

# Plagiarism in *Typee*: A Peep at Herman Melville's Lifting from Travel Narratives

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## ABSTRACT

*Herman Melville's first book Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life During a Four Months' Residence in the Valley of the Marquesas (1846) made him famous and along with his next narrative Omoo (1847) he maintained an audience both in England and the United States, even though both books were controversial. In Typee, the combination of his plagiarism of obscure travel narratives and his cheap attempts to sensationalize his brief visit on the island of Nuka Hiva with titillating imaginings of beautiful loose native women along with his melodramatic captivity narrative and the irrational fear of anthropophagy reveal, this paper will argue, that in Typee Melville wrote in the main sensational hackwork.*

## KEYWORDS

Herman Melville, cannibalism, autobiography, plagiarism, travel narrative, Marquesas Islands

## Introduction

In the nineteenth century, while American merchants traded extensively with India, China and Japan and, along with the burgeoning whaling industry for lamp oil, the shipping and sailing sphere attracted the attention of thousands of American, British French and even Russian companies and accordingly their respective governments. Fortunes were made in these international enterprises so military presence was also evident. Herman Melville came from a merchant and sailing family and in his youth he learned of his ancestors' achievements in the American Revolutionary War as well as international commerce. At the age of twenty-one, young Herman signed on a new whaling ship, the *Acushnet*, joining the thousands of sailors in the world working at sea in trading, naval and whaling ships in the heyday of the exploitation of the South Seas. His fiction is populated with characters of every nationality and race, echoing experiences he had over the five years he spent hunting whales, on a merchant ship as well as his short stint in the US Navy. The military, commercial and colonial interests combined with the missionary zeal of the time made this area of the South Seas intensely fascinating to the Anglo-American reading audience.

Today known as one of the most remarkable American novelists and short story writers of the 19th century whose prose writings have fascinated post-structuralists such as Jacques Derrida, J. Hillis Miller, Maurice Blanchot and Gilles Deleuze, Melville's legendary masterpiece *Moby Dick* (1851) was recognized in his own lifetime as a literary failure. Instead it was Herman Melville's first book that made his reputation prominent in the mid-1840s, and along with *Omoo* his only book which remained in print throughout the nineteenth century, largely due to a sustained interest in colonial and missionary work among "savages."

In 1846, Herman Melville published this book in England and the United States to astounding success. Fully entitled *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life During a Four Months' Residence in the Valley of the Marquesas*, the book depicts Melville's experiences in the Pacific after deserting

a whaling ship anchored near the Marquesas Islands. On the largest island, Nuka Hiva, he lived in July 1842 among the cannibal Typees in Nuka Hiva. His romantic adventure story so captivated the public that initially it was suspected to be fiction. Melville, however, insisted that his story was an authentic autobiographical account. In his 'Preface' Melville writes of the "anxious desire to speak the unvarnished truth"<sup>1</sup> as if it were an outpouring of a flooded memory. This claim of his travel narrative's authenticity received little criticism once the character (named 'Toby' in the book) revealed himself as Richard Tobias Greene. Greene published a letter in a newspaper in Buffalo, New York, stating "I am happy to testify to the entire accuracy of the work so long as I was with Melville."<sup>2</sup> All criticism of the truthfulness of *Typee* was thus successfully silenced, and in his revised American edition in July 1846 Melville attached "The Story of Toby, A Sequel to *Typee*" to the narrative which subsequently became a bestselling book. Raymond Weaver and other early biographers of Melville took *Typee* as straight-up autobiography. Only eighty years later with the publication of Columbia University professor Charles Robert Anderson's *Melville in the South Seas* (1939) do we find out the extent to which both fantasy and plagiarism are evident in what is today regarded as a semi-autobiographical romance.

At first sight 'plagiarism' may seem to be too harsh a word. Most critics soften the charge of lifting against Melville. For instance, Carol Colatrella in her book-length study, states that Melville blends "semiautobiographical accounts of his adventures in the South Seas with commentary developed from careful reading of other published travel narratives."<sup>3</sup> Hershel Parker wittingly writes that Melville "had unoriginally cannibalized his source books and employed a second or third hand style."<sup>4</sup> Plagiarism, in *Oxford's Online Dictionary* is defined as "[to] take (the work or idea of someone else) and pass it off as one's own."<sup>5</sup> If the wording or ideas of someone else's publication or paper is used, it should also be cited, and the citation should accurately attribute the author. If it isn't, the idea and/or wording have been plagiarized. I wish to emphasize that Melville has sundry documented instances of plagiarism and therefore committed a literary crime.

