his observations become more evident than in the scenes pertaining to the Typees' supposed cannibalism. Every time Tommo sees a sign that seems to confirm this practice, he only gets a momentary glimpse, significantly limiting the validity of his view. While reposing at Marheyo's household, Tommo's curiosity is piqued by "three packages hanging very nearly over the place" where he lies (232). One day, when entering the household, Tommo happens to see "the mysterious packages . . . under inspection" by Marheyo, Kory-Kory, and several other natives. Possessed by "an uncontrollable desire to penetrate the secret," Tommo "forced [his] way into the midst of the circle, and just caught a glimpse of three human heads, which others of the party were hurriedly enveloping in the coverings from which they had been taken" (232). To his horror, among the three human heads, one was "that of a white man." Tommo states, "Although it had been quickly removed from my sight, still the glimpse I had of it was enough to convince me that I could not be mistaken" (233). Shortly thereafter, the Typee warriors return home triumphantly after a bloody fight with the Harpars, their neighboring enemies. Among them, Tommo sees "four men, one preceding the other at regular intervals of eight or ten feet, with poles of a corresponding length, extended from shoulder to shoulder, to which were lashed with thongs of bark three long narrow bundles, carefully wrapped in ample coverings." What these men carry, Tommo suspects, are "the bodies of their slain enemies" (235). Ordered to be absent from what is going to occur to the slain bodies at the Ti, the chief Mehevi's dwelling, Tommo assumes that "the savages were about to celebrate some hideous rite in connection with their peculiar customs, and at which they were determined I should not be present" (236). After the feast seems to have ended, Tommo is allowed to visit the Ti again, where he finds a "curiously carved vessel of wood": "[P]rompted by a curiosity I could not repress, in passing it I raised one end of the cover. . . . But the slight glimpse sufficed; my eyes fell upon the distorted members of a human skeleton." To allay his suspicions, Kory-Kory exclaims: "'Puarkee! puarkee!' (Pig, pig)" (238).

While pretending to accept Kory-Kory's explanation, Tommo remains convinced he has seen evidence of the tribe's practice of cannibalism, a fact that horrifies him because he could be a victim of their feast on any day. However, it still holds true that he does not *really* know the nature of what

he has seen. Again, his judgment has to come with some qualifications: “Everything, in short, strengthened my suspicions with regard to the nature of the festival they were now celebrating; and which amounted *almost to a certainty*” (237, italics added). Although he says that his glimpse “suffices” to convince him of the tribe’s cannibalistic feast, his momentary glimpse of the skeletons does not fully confirm his conjectures. Given the repeated use of the word “glimpse” here and elsewhere in the narrative, the novel’s subtitle—*A Peep at Polynesian Life*—is telling; what it offers is not a peep *into* Polynesian life but only a peep *at* it, suggesting that Tommo’s observations about the Typee culture touch only the surface. In contrast to Melville’s other works concerned with the depth of the other, *Typee* seems to be more concerned with the lack of depth rather than with its existence. Almost everything is exposed—albeit momentarily—before Tommo’s eyes; however, he cannot decode the meaning beneath the visible surface.

The Typees’ careful, strenuous endeavor to hide their cannibalism from Tommo’s view demonstrates that they are cognizant of what Tommo thinks and fears about the peculiarity of their customs, signaling a highly sophisticated self-awareness about their own culture. An important contrast emerges here: the Typees are able to read Tommo, yet he cannot read them. From his first entrance into the community, Tommo’s bare white face becomes the object of the Typees’ gaze: “Never before had I been subjected to so strange and steady a glance; it revealed nothing of the mind of the savage, but it appeared to be reading my own” (71). Becoming a naked text to be read, Tommo feels objectified in the eyes of the natives, finding himself in an asymmetrical relationship between the reader (Mehevi and the Typees) and the text (Tommo).⁹ In contrast to the legibility of Tommo’s face, the tribe’s tattooed faces present illegible inscrutability for him. Kory-Kory’s tattooed face, for example, reminds him of “those unhappy wretches whom [he has] sometimes observed gazing out sentimentally from behind the grated bars of a prison window” (83). Placed beyond the “grated bars,” the Typees’ faces pose an unreadable enigma and alterity to Tommo.

