

SYMBOLISM AND IRONY IN MELVILLE'S *TYPEE*

by

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ABSTRACT

Taking issue with the most significant modern interpretations of Typee, I have attempted to illustrate that Melville's first novel is a conscious, serious, and largely successful work of art. My interpretation focuses on the ironic presentation of the symbolic quest in Typee, a pattern which Melville was to use repeatedly as a symbol of the inevitable defeat of all rational attempts to comprehend an ineffable universe. I explore this thesis through close examination of two main topics: the quester and the symbolic world through which he pursues his search for singularity of vision.

Tom is Melville's first quest hero, and represents the active, inquisitive intellect. However, the process of human understanding, as it is presented in Tom, is in constant flux. It is finite and unreliable; ultimately, it is a relative process. Moreover, the secrets of the world through which Tom pursues his quest are inscrutable, symbolized by the towering mystery of Nukuheva's central mountain. These, then, are the two sides to the ironic quest in Typee: the finite rationality of Tom, and the infinite natural mystery of Nukuheva. Tom and the absolutes of his world, understanding and mystery, are brought finally into confrontation in Typee Valley, and the outcome serves to confirm the inevitability of defeat for the quest after rational singularity of vision.

In Typee Valley Tom meets with a culture that is fundamentally strange to him. But his failure to comprehend the whole reality of

Typee goes far beyond a cultural gap. The dark and awful secrets of the Typees are linked symbolically to the fullness of Nukuheva's mystery. When Tom confronts the Typees, he comes face to face with the human embodiment of the mystery at the heart of things. He retreats because his rationality cannot carry him beyond appearances and into the irrational and inscrutable essence of Typee culture and of Nukuheva as a whole. The failure of Tom's quest is a failure of understanding. He retreats finally to the world from which he had initially fled, bringing the quest in Typee full circle, and leaving the mysteries of Nukuheva unpenetrated and absolute. In the end Tom's quest meets with the defeat to which, in Melville's eyes, it was predestined. Ultimately, then, the vision of human understanding Melville presents in Typee--the essential human urge to quest after knowledge and the essential inevitability of the frustration of that urge--is profoundly ironic.

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"In youth . . . men are apt to write more wisely than they really know or feel; and the remainder of life may not idly be spent in realizing and convincing themselves of the wisdom which they uttered long ago."

Hawthorne, from the preface to
The Snow Image and Other Twice
Told Tales

D E D I C A T I O N

*To my wife and daughter, for
patience and understanding I
did not always deserve.*

INTRODUCTION

"Until I was twenty-five, I had no development at all. From my twenty-fifth year I date my life. Three weeks have scarcely passed, at any time between then and now, that I have not unfolded within myself. But I feel that I am now come to the inmost leaf of the bulb, and that shortly the flower must fall to the mould."

Herman Melville, from a letter to Hawthorne, dated June, 1851

It is an unfortunate fact of Melville criticism that Typee, in many ways one of Melville's most successful books, has almost universally been misunderstood and underestimated. Early critics variously praised and condemned Typee's obvious ideological biases¹ but, by and large, mistakenly believed it to be the "unvarnished truth," a literal record of events "just as they occurred."² Modern critics, thanks mainly to the painstaking research of Charles Anderson in Melville in the South Seas, have been spared further debates about Melville's veracity in Typee. Modern critics recognize the book to be fiction,³ and yet have proved remarkably hesitant to go further and to grant it the status of a work of art. At best Typee is seen to display what Warner Berthoff has called "imaginative power in reserve."⁴ Today Typee is not generally thought to be informed by the same dedicated and far-reaching artistic spirit often perceived in the later works. As a result, Typee remains one of Melville's "most neglected works."⁵

Admittedly Typee invites a measure of critical confusion and scepticism for, at least superficially, it is a many-faceted, not to say a disorganized, piece of writing. At first glance it appears to be a pastiche, mixing heady romanticism and hard-nosed social criticism, beautiful descriptions and long-winded anthropological observations, and critics have tended to respond to one side of the book or the other--or to its seemingly aimless diversity. As Charles Anderson has shown, Melville went about composing Typee in a way that could indeed have made it no more than a pastiche: in creating his first book Melville lied, shamelessly plagiarized, and only occasionally told the "unvarnished truth." So some critical dubiety concerning Typee's artistic merits is understandable. There remains, however, a relative dearth of sound criticism of the novel. Certainly no one approach to Typee can be said to have done it justice.⁶