A further point of investigation in this contribution is what direction his writing took in its representation of the native islanders when Melville was not plagiarizing and had not directly experienced or observed them but made up sections of the plot whole cloth. Edward Said points out that travel narratives "deliver the non-European world either for analysis and judgment or for satisfying the exotic tastes of European and North American audiences."<sup>6</sup>

The time that Melville resided in Nuka Hiva is interesting since many inhabitants were still relatively isolated from European influence though not so close in time anymore to first contact.

1 Herman Melville, *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life* (London: Penguin 1987), 34.

2 Richard Tobias Greene, "Letter to the Editor," *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser*, July 1, 1846. Cited in Charles Robert Anderson, *Melville in the South Seas* (New York: Columbia UP, 1939, reprinted 1963), 187.

3 Carol Colatrella, *Literature and Moral Reform: Melville and the Discipline of Reading* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 87.

4 Hershel Parker, "Aesthetic Implications of Authorial Excisions: Examples from Nathaniel Hawthorne, Mark Twain, and Stephen Crane," in *Editing Nineteenth Century Fiction*, ed. Jane Millgate (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1978), 114.

5 *Oxford's Online Dictionary*, [http://www.askoxford.com/concise\\_oed/plagiarize?view=uk](http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/plagiarize?view=uk), accessed May 14, 2017.

6 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), xviii.

Through his narrator “Tom” or “Tommo”<sup>7</sup> Melville conveys information about the culture and customs, the festivals and cuisine as well as the language, religion, medicine, housing, and the Typee practice of tattooing when relatively little literature except for a few obscure travel narratives by explorers, missionaries or naval officers existed. Parker notes that “as Tommo becomes more acclimatized to this society, so the factual element of the narrative becomes more prevalent.”<sup>8</sup>

Through extensive research of ship logs, Anderson discovered that Herman Melville and Richard Tobias Greene dissented the whaling ship *Acushnet* on July 9, 1842, and on August 9 Melville signed on to an Australian trading vessel, the *Lucy Ann*.<sup>9</sup> Thus, instead of the four months promulgated in the book’s subtitle, Melville resided in Nuka Hiva merely a month at most. Melville’s description of what is now called Anna Maria Bay, named Typee Bay in Melville’s narrative, as he first arrives, derivatively reuses the official narrative of the chaplain of a ship which visited Nuka Hiva twelve years earlier. Herman Melville was made familiar with this 1831 narrative entitled *A Visit to the South Seas*,<sup>10</sup> through his cousin Thomas Wilson Melville, a midshipman aboard the same naval vessel. This travel narrative, written by Charles S. Stewart, chronicles his visit and is conveyed using a comparable style, the same step-by-step description of the geography, botany, and uniquely-constructed housing of the natives overlooking the ocean shore from high above. Melville’s only imaginative contribution to this account he plagiarizes from Stewart consists of his exquisite narrative style that personalizes the memory of the scene so as to inveigle the reader. As Robert Johannes observes, “[B]efore *Typee*, travel writing concentrated on facts, observations and opinions, everything but the *picturesque*. Melville supplied the missing ingredient.”<sup>11</sup> For instance: “Very often when lost in admiration at its beauty, I have experienced a pang of regret that a scene so enchanting should be hidden from the world in these remote seas, and seldom meet the eyes of devoted lovers of nature.”<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, like most travel narratives, Melville here implicitly denies the gift of this aesthetic appreciation of natural beauty on the part of the Nuka Hiva natives.

## Travel Narrative Romance

In his romance, Melville’s narrator Tommo paints his anticipation of the islands before he arrives in the Marquesas, almost exactly as Georg H. von Langsdorff describes his anticipation before arrival. This Russian naturalist who long before Melville visited the islands in a famous expedition (a Russian national in spite of his German name), von Langsdorff visited the Marquesas Islands in 1804 for ten days. In his *Voyages and Travels* he records the visit of the natives on board his ship in a way remarkably similar to Melville’s description. Von Langsdorff describes experiences of the native hospitality well before he even stepped foot on the island:

7 Melville, *Typee*, 117.

8 Parker, “Aesthetic Implications of Authorial Excisions,” 109.

9 Charles Robert Anderson, *Melville in the South Seas* (New York: Columbia UP, 1939, reprinted 1963), 113.

10 Charles S. Stewart, *A Visit to the South Seas, in the U.S. Ship Vincennes, during the Years 1829 and 1830* [2 volumes] (New York, 1831).