Although Tommo’s observations remain on the visible surface, this is not to say that appearance is not important in this novel. At a later stage in his sojourn in the Typee valley, Tommo begins to conform to their clothing customs: “I was consequently obliged to assume the Typee costume, a little altered, however, to suit my own views of propriety” (121). Later, in his preparation for a village festival, he makes further efforts to appear like a Typee native: “I ought myself perhaps to be taking some little pains with my appearance. . . . I determined to do all that lay in my power; and

knowing that I could not delight the savages more than by conforming to their style of dress" (161). While showing his willingness to conform to their appearance, Tommo displays a strong objection to being tattooed: "I should be disfigured in such a manner as never more to have the *face* to return to my countrymen, even should an opportunity offer" (219, italics in original). To Tommo, there is a significant difference between clothes and tattoos. For one, clothes can easily be worn or taken off, while a tattoo, once inscribed upon one's skin, leaves an "indelible impression" (218), as Tommo himself puts it.¹⁰ If there are two modes of appearance, clothes represent the "surface appearance," while a tattoo is what might be termed "deep appearance," in that the former is temporary and the latter is permanent. This temporal difference matters for Tommo, who constantly tinkers with the idea of returning to his home country if a chance is offered to him in the future.

In ways that prefigure Melville's emphasis on Moby Dick as residing deep beneath the surface, Tommo tries to fathom the depth of the Typees, only to find doing so to be impossible. In that sense, Tommo resembles Ahab, who is both fascinated and repulsed by the unfathomable, inscrutable existence that lies beneath the surface. Tommo wonders, "Might it not be that beneath these fair appearances the islanders covered some perfidious design?" (76). However, the significant difference between the two characters lies in their willingness to risk losing oneself to capture the inscrutable other. Despite the great hospitality he receives from the Typees, Tommo remains fearful of "death which, under all these smiling appearances, might yet menace" him (97). Tommo's simultaneous fear and curiosity about the Typees derive from his inability to see beneath appearances. He fears them because he cannot see enough, yet he also desires to see what is hidden because it is invisible. Regarding the suspected practice of cannibalism, Tommo notes that he is gripped by "fearful curiosity" (236), a phrase that encapsulates his contradictory feelings of attraction and aversion.

PENETRATING THE DEPTH

Having examined Tommo's inability to fathom the depth of the Typee community so far, it would be worth asking whether this is attributable solely to the Typees' unwillingness to reveal their secrets to him. The key to this question seems to be offered by the word "penetrate," which permeates the text. Tommo's foray into the Typee valley and his inquisitive curiosity

about the Typees' lives are often described with the verb "penetrate": "[W]e must penetrate to the bottom of every yawning gulf, and scale in succession every one of the eminences before us" (53); and "[I]t was with difficulty I could bring myself to believe that we had ever penetrated the black and yawning chasm" (54). Finally arriving at the opening of the Typee valley, Tommo and Toby's eyes are arrested by "[a]n almost impenetrable thicket [that] extended from side to side" (66). Undaunted by the difficult course, they "manfully" (67) penetrate the thicket to enter the valley. After entering the village, Tommo proudly notes, "I have no doubt that we were the first white men who ever penetrated thus far back into their territories" (74). The verb is also employed figuratively in the sense of "understanding": "But there was a singular expression he [Kory-Kory] made use of at the time, enforced as singular a gesture, the meaning of which I would have given much to penetrate" (173). Finally, the verb indicates Tommo's inquisitiveness regarding the tribe's secret about cannibalism. As quoted earlier, possessed by "an uncontrollable desire to *penetrate the secret*," Tommo "forced [his] way into the midst of the circle, and just caught a glimpse of three human heads" (232, italics added). Thus, going deeper into the Typees' hidden community requires Tommo's strenuous, forceful movement—or penetration—into the "impenetrable thicket," both geographically and figuratively. By going through an "impenetrable thicket," Tommo makes a cultural penetration into the Typee community, which he argues has remained intact from the pernicious influence of outside European forces.¹¹ Indeed, from the very beginning of their flight from the *Dolly*, Tommo and Toby's progress is obstructed by a "thicket of canes," the passage through which requires their "violent exercise" (37, 38).