Typee is not merely a literal description of South Sea adventure, it is not just an idyllic romance, and it is not simply a promising failure. It is much more than any of these opinions allow. Typee is a crafted, serious, and largely successful work of art, achieving unity and depth of meaning through two concerns we now recognize to be vital to, and profoundly realized in, Melville's best work: symbolism and the quest for "the absolute amidst its relative manifestations."⁷ Typee is, finally, a symbolic novel of the quest.

Moreover, it is informed by the same deep commitment to the question of absolute human knowledge, and manifests the same skepticism towards the possibility of such knowledge, to be found in the greater works. The quest in Typee is ironically conceived, emerging at the

beginning of his career, as Melville's symbol for the hopelessly ambiguous and uncertain nature of human understanding. Melville's quest heroes, of whom Tommo is the first, are lonely wanderers engaged in the search for a singularity of vision which will make sense of a troubled, ambiguous existence. They always quest after certainty and yet are always denied its attainment. This is the dilemma facing the quest in Melville's work: one must seek, but can never find, and what is worse, one cannot know by any rational measure what one is really after.

It is the fate of Melville's quest heroes to try to have what cannot be had, to understand what cannot be understood, and the quest becomes Melville's symbol for their failure--the eternal struggle to reach the absolute, and the eternal failure to ultimately win through. The quest in Melville is inevitably inconclusive because the truth of the universe lies beyond human ken, outside the range of finite human intellect. The quest becomes its own conclusion, the intellectual process that is life itself to the Melvillean man, but which necessarily cannot succeed. The urge to quest and the inevitable frustration of that urge are constant in Melville's overwhelmingly ironic vision;⁸ and that vision is born in his first novel.

It will therefore be the purpose of this paper to show that the Melvillean quest begins, with nearly all its implications, in Typee. Melville's first novel explores the quest as a process of human understanding which, by its very nature, is predestined to failure. Typee is, finally, a chronicle of that failure, displaying why it is that, for Melville, absolute reality and human reality can

never be the same. We will see that, indeed, Typee is a book of greater purpose and depth than has heretofore been recognized.

It has too often been ignored that Typee began the intellectual "unfolding" which, only a few prolific years after 1846, was to bring the artist to the "inmost leaf of the bulb," to Moby Dick. As Leon Howard points out, Typee should now be recognized as "Melville's germinal work of art."⁹

The story of Typee is set on the Marquesan island of Nukuheva, and that setting assumes an overriding importance in the novel. Nukuheva is the arena in which the quest in Typee operates, providing a symbolic background against which Tom's quest is always to be seen and which it ultimately serves to confirm. Nukuheva is not simply an island fixed in place and time; it is a timeless symbol for the human condition, for the inevitably relative and imperfect state of human understanding. Nukuheva is Melville's central symbol in Typee.

Nukuheva achieves its symbolic importance in two ways: it is both a geographic and an ethnographic symbol. It is circular, the infinity of the Pacific converging on its shores which, in turn, encircle the island's mountainous and mysterious central heights. Along its shores runs the cycle of human cultures, from the absolutely primitive in Typee Valley to Nukuheva harbour, where European civilization is making its first inroads. On the shore is seen the narrow margin of human culture or understanding, and above it rises the central mountain, the ominous mystery at the heart of this world. The mountain is the hushed and primeval centre of the circle and of the universe of Typee.

Nukuheva symbolizes the ageless natural mystery Melville sees as governing the universe, and its peoples represent the human cultures which have developed within this mysterious world without every truly understanding it. Finally, Nukuheva represents the whole world of human possibilities, the knowable and unknowable aspects of our human existence. It is emblematic of ambiguity, of the numerous cultural and intellectual levels of human history, none of which is clearly bad or good, merely different, rather, from one another, and related in only one thing: they are clustered in a circle around the only absolute in Melville's universe--the mute and ineffable heart of nature--response to which defines and characterizes all human cultures.