11 Robert Johannes, *To the Halls of Montezuma: The Mexican War in the American Imagination* (New York: Oxford UP, 1985), 147.

12 Melville, *Typee*, 60.

A number of the islanders swam to the place where we were anchored, a distance of three miles. At first we could only see a shoal of black-haired heads just above the water; but in a short time we had the extraordinary spectacle presented us of some hundred men, women, girls and boys, all swimming about the ship, having in their hands cocoa-nuts, breadfruit, and bananas, which they had brought to sell. The young girls and women were not more clothed than the men, and were collected in even greater numbers [...] their oratory was illustrated with pantomimic gestures, by which we were sufficiently given to understand that they were making us the most liberal and unreserved offers of their charms. The men who were with them did not show the slightest symptoms of jealousy.

We are told by Captain Wilson, in an account of his missionary voyage to the South Sea, in the ship *Duff*, that an adventure of this kind happened to some visitors [...] “The knavish goats” he says, “were guilty of a great offence, with regard to the poor young maidens, for they would not leave them even the little clothing they had.”<sup>13</sup>

Hershel Parker believes that Melville had read this travel narrative by von Langsdorff as early as his teenage years, well before undertaking his first ocean voyage. Melville’s romance depicts the scene described in the first two paragraphs cited above the same way in Chapter Two of *Typee*. With respect to the third paragraph, Melville rather poignantly describes the behavior that Captain Wilson only condemns, i.e., the sailors and Typee sylphs engaged in a wild orgy. Initially Melville emphasized the beauty and childlike innocence of the young girls who boarded the ship and offered themselves to the *Acushnet* whaling sailors. Accordingly Melville ameliorates his narrative for his Victorian readership by moralizing the behavior of the sex-starved sailors:

Their appearance perfectly amazed me; their extreme youth, the light clear brown of their complexions, their delicate features, and inexpressibly graceful figures [...] The ship taken, we could not do otherwise than yield ourselves prisoners. These females are passionately fond of dancing and in the wild grace and spirit of the style excel everything that I have ever seen. The varied dances of the Marquesan girls are beautiful in the extreme, but there is an abandoned voluptuousness in their character [...] 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, with occasional and but short-lived interruptions [...] Unsophisticated and confiding, they are easily led into every vice.<sup>14</sup>

Suffice it to say that in reading von Langsdorff and then Melville’s arrival, one is easily convinced that Melville lifted and rewrote von Langsdorff’s narrative, but appended much more explicit and salacious details of the frequent orgies which von Langsdorff merely hints at through a third party. The Russian explorer’s text is not as purple as Melville’s prose, for on his arrival to Nuka Hiva, Melville employs the style characteristic of the travel narrative genre so popular in his time, describing a concatenation of adventures and emphasizing a Garden of Eden-like portrayal of ideal beauty.<sup>15</sup> Drawing copiously on the information from von Langsdorff’s description of natives swimming to the boat and offering themselves to the sailors, Melville again unctuously improves

13 Georg H. von Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels* (London, 1813), quoted in Anderson, *Melville in the South Seas*, 73.

14 Melville, *Typee*, 49–50.

15 T. Walker Herbert erroneously indicated that Melville parodied a similar scene in Chaplain Stewart’s travel narrative in which Stewart censured the morality of the native islanders and Melville reversed Stewart’s assumption by blaming the sailors. However, in this section of *Typee* it was clearly von Langsdorff’s narrative that Melville plagiarized from, not Stewart. Von Langsdorff also directs his criticism against the sailors, not the Marquesans. See Herbert, *Marquesan Encounters: Melville and the Meaning of Civilization* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 10–15.

the writing style. Otherwise, Melville plagiarized him in content, sentence by sentence, until the last titillating scene, which he calculated to be sensually captivating material for his Victorian readers. Andrew Delbanco argues that the sexually-stimulating properties of *Typee* are really what made the book so popular for the Anglo-American audience:

With its lubricous accounts of oil ribs and orgies, *Typee* gave the author a measure of fame and even attracted to him the nineteenth century equivalent of a rock star's groupies: "You dear creature," one woman beseeched him in a feverish fan letter, "I want to see you so amazingly."<sup>16</sup>