Importantly, the act of penetration has a strong sexual connotation of "[t]he insertion of the penis, or a penis-like object, into the vagina or anus in copulation or another sexual act."¹² Tommo's failure to penetrate the secret and mystery of the Typees, I argue, is linked with his unconscious refusal to sexually penetrate native women—Fayaway, among others, a beautiful girl with whom Tommo resides in old Marheyo's household. One can assume that the Typee community places beautiful Fayaway near Tommo for his sexual satisfaction. Tommo describes in detail his sexual attraction to this "beauteous nymph" (85) by dwelling on her physical appearance: "Her full lips, when parted with a smile, disclosed teeth of a dazzling whiteness; and when her rosy mouth opened with a burst of merriment, they looked like the milk-white seeds of the 'arta,' a fruit of the valley, which, when cleft in twain, shows them reposing in rows on either side, imbedded in the red

and juicy pulp" (85); and "The skin of this young creature, from continual ablutions and the use of mollifying ointments, was inconceivably smooth and soft" (86). After presenting Fayaway as sexual and sensual, Tommo concludes by noting, "Fayaway was indisputably the loveliest female I saw in Typee" (87). Despite the sexual attraction he feels toward this beautiful nymph, Tommo's relationship with Fayaway, as far as we can tell from his account, remains platonic, with no indication of intercourse. Although there are a few explicit references to other men's engagement in sexual acts in the narrative, we are never given an example of Tommo having sexual intercourse with Fayaway or any other native woman. Tommo, it seems, carefully and somewhat mysteriously distances himself from the topic, remaining only an observer of others' intercourse throughout the text. When the ship enters the harbor of Nukuheva, he notes beautiful native girls welcoming them: "What a sight for us bachelor sailors! how avoid so dire a temptation? For who could think of tumbling these artless creatures overboard, when they had swam miles to welcome us?" (15). A little further on, however, Tommo detaches himself from an ensuing sexual debauchery by taking an observer position: "Our ship was now wholly given up to every species of riot and debauchery. Not the feeblest barrier was interposed between the unholy passions of the crew and their unlimited gratification. The grossest licentiousness and the most shameful inebriety prevailed. . . . Alas for the poor savages when exposed to the influence of these polluting examples!" (15). Furthermore, inside the Typee village, Tommo acknowledges having seen Mehevi engaging in a sexual intercourse with a young woman and a man: "I sometimes beheld both him and the chief making love at the same time" (190).¹³

Despite these explicit accounts of intercourse in the text, it comes as a surprise that Tommo never implies any sexual act with Fayaway. Of course, the Victorian moral code in the mid-nineteenth century prohibits him from writing overtly sexual scenes; however, it remains remarkable that there is absolutely no mention, direct or indirect, of his sexual intercourse with native women. If he intentionally refrains from a sexual act with Fayaway, one could argue that Tommo's resistance might indicate his deep-seated fear—a fear that, if he copulates with Fayaway and impregnates her, then he will be wholly assimilated into the Typee community. Despite several strict taboos regarding the female sex, Mehevi, quite inexplicably, grants Tommo's request that Fayaway be seated in a canoe, which constitutes breaking a significant taboo for the tribe: "Fayaway's dispensation from this portion of the taboo was at length procured" (133). This exceptional

lifting of a taboo for Tommo and Fayaway can be seen as the community's strong interest in furthering the couple's bond. In other words, Fayaway's very existence near Tommo conveys a silent message from the Typees, encouraging him to join their community by creating a kinship tie with the native woman. The community's wish has been evident since Tommo's entry into the village as, in their first encounter, Mehevi names the narrator "Tommo," which, John Samson observes, is "a Marquesan verb signifying 'to enter into, to adapt well to.'"¹⁴ Thus, Tommo's private relationship with Fayaway inevitably becomes charged with public and communal meaning in the eyes of the Typees.