Ironically, for the male readership, Tommo "might be considered a precursor to the twentieth century sexual tourist" as Justin Edwards avers.<sup>17</sup> In Leon Howard's biography of Melville, grave doubts are raised about whether this orgy actually took place on Melville's whaler the *Acushnet* since "[...] squally weather precluded young women swimming out [...] Melville's account of the ship's reception was of his expectations rather than of the reality."<sup>18</sup>

In the great tradition of romanticism, Melville builds up suspense and melodrama by repeating persistently dark rumors of cannibalism among the natives of the Marquesas. His fears, along with those of his companion Toby, accompany the exciting tale of escape from the harsh treatment on the whaling ship, the *Acushnet*. All crew members knew all too well that a deserter's capture by shipmates meant that they would at least be put in irons and abused. In losing his way with Toby, forced to live on a few biscuits for a week while scrambling up and down the ridges and ravines of the interior of the island in out-and-out confusion, Tommo stirs the reader. In chapter 7, Toby and Tommo finally descended a precipice 300 hundred feet high by swinging themselves with prowess from vine to vine with frightening gaps between them and jumping off a cliff onto a treetop when the slope was too steep for them to make their way on foot. This great romantic adventure story with descriptions of death-defying feats during the journey seemed incredulous to many initial readers but contained no plagiarism.

The representation of the law-abiding nature and innate goodness of the natives is reminiscent of the Noble Savage myth in the romantic tradition of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Accordingly, Melville's writing assumes the fundamental superiority of the primitive over the civilized society. Tommo reports no quarrelling, stealing or jealousy of any kind, but a simple and uncomplicated life of leisure and a contented utopian community. The weal and communitarianism of the *Typees* was foremost, rather than the private commodity culture from which Tommo hails: "Polynesians were 'collectivists' rather than 'individualists' – they formed groups to carry out most activities, and their more valued possessions were corporately owned."<sup>19</sup>

Later when he arrives in Tahiti, he experiences personally the corrupting influence of European contact where the introduction of iron nails, looking glasses and cheap calico prints resulted in a native degeneration into covetousness. As Melville wrote most appositely early in his book, "Thrice happy are they who, inhabiting some yet undiscovered island in the midst of

16 Andrew Delbanco, *Melville: His Work and World* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 71.

17 Justin D. Edwards, "Melville's Peep-Show: Sexual and Textual Cruises in *Typee*," *ARIEL, a Review of International English Literature* 30, no. 2 (1999): 72.

18 Leon Howard, *Herman Melville. A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 49–50.

19 Douglass L. Oliver, *The Pacific Islands* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), 71.

the ocean, have never been brought into contaminating contact with the white man.”<sup>20</sup> Yet, his principal source about the native ethnology was not his own observations but William Ellis’s *Polynesian Researches* (1829).

Nuka Hiva gets aestheticized as a location of pleasure and spiritual liberation but as shall be noted in some detail in the conclusion of Melville’s narrative, this “paradise” again transforms into a prison, a place to escape from. Yet none of these transformations of Nuka Hiva’s status is plagiarized – rather it follows much of the structure of classic travel and captivity narratives.

A final aspect of the travel narrative genre is Tommo’s extravagant praise of the physical beauty of the natives. This follows a tradition made popular to the English-reading public by the renowned British explorer Captain James Cook and some others. Yet, as Anderson puts it,

The descriptions by earlier travel writers are so strikingly similar, even in phraseology [...] To European explorers, accustomed to the more Mongoloid aborigines of America and the more Negroid primitives of Melanesia, the discovery of the Polynesians came as a pleasant and even exciting surprise, for here at the end of the earth were Stone-Age savages who conformed closely to accepted European standards of beauty.<sup>21</sup>

A share of this attractive standard for Melville can be attributed to the “whiteness” which Tommo describes as a result of a process of “anoint[ing] themselves” with aker and papa plants.<sup>22</sup> This absorbing clarification of their light complexion, however, was extracted heavily from the aforementioned *Visit to the South Seas* by Chaplain Stewart in an example of what Edward Said calls “orientalist discourse,” the escapism into sexual fantasy, for Freud a cathexis and for Said a concupiscent literary discourse well established by earlier travel narrators.<sup>23</sup> Considering what a great publishing sensation *Typee* was, a good part of it was the sheer excitement and romantic elements which Melville replicated by combining the narratives of previous visitors to Nuka Hiva with his own embellished autobiography.

## Anthropophagy

The terror of being eaten by the natives is the most distressing dramatic threat sustaining the narrative of this book. The fourth day of Tommo’s escape from his ship, July 13, 1842, was dominated with the fear of the natives he and Toby has befriended. “Was it possible that, after all our vicissitudes, we were really in the terrible valley of Typee, and at the mercy of its inmates?”<sup>24</sup> Yet were Typee natives really cannibals?

One of the sources for Melville’s many instances of plagiarism, Captain David Porter of the U.S. Navy, who had spent six weeks at Nuka Hiva in 1813 while directing the military hostilities against the British during the War of 1812, wrote about cannibalism rather inconclusively in his travel narrative, *Journal of a Cruise Made to the Pacific Ocean* (1822) where Porter describes

20 Melville, *Typee*, 50.

21 Anderson, *Melville in the South Seas*, 122, 125.

22 Melville, *Typee*, 250.

23 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1988), 170.

24 Melville, *Typee*, 122.

witnessing the offering of slain enemies as sacrifices to their gods and the preservations of their skulls and bones as trophies, but that is all. During his two-week stay in Nuka Hiva, Stewart only reports the Typees admitting to eating the bodies of their arch-enemy the Happar as well as some of the prisoners taken in battle, but Chaplain Charles Stewart made no independent corroboration of this confession, nor did he attempt any.

The cannibal in *Typee*, however, was most likely a straw man arranged by Melville to be knocked down while he praises the ‘noble savage.’ Obviously Tommo was not eaten, nor does he personally witness Typee natives eating any enemy. Charles Anderson hesitantly reaches this conclusion without reliable substantiation:

the Marquesans, along with most of the other Polynesian nations, had practiced cannibalism as a religious ceremony on the bodies of slain enemies – and possibly on those of their relatives and chief people at death – with the purpose of wreaking vengeance and of acquiring the virtues of the deceased.<sup>25</sup>

Only near the conclusion of the narrative does Tommo provide inconclusive “evidence” of cannibalism. From hostilities with the cross-island rival tribe, the Happar, Tommo avers, the corpses of three killed enemies had been brought to the valley in triumph. Unusually, the Typees refused to let him witness the “cannibal banquets” which took place at the mortuary “Taboo Groves,” but two days afterward Tommo visited the scene, “prompted by a curiosity I could not repress,” [...] “my eyes fell upon the disordered members of a human skeleton, the bones still fresh with moisture, and with particles of flesh clinging to them here and there!”<sup>26</sup> An impressive amplification of Tommo’s horror follows, but to be sure, no convincing evidence of cannibalism is ever provided by Herman Melville nor witnessed personally by Tommo. In essence, Melville’s fake cannibal story is a rather pathetic representation of the “noble savage” but the fake story certainly offered a cheap thrill to his readers and aided in the sensational sales of his book. In his autumn 1846 journal after reading *Typee*, Henry David Thoreau takes “a swipe at Melville’s tendency to embellish the grotesqueness of the natives in order to heighten the sense of suspense and danger in his adventures.”<sup>27</sup>

## Observing vs. Plagiarizing Ethnological Data

All natives anointed their bodies with eka (Tommo’s “akar”) which not only whitened their skin color, but perfumed their bodies. They also ornamented themselves with flowers and necklaces of pandanus seed. The dress of the Typees was described as scant and simple, except for the chief Mehevi, who wore “drooping tail feathers of a tropical bird” and “enormous necklaces of boar’s tusks, polished like ivory [...] in his ears were two small and finely shaped sperm whale teeth.”<sup>28</sup> His son, named Kory-Kory in the narrative, fed Tommo and took care of his every need, including his injured leg.

25 Anderson, *Melville in the South Seas*, 106.

26 Melville, *Typee*, 315–316.

27 See Robert Sattelmeyer, “Thoreau and Melville’s *Typee*,” *American Literature* 52, no. 3 (November 1980): 466.

28 Melville, *Typee*, 124.

Special houses called “pi-pi” were erected by young men for feasts and festivals, as well as certain rites, such as tattooing. Tommo enthusiastically describes the “Feast of the Calabashes” and specifies the unique drums, dances and elaborately designed costumes celebrating the harvest festival. Melville was on the island just when the breadfruit harvest was at its most abundant.<sup>29</sup> The narrative is so thorough and here so original that it serves as his bona fides, convincing Anderson that Melville really must have lived for some time on the island among the natives, hence had not lifted or invented it all.