Tommo's leg ailment has been interpreted as his possible impotence. Leo Marx, for example, argues that "Tommo's illness strongly suggests a conflict involving sexual guilt, repression, and impotence. It 'nearly unmanned me,' he says of the pain in his leg."¹⁵ Indeed, he notes twice that he is "unmanned" (46, 232). Particularly, in the second case, he links his loss of masculinity with his lame leg: "[T]he painful malady . . . began again to show itself, and with symptoms as violent as ever. This added calamity nearly unmanned me" (231–32). Building on the traditional reading of Tommo's disabled leg as a sign of his sexual impotence, I would further interpret it as his unconscious refusal to enter deep into Fayaway's vagina or into kinship ties with the Typees, the mode of relationship that would be most enduring and, therefore, the most perilous for Tommo. On the practice of marriage in the Typee community, Tommo notes: "On the whole wedlock, as known among these Typees, seems to be of a more distinct and *enduring* nature than is usually the case with barbarous people. A baneful promiscuous intercourse of the sexes is hereby avoided, and virtue, without being clamorously invoked, is, as it were, unconsciously practiced" (192, italics added). Lamenting "the absence of the marriage tie" (193) in Tahiti and the Sandwich Islands, Tommo emphasizes the existence of marriage ties in the Typees. Wedlock, if it ever were to happen with Fayaway due to sexual intercourse, would be perilously "enduring," just as a tattoo would leave an "indelible mark" on his face. Tommo originally fled the *Dolly* to free himself from a contractual bonding with the ship. Now, among the cannibals, he finds himself on the verge of entering into another kind of bondage.¹⁶

Fayaway, however attractive to Tommo she may be, is still part of the Typee community. On this point, Wai-Chee Dimock offers a compelling argument: "Fayaway is united with a communal wholeness of which she is an inviolate part, and . . . the union also absorbs her, simplifies the contours

of her being, and makes her common, unexceptional. She is sufficiently individualized only to be merged with a communal whole, or rather, she is sufficiently individualized only to be used as an example."¹⁷ Since Tommo is most likely aware of the public meaning that Fayaway embodies, he cannot bring himself to copulate with her because to penetrate Fayaway would be tantamount to penetrating the Typee community so deeply that he would become irrevocably assimilated into it. Eman Mukattash agrees with Dimock, by arguing that Fayaway's body serves as an extension of "the communal body" of the Typees.¹⁸ The same can be said of Kory-Kory, who seems to Tommo "to be executing the orders of some other person with regard to" him (106). Thus, those who appear to be the most personally invested in Tommo's welfare, Fayaway and Kory-Kory, prove to be deindividualized members of the larger community.

This process of deindividuation—deprivation of one's individuality—is exactly what makes Tommo apprehensive about his prolonged life among the Typees. For Tommo, such existential violence materializes in the form of tattoos. If Tommo is hesitant about penetrating Fayaway, he is also confronted with fear of being penetrated by a tattoo. As noted earlier, Tommo displays a strong aversion to being tattooed on his face, which can be interpreted as another example of his refusal to be permanently incorporated into the community. On a more sexual note, Daneen Wardrop argues that tattooing in *Typee* signifies a kind of sexual penetration: "Tommo and Kory-Kory came upon the scene of tattooing unexpectedly, and it bears a strong resemblance to a scene of rape."¹⁹ Indeed, the tattooing scene, which graphically describes the physical pain of the tattooed, is similar to that of rape: "On entering the thicket I witnessed for the first time the operation of tattooing as performed by these islanders. I beheld a man extended flat upon his back on the ground, and, despite the forced composure of his countenance, it was evident that he was suffering agony. His tormentor bent over him, working away for all the world like a stone-cutter with mallet and chisel" (217). With phallic images such as "mallet and chisel," Karky, the tattoo artist, begins to threaten Tommo's hitherto impenetrable self. At this point, Tommo is given a choice: to go deeper into the secret of the Typees, he will need to become part of—or inscribed into—the community. Ironically, it is only when his self is threatened that he becomes aware of his sense of belonging to the civilized Western world. However, as we shall see in what follows, this awareness does not bring Tommo a comforting sense of belonging because he cannot feel a real sense of belonging to that community either.

SUSPENDED BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY

Tommo's refusal to enter into—or penetrate—the Typee community is driven by his strong sense of singular individuality, a distinct identity as a cultural other among the Typees. For Tommo, his singular identity among the Typees is a double-edged sword. While stimulating the tribe's desire to liquidate his uniqueness in order to assimilate him into the community, Tommo's singularity also encourages them to confer special kindness on him, attention that he greatly enjoys as a privilege. Tommo's unique identity, however, becomes threatened with the advent of Marnoo, another taboo character who distinguishes himself from other natives. Watching Marnoo cordially welcomed by the Typees, Tommo cannot contain his jealousy: "When I observed the striking devotion of the natives to him, and their temporary withdrawal of all attention from myself, I felt not a little piqued. The glory of Tommo is departed, thought I, and the sooner he removes from the valley the better" (137). Here Tommo admits to having delighted in being recognized as a distinct individual among the tribe, which can be secured as long as he refuses to be assimilated into their culture. Tommo constantly finds himself experiencing a tension between individuality and community. In this vein, Dimock persuasively argues that Tommo's residence in the Typee community threatens to nullify his individual self: "If the harmonious community smothers all differences (and all identities), the consequences are worked out in two distinct, but distinctly related ways, in the twin practices of cannibalism and hospitality. . . . The unifying (and depersonalizing) force that holds the community together becomes cannibalism when it is literalized, when it manifests itself in a physical form."²⁰ Thus, the Typees' strong communal bond poses a grave threat to what John Samson calls "Tommo's intransigent individualism."²¹