Melville describes the tattooing ornamentation incorrectly as a matter of indicating high birth or nobility. This proved inaccurate, although wealth certainly played a role, as the job of tattooist was a full-time employment and an art, and wealthier natives possessed the best works of art on their bodies. Melville repeats other previous reports about the tattoo art covering the entire body, decorated with, among other designs, birds and fish. Anderson comments on the details of the tattooing descriptions: “[von] Langsdorff parallels Melville not only in subject matter and even in specific phraseology, but also in half-a-dozen instances of identical misinformation. No better proof could be found of borrowing by one author from another than such a similarity of erroneous matter”<sup>30</sup> especially since the two writers lived separated geographically on opposite ends of the island and in point in time – Melville’s visit to Nuka Hiva took place some forty years after von Langsdorff’s visit.

In addition to these points in *Typee*, Anderson states that Melville appears to have not duplicated previously published travel narratives in his descriptions of food and its preparation. He describes food preparation in ways that were not published earlier. Moreover, he does not include much information published earlier about the rather elaborate and thrifty system of food storage and preservation. Tommo’s description of breadfruit, the variety of cooking procedures the Typee natives employ in preparing it, the variations of its taste and form, as for example:

- a soft pulp
- mixed with water as a drink (which Melville could not “endure”)
- as a delicious milky drink when mixed with coconut
- as a tart-tasting “caky substance” which is the result of baking in a stone oven
- as a pudding (eaten by hand)

In chapter 15 of *Typee* a thorough description of the native islanders’ cooking processes is provided by Melville.<sup>31</sup> As Anderson concludes,

His information is apparently that of an eyewitness, and it is in these more prosaic passages that one finds the most convincing evidence that he actually lived the life of a native among the Marquesans for some weeks at least [...] he seems to have been writing of the breadfruit from personal observation alone, contrary to his usual practice.<sup>32</sup>

29 Anderson, *Melville in the South Seas*, 164.

30 Anderson, *Melville in the South Seas*, 155.

31 Melville, *Typee*, 168–171.

32 Anderson, *Melville in the South Seas*, 144.

There were matters concerning the life of the Typees mentioned in Porter's reportorial narrative which Melville did not include. Stilt-walking, string games, and other leisure activities were rendered in the travel narrative by Porter. Also omitted from Melville's book were those aspects which might make the natives be seen to have a higher degree of civilization than the primitive narrative of Melville's romance could endure, such as Typee villages with regularly laid-out streets and the carefully cultivated breadfruit and coconut tree plantations. As George Woodcock observes in his "Introduction" to the Penguin edition of *Typee*, Melville has reduced "the Marquesans from a relatively sophisticated people, with a life based on agriculture and producing massive works of communal labour, to mere children of nature."<sup>33</sup>

With regard to religion of the inhabitants of Nuka Hiva, Melville made the mistake of culling from the accounts of Porter and Stewart, who happened to be wholly inaccurate in their interpretations, although the outward manifestations were correct. Two anthropologists, Robert Wood Williamson and Sir James George Frazer, quote with approval from Melville's multitude of religious explanations of "tapu," a great deal of which Melville plagiarized. Additionally, Melville altered some of the taboos to invigorate his romantic plot. For example, the restrictions on women were modified. In Nuka Hiva women were not permitted on canoes or allowed to eat with men. Yet Tommo claims that "Fayaway," his Typee lover, ate her meals with him. He acknowledges the taboo forbidding women on canoes, but claims that he persuaded the chief to allow his lover to join him.<sup>19</sup> In his study of the Typee, the eminent anthropologist E. S. Craighill Handy indicates the religious magnitude of the canoe (among other things, as the means of transportation of the dead to heaven), and shows the impossibility of Tommo "persuading" the chief to change this taboo. A change of perspective that distinguishes Melville's romance is, as Edgar Dryden puts it, his effort "to associate apparently unique primitive practices with accepted civilized modes of behavior."<sup>34</sup>

Melville cunningly dismisses the "savage" lifestyle at the end of *Typee* and accordingly reveals it as an unviable alternative to civilization, fated to annihilation. Much evidence of Melville's objection to the very lifestyle he lavishly praised earlier is to be found in chapter 34, his final chapter, which unlike all other chapters has no subtitles and is entitled simply "The Escape." It sensationally recites Tommo's violent flight: "[...] exerting all my strength I dashed the boat-hook at him [Mow-Mow, the athletic islander]: it struck him just below the throat, and forced him downwards [...] never shall I forget the ferocious expression of his countenance."<sup>35</sup> As Nicholas Lawrence puts it, "With this final image of the islanders, *Typee* aligns with the prevailing antebellum notions of the irreconcilable enmity between Anglo-Europeans and the aboriginal Other."<sup>36</sup> Greg Pollock goes a step further, claiming that "the cannibal as object of imperialism incarnates that animalized human [...] authorizing violence against whatever is animalized (notably non-Europeans)."<sup>37</sup>

33 Woodcock, George, "Introduction," in: Melville, *Typee*, 22.

34 Edgar A. Dryden, *Melville's Thematics of Form* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), 45.

35 Melville, *Typee*, 332.

36 Nicholas Lawrence, "[R]eaders who are sick at heart': Melville's *Typee* and the Expansion Controversy," *South Central Review* 26, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 63.