What complicates the matter for Tommo is that, while he longs to remain an individual free from communal imperatives, he also yearns for a community that welcomes him. Despite his strong will to maintain his individuality that defies the unifying force of the community, Tommo's independent identity paradoxically depends on his sense of belonging to some kind of a community.²² For example, several times in the narrative, Tommo identifies himself as an American par excellence. When he is threatened by Karky, he notes: "I should be disfigured in such a manner as never more to have the *face* to return to my countrymen, even should an opportunity offer" (219, italics in original). Or, he invokes the collective, even patriotic, "we": "We American sailors pride ourselves

upon our straight clean spars" (134). His self-identification as an American notwithstanding, he also distances himself from this identity by constantly rebuking American colonization of the Sandwich Islands: "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" (195). In severely critiquing his native country, he also invokes other crimes committed by the state toward Native Americans: "The Anglo-Saxon hive 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). In stating this, Tommo admits his culpability in being part of the "Anglo-Saxon hive" that has brutally dealt with not only the Polynesian natives but also Native Americans.²³ In the same gesture, therefore, his writing registers his otherness both from the Typees and Americans. The peculiarity of Tommo's identity is that he can only define himself as being "not somebody." He is not fully a Typee, yet he is not fully an American either, as he cannot morally accept the nation's barbarous acts toward the Sandwich Islands. What ultimately remains after subtracting much from his sense of self is an undefined, unrooted solitary individual who hungers to belong to a satisfying form of community.

Tommo's unfulfilled yearning for communal bonds finds an emotional expression through his sense of alienation that intensifies after Toby leaves him alone among the Typees: "[Fayaway's] manner convinced me that she deeply compassionated my situation, as being removed from my country and friends. . . . [S]he appeared to be conscious there were ties rudely severed, which had once bound us to our homes. . . . [Toby] has gone, and has left me to combat alone all the dangers" (108–09); and "There was no one with whom I could freely converse; no one to whom I could communicate my thoughts; no one who could sympathize with my sufferings. . . . I was left alone" (231). Tommo's fear of solitude is clear from the very beginning of his flight, as he chooses to go with a companion rather than alone: "[W]hy should I not have some comrade with me to divide its dangers and alleviate its hardships? Perhaps I might be obliged to lie concealed among the mountains for weeks. In such an event what a solace would a companion be!" (33). In selecting Toby, Tommo further suggests he has felt alienated from the ship community: "Toby, like myself, had evidently moved in a different sphere of life. . . . He was one of that class of rovers you sometimes meet at sea, who never reveal their origin, never allude to home" (32).

For the lone-hearted Tommo, old Marheyo's household seems to function

as a surrogate family, bringing him emotional comfort: “Marheyo was a most paternal and warm-hearted old fellow, and in this particular not a little resembled his son Kory-Kory. The mother of the latter was the mistress of the family, and a notable housewife, and a most industrious old lady she was” (84). Furthermore, after Tommo repairs Marheyo’s clothes, the latter acts like a father toward him: “The repairs completed, old Marheyo gave me a paternal hug” (121). However, despite the care and warmth they give him, this pseudo-family never becomes a real family to Tommo, who perceives Kory-Kory as his servitor, not as his brother, and Fayaway as a sexualized object, creating an unbridgeable psychological distance from them. Furthermore, this small, affectionate family headed by Marheyo actually constitutes a smaller unit of a larger family headed by King Mehevi. John Samson compellingly argues that “the whole Typee society is a family under the patriarchal rule of Mehevi.”²⁴ However caring and devoted they might be, this family is ultimately part of the larger system of the Typee “family,” which Mehevi rules and which threatens to devour Tommo’s individuality. As Tommo himself observes, “The natives appeared to form one household, whose members were bound together by the ties of strong affection” (204).

Only a handful of critics have noted Tommo’s sense of solitude. James L. Babin offers an astute argument that one reason why Tommo jumps ship is “his solitude among the crew; but in the silent nature he returns to, he becomes acutely aware of his aloneness, and his spiritual solitude becomes finally unbearable.”²⁵ Unable to feel at home in the Christian civilized world, Tommo finally finds himself affectionately welcomed by the Typees. Tommo is thus given a choice between assimilating into a community that welcomes him or returning to his country, which he vehemently criticizes in his narrative. Tommo’s alienation among the Typees can be considered to be self-imposed, as his struggle to maintain his individual identity further deepens his isolation within the community. Tommo is confronted with a dilemma, in which if he forfeits his sense of identity and joins the Typee family, his spiritual alienation will be lessened, yet this idea is as repulsive to him as it is tempting. Tommo’s refusal of depth, which we have examined in detail, is an indication of his resistance to surrendering his individuality to the Typee community, even at the cost of feeling intense alienation.

For Tommo, who is situated in such unrootedness, Marnoo, it seems, presents a possible career of becoming a liminal character.²⁶ In discussing *Typee*, Robert K. Martin sees a liminal character as Melville’s ideal mode of existence: “Neither pure native nor pure civilized white, Marnoo . . .

points to a union of the best of both worlds, black and white, male and female, classical and romantic."²⁷ However, the important point here is that Tommo ultimately does not choose to become a liminal character. He cannot be content with being somewhere between two opposite poles where he remains torn and suspended. Herein lies the Melvillean motif of suspension that does not allow for facile compromise. Discussing the tribe's practice of cannibalism, Tommo notes: "Truth, who loves to be centrally located, is again found between the two extremes; for cannibalism to a certain moderate extent is practised among several of the primitive tribes in the Pacific, but it is upon the bodies of slain enemies alone; and horrible and fearful as the custom is, immeasurably as it is to be abhorred and condemned, still I assert that those who indulge in it are in other respects humane and virtuous" (205). This embrace of eclecticism notwithstanding, the problem with Tommo is that he cannot settle in such middle ground. Unable to feel at home among the Typees, in Western civilization, or in the liminal space, Tommo is bound to find himself isolated, and *Typee* ends with leaving him as a lonely stranger who cannot feel a substantive sense of belonging to any community. Interestingly, the vessel that rescues Tommo in the end is Australian, not American (252), suggesting that the ending of this novel, which seems to result in Tommo's happy return to his home in America, instead shows otherwise; it ends by intimating that his uncertain quest for identity and community continues. If *Typee* leaves the reader with a sense that the ending of this narrative is unfinished, that comes from the fact that Tommo's yearning for community remains unfulfilled. Tommo is bound to keep floating on the surface of the sea as a lonely voyager, in search of a place where he can feel at home.

Several years after the publication of *Typee*, we see Tommo radically transformed and resuscitated in the figure of Captain Ahab who, unlike Tommo, dares look into the depth of the other at the expense of his life, and who, critics concur, embodies an extreme case of individualism.²⁸ By recreating a figure who is both fascinated and repulsed by the invisible depths, Melville continued to explore the intertwined themes of depth, alterity, and individualism in *Moby-Dick*. In a March 1849 letter to his friend Evert A. Duyckinck, which is famous for his diatribe against Ralph Waldo Emerson, Melville writes of what he calls "thought-divers": "I love all men who *dive*. Any fish can swim near the surface, but it takes a great whale to go down stairs five miles or more; & if he dont [*sic*] attain the bottom, why, all the lead in Galena can't fashion the plummet that will. I'm not talking of Mr Emerson now—but of the whole corps of thought-divers,

that have been diving & coming up again blood-shot eyes since the world began.”²⁹ Here, Melville glorifies thought-divers who take the risk of going down into the depths, while rebuking those who nonchalantly remain on the surface. Certainly, Tommo in *Typee* does not qualify as a thought-diver for Melville; however, it is worth emphasizing that Tommo remains on the surface precisely because he knows the dangers of diving deep. In *Moby-Dick*, Melville would undertake creating such a risk-taking diver in the form of Captain Ahab, which suggests continuity and development of his literary explorations initiated in his first novel.