37 Greg Pollock, "The Cannibal-Animal Complex in Melville, Marx and Beyond," *HUMaNIMALIA. A Journal of Human/Animal Interface Studies* 2, no. 1 (Fall 2010): 14.

Even in this conclusion to the book, instead of the “unvarnished truth” of Tommo’s melodramatic escape from “cannibals,” Melville is described by one of his biographers Leon Howard:

[...] a chart based upon the French survey of Comptroller Bay in 1844 [...] provokes doubts concerning the melodramatic quality Melville introduced into his account of his departure: unless a band of barefooted savages dashed furiously over a mile of coral along a coast so rocky that for generations it had kept them separated from the neighboring Happers, they did not swim out from the headland to intercept their escaping prisoner [...] For all we know, the captive may have been told to go in peace.<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusion

Melville sternly condemned the work of missionaries on the islands as a pernicious force. As he sardonically put it, Islanders had been “civilized into draught horses and evangelized into beasts of burden.”<sup>39</sup> However, earlier in his romance Melville admits having no understanding of the theology of the islanders. Later he undoubtedly motivated the proselyting fervor of his evangelical readers: “In truth I regard the Typees as a back-slidden generation. They are sunk in religious sloth, and require a spiritual revival.”<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, Melville was condemned by those who supported the missionaries in the U.S. and England. However, as Arthur Stedman remarks, “It is a curious fact that [Melville’s writings] proved of the greatest value to outgoing missionaries on account of the [...] information contained in them with respect to the islanders.”<sup>41</sup>

The best-selling novelist and short story writer Jack London provides in his non-fiction sailing narrative, *The Cruise of the Snark* (1911), a bleak picture of the irrevocable loss of native population on the Marquesas as he witnessed it nearly 70 years later:

The Marquesas are perishing, and, to judge from conditions at Taiohae, the one thing that retards their destruction is the infusion of fresh blood. A pure Marquesan is a rarity [...] in their veins runs the blood of English, American, Dane, German, French, Corsican, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese [...] There are more races than there are persons, but it is a wreckage of races at best. Life faints and stumbles and gasps itself away. In Melville’s day the valley of Happer was peopled by a strong and warlike tribe. A generation later, it contained but two hundred persons. Today [...] all this strength and beauty has departed, and the valley of Typee is the abode of some dozen wretched creatures, afflicted by leprosy, elephantiasis, and tuberculosis.<sup>42</sup>

Those portentous warnings of the cruel influence of visitors on the natives and their culture are validated in Jack London’s visit less than 20 years after Melville’s death.

At the onset this paper confirms the plagiarism engaged in by Melville to indicate that Melville did not entirely compose, as he writes in the opening of his book, “matters just as they occurred,”<sup>43</sup> but that many portions of the text are apocryphal and, on these occasions, I conclude

38 Howard, *Herman Melville. A Biography*, 54.

39 Melville, *Typee*, 267.

40 Melville, *Typee*, 246.

41 Arthur Stedman, *Marquesan Melville*. Cited in *South Seas*, 465n.

42 Jack London, *The Cruise of the Snark* (New York: Sheridan House, 1996), 163, 170.

43 Melville, *Typee*, 34.

that Melville is a hack and a fraud. What parts are fantasies and which parts constitute his autobiography, besides the documented plagiarized material revealed in Anderson's study, can also be revealed to some extent in the massive two volume biography by Hershel Parker, particularly in the chapter dealing with his composition of *Typee*. In Parker's account, Melville retold his story in 1844 to relatives and friends in a way that thrilled them. His sister Augusta Melville convinced Herman to write a narrative detailing his astonishing adventures. Besides his brother, who served on Chaplain Stewart's ship visiting Nuka Hiva, Melville had another family connection to one of the authors he plagiarized. His first cousin had spent the winter of 1805 in Norfolk Sound, Alaska, with the aforementioned von Langsdorff, a famous explorer and traveler of the period. It is through this connection that Parker believes Melville thought of plagiarizing von Langsdorff's and other narratives for his own adventure to give length and detail to his narrative as. Throughout the year 1845, from January until Christmas, Melville wrote two drafts of the book, eventually cutting out objectionable passages such as many of the more sensual, philosophical and learned aspects, a number of Melvillian jibes as well as all references to the Bible.<sup>44</sup>

In the romance Melville makes cutting remarks about travel narratives in general, from some of which he lifted much of his material. Early in the novel he praises travel narratives by the Americans David Porter and C. S. Stewart, and cites William Ellis's four-volume *Polynesian Researches* (1833) as worthy of reading.<sup>45</sup> It is rather extraordinary that literary scholars and ethnologists took so long, some eighty years, to discover that Melville did not write so much as impersonate as the observer of so many of the ethnological "observations" presented in his bestseller, especially since quite a significant number of renowned anthropologists had been citing Melville as a source for their studies. Melville's many lifted passages, often inserted within the subplots, reveal him to be a fraud when he underscores his "anxious desire to speak the unvarnished truth" in his "Preface".<sup>46</sup>

Many critics today feel uncomfortable with such a harsh accusation of plagiarism leveled against a fiction writer of Melville's reputation, and they downplay the very notion of plagiarism in fiction, arguing for a case of intertextuality or revising and perhaps motivated signifying of previous texts. Yet in my particular area of specialization, African American literature, writers who were accused of plagiarism had their reputations and ultimately, their careers, ended. In 1930, Nella Larsen's last story "Sanctuary" was shown to have been copied and she never was published again. In 1977 Alex Haley's national bestseller nonfiction book *Roots* was found to have a literary antecedent, and Haley paid \$650,000 to the plaintiff in an out-of-court settlement. Published by Little, Brown in New York City, Kaavya Viswanathan's 2006 novel climbed on the *New York Times* bestseller list was pulled from the shelves when the lifting was revealed, and no critic spoke of intertextuality. Whether Melville's first book *Typee* is considered fictional romance or nonfictional autobiography (as he repeatedly claimed in succeeding edited editions), others caught lifting a much smaller percentage of their text suffered the consequences. Charles Anderson noted as "contrary

44 Hershel Parker, *Herman Melville, A Biography. Vol. 1 [1819-1851]* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 354-369.

45 Melville, *Typee*, 38-39.

46 Melville, *Typee*, 34.

to his usual practice"<sup>47</sup> the rare original observation Melville wrote about regarding breadfruit harvesting. The evidence of copying is clear and irrefutable.

In contrast, the avid readers buying up the book may not really have cared so much if *Typee* was fact or fiction, just as long as there were resilient characters and an exhilarating plot. At the expense of the pledged truthfulness, Melville gave his readers these elements and more: *Typee* offered utopia a name and a location, and expressed the secret Victorian readers' fantasies of boundless sensuality and freedom. *Typee* decisively expressed a social and economic idealism in its description of happiness without greed which may have inspired American communes such as Brook Farm. Edward Said's study of the Western discipline of the Orient as the obverse of all that is good about the Occident is regularly elaborated on at the conclusion of *Typee*. Melville subliminally projects the Western desire for the island life alternatively as both a dreamlike utopia (harmony, lack of greed, jealousy or need of labor, and free love) and as a nightmarish hell (cannibalism, imprisonment, possibly even slavery). Cannibalism was Melville's stage prop set up to frighten his readers. (Cannibalism is ultimately the greatest signifier of the savage in need of civilizing, and yet it has never been proven up to now that cannibalism was practiced among any of the Polynesian natives.) As Breitwieser points out regarding Melville's false sympathy for the Islanders as victims of colonialism, "When thinking of them as fellow victims, he excludes evidence of their actual life in order to construct an idyllic image in order to denounce those he detests without seeming self-serving [...]. He is a sympathetic primitivist as long as he is left in charge of defining "primitive."<sup>48</sup> Today *Typee* pales in literary complexity and allusions to the Bible, Shakespeare, Milton and philosophy, particularly when compared with *Moby Dick*, Melville's forerunner of modernist fiction in its depiction of the human condition.

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<sup>47</sup> Anderson, *Melville*, 144.

<sup>48</sup> Mitchell Breitwieser, "False Sympathy in Melville's *Typee*," in: *Herman Melville: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Myra Jehlen (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994), 16.

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