Of course, there do exist important differences between the two novels—Melville’s debut novel and his tour de force—in terms of their engagement with the alterity of the other. Whereas *Typee* dramatizes Tommo’s encounter with the cultural other against which to define himself, *Moby-Dick* restages this encounter with the other on a more metaphysical, philosophical level by depicting the ways in which Ahab solipsistically finds himself mirrored in the white whale. Moby Dick for him emerges as the inscrutable other, which is a physical reality existing outside himself but whose symbolical entity is the product of his own monomaniac obsessions. “[Let] Ahab beware of Ahab; beware of thyself, old man” (475), Starbuck rightly points out. When Ahab looks into the depths of the sea for Moby Dick, he is actually looking at his self-image buried deep inside his psyche. Melville, beginning his career with *Typee*, would continue to explore the problematics of depth and alterity to suggest that an inscrutable other can be found not only deep outside oneself but also deep inside oneself.

NOTES

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¹ Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*, Northwestern-Newberry Edition of *The Writings of Herman Melville*, vol. 6, Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle, eds. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 164. Subsequent references appear parenthetically.

² Herman Melville, “Bartleby, the Scrivener,” in *The Piazza Tales and Other Prose Pieces: 1839–1860*, Northwestern-Newberry Edition of *The Writings of Herman Melville*, vol. 9, Harrison Hayford, Alma A. MacDougall, and G. Thomas Tanselle, eds. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1987), 28.

³ Herman Melville, "Benito Cereno," in *Piazza Tales*, 116; Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, Northwestern-Newberry Edition of *The Writings of Herman Melville*, vol. 10, Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle, eds. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1984), 11. In my published essays, I have explored the relationship between depth and alterity in Melville's works. See Yoshiaki Furui, "Bartleby's Closed Desk: Reading Melville against Affect," *Journal of American Studies* 53, no. 2 (2019): 353–71; "Transcending Distances: A Poetics of Acknowledgment in Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" *Canadian Review of American Studies* 44, no. 3 (2014): 450–70; and "'Secret Emotions': Disability in Public and Melville's *The Confidence-Man*," *Leviathan: A Journal of Melville Studies* 15, no. 2 (2013): 54–68.

⁴ Michael T. Gilmore, *Surface and Depth: The Quest for Legibility in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 93. For a more classic example, see Ralph Maud, "Archetypal Depth Criticism and Melville," *College English* 45, no. 7 (1983): 695–704.

⁵ Douglas Ivison, "'I Saw Everything but Could Comprehend Nothing': Melville's *Typee*, Travel Narrative, and Colonial Discourse," *ATQ* 16, no. 2 (2002): 115.

⁶ For a comparative study of these two works, see, e.g., Owen Elmore's "'Melville's *Typee* and *Moby Dick*," *Explicator* 65, no. 2 (2007): 85–88.

⁷ Herman Melville, *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life*, Northwestern-Newberry Edition of *The Writings of Herman Melville*, vol. 1, Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle, eds. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968): 36–37. Subsequent references appear parenthetically.

⁸ Other examples include: "as far as its results came under my observation" (130); "as far at least as I was enabled to judge from appearances" (187); and "every one seemed disposed to drown the sense . . . and seemed to enjoy" (194).

⁹ Katsunori Takeuchi cogently discusses how Tommo's status as a seeing subject comes to be transformed into an object that is seen by the *Typee* tribe. See Katsunori Takeuchi, *Melville bungaku niokeru engisuru shutai* [The performing subject in Herman Melville's works: Literary creation as spiritual/textual resurrection] (Tokyo: Takanashishobo, 2020), 126.

¹⁰ For discussions of tattooing in *Typee*, see John Alberti, "Cultural Relativism and Melville's *Typee*: Man in the State of Culture," *ESQ* 36, no. 4 (1990): 332; Jason Berger, *Antebellum at Sea: Maritime Fantasies in Nineteenth-Century America* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 101; Michael C. Berthold, "'Portentous Somethings': Melville's *Typee* and the Language of Captivity," *New England Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (1987): 563; Mitchell Breitweiser, "False Sympathy in Melville's *Typee*," *American Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (1982): 412; Justin D. Edwards, "Melville's Peep-Show: Sexual and Textual Cruises in *Typee*," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 30, no. 2 (1999): 70; S. X. Goudie, "Fabricating Ideology: Clothing, Culture, and Colonialism in Melville's *Typee*," *Criticism* 40, no. 2 (1998): 222; and Daneen Wardrop, "The Signifier and the Tattoo: Inscribing the Uninscribed and the Forces of Colonization in Melville's *Typee*," *ESQ* 47, no. 2 (2001): 135–61.

¹¹ On the tribe's intercourse with Europeans, Tommo observes: "The intercourse occurring with Europeans being so restricted, no wonder that the inhabitants of the valley manifested so much curiosity with regard to us, appearing as we did among them under such singular circumstances. I have no doubt that we were the first white men who ever penetrated thus far back into their territories, or at least the first who had ever descended from the head of the vale" (74).

¹² *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "penetrate."

¹³ On Mehevi's sexual act, Natasha Hurley offers a detailed analysis. Natasha Hurley, *Circulating Queerness: Before the Gay and Lesbian Novel* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 71.

¹⁴ John Samson, "The Dynamics of History and Fiction in Melville's *Typee*," *American Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (1984): 281.

¹⁵ Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 284.

¹⁶ On his contract with the whaling ship, Tommo notes: "When I entered on board the Dolly, I signed as a matter of course the ship's articles, thereby voluntarily engaging and legally binding myself to serve in a certain capacity for the period of the voyage" (20).

¹⁷ Wai-Chee Dimock, "*Typee*: Melville's Critique of Community," *ESQ* 30, no. 1 (1984): 32.

¹⁸ Eman Mukattash, "The Democratic Vistas of the Body: Re-Reading the Body in Herman Melville's *Typee*," *Journal of Language, Literature and Culture* 62, no. 3 (2015): 167.

¹⁹ Wardrop, "Signifier and Tattoo," 141.

²⁰ Dimock, "*Typee*: Melville's Critique," 35.

²¹ Samson, "Dynamics of History," 287.

²² Thomas P. Joswick compellingly argues that "Tommo's journey into the center of the island is precipitated by an impulse toward community," identifying his yearning for "a home that could provide the satisfaction of mutual bonds, respect, and harmony." Thomas P. Joswick, "'Typee': The Quest for Origin," *Criticism* 17, no. 4 (1975): 338.

²³ For an insightful discussion about Tommo's sense of guilt about the violence that the United States inflicted on Native Americans, see Yukiko Oshima, *Melville bungaku ni hisomu senjyumin: Fukushu no rensa ka fukuin ka* [The indigenous in Herman Melville's works: Cyclical revenge or gospel] (Tokyo: Sairyusha, 2017), 47.

²⁴ John Samson's argument is significant in implying the absence of Tommo's sexual act with Fayaway: "Melville himself is a sharp contrast to his narrator: the frequency with which he presents sexual innuendoes, metaphors, and situations shows his sly delight in sexuality. Tommo, on the other hand, is always oblivious to Melville's metaphors. . . . In sexual situations, though, Tommo is more than oblivious." Samson, "Dynamics of History," 288.

²⁵ James L. Babin, "Melville and the Deformation of Being from *Typee* to *Leviathan*," *Southern Review* 7, no. 1 (1971): 94. John Alberti also argues that "Tommo . . . links the linguistic alienation he feels with spiritual alienation and thus implies that sympathy depends more on a shared language." Alberti, "Cultural Relativism and Melville's *Typee*," 340.

²⁶ Earlier in the narrative, there appears another liminal character, "a genuine South-Sea Vagabond" whom Tommo meets when entering the Nukuheva harbor: "[O]ur eccentric friend had been a lieutenant in the English navy; but having disgraced his flag by some criminal conduct in one of the principal ports on the main, he had deserted his ship, and spent many years wandering among the islands of the Pacific" (13).

²⁷ Robert K. Martin, *Hero, Captain, and Stranger: Male Friendship, Social Critique, and Literary Form in the Sea Novels of Herman Melville* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 34.

²⁸ For discussions on Ahab's individualism, see Winfried Fluck, "Cultures of Criticism: Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Expressive Individualism, and the New Historicism," *REAL: Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature* 11 (1995): 211; and Robert N. Bellah, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 144.

²⁹ Herman Melville, *Correspondence*, Northwestern-Newberry Edition of *The Writings of Herman Melville*, vol. 14, Lynn Horth, ed. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 121 (italics in original).