To this island Melville brings his first quest hero, and through the mind of Tom (or Tommo) we see why it is that for Melville the history of humanity, as symbolized in Nukuheva, is above all one of separation of man from the absolute secrets of his world. Ultimately Tom's quest is a human search for certain knowledge, for singularity of vision, and Nukuheva stands in constant symbolic testimony that, from the beginning of time, the mysteries of the universe have defied rational human reduction of any sort.

Tom's constant ratiocination, his rather unfortunate contrast to the physical and resolute Toby, and his symbolic association with original sin through his mysteriously "bitten" heel, identify him with the intellect. Tom comes to represent the urge to know. Like all of Melville's quest heroes, Tom is a keen observer, and prides himself on his intellectual superiority. It is a yearning for experience that is intellectually and emotionally satisfying that spurs Melville's

sailor heroes to begin searching and leads them to such places as Nukuheva, Mardi, and the infinite of the Pacific Ocean. In Typee it is the seeming perfection of primitive life Tom perceives to be the answer to his discontent. Yet whatever Typee, Yillah, and Moby Dick represent remains a mystery. The quest inevitably fails because the absolute, for Melville, lay beyond the scope of finite human consciousness. Whatever the true nature of Typee valley is, we cannot, finally, rely upon Tom to tell us. He does not know. Indeed, he cannot.

Melville illustrates through the mind of his hero that reality exists for a man only as he perceives it, and that that perception changes with a man's physical and intellectual point of view. This is not to say that a changeless, eternal reality does not exist, for it does. It is just that what a man holds to be real--the way he understands his world--is necessarily in constant flux, relative to an ever changing angle of perception, and therefore transient and arbitrary.

Throughout Typee Melville opposes Tom's vision of paradise with contradictory facts until we see that, rather than perceiving the essential order of things, Tom simply and selectively creates a version of it to suit his own purposes, to rationalize and sustain his attempted flight from civilized corruption. Throughout the novel Tom's understanding of his world is shown to be at the very least only partial, and often quite wrong. Tom orders his world so that it makes sense to him, but that sense is seen to be his alone. Understanding in Typee is, finally, a relative, almost an arbitrary, thing.

Any meeting with the possibility for absolute experience then must, for the Melvillean quester, be an accident, as are Taji's chance encounter with Yillah and Tom's mistaken falling in with the Typees. And once this arbitrary circumstance obtains, the quest for the absolute has gone very nearly as far as it can go. In Typee Valley the quest comes to a stand off between the rationality seen in Tom and the irrational mysteries of the natives, mysteries which are linked symbolically to the towering silence of Nukuheva's center. The quest comes to an end in Typee Valley and there, in the novel's final episodes, Tommo is left to confront the essential ambiguity of his world. The realities of Typee Valley present a crucial challenge to Tom's understanding for, despite all his praise for Typee's idyllic appearance, things there are really not the way they seem to be.

There are two sides to Typee culture, one seeming to be living proof of the primitive ideal, and the other bound up in the mute, elemental, and inhuman mysteries of Nukuheva. Understanding of the Typees can, then, exist at two levels: it can be partial and superficial, concentrating on what the Typees appear to be; or it can be complete, going beyond appearances and coming to grips with the dark primeval secrets underlying Typee culture.

The choice is clear cut, yet poses a crucial dilemma to the quest for knowledge, because the possibility for absolute experience here lies beyond the reach of rational understanding. To completely understand the Typees, Tom must commit himself absolutely to a culture that is fundamentally and profoundly mysterious to him. It is a commitment to which all understanding and preconception, all

reason, are irrelevant. Tom must commit himself to something he has no way of knowing about. He is, in the end, unable to take such a step.

Tommo flees Typee, retreats, because he is unwilling to make the final commitment and surrender his reason, his very humanity, in order to plunge, like Taji or Ahab, into the dark reaches of mystery. Tom returns none the wiser to where he began, and concludes his adventures afloat again in Melville's watery world of infinite possibility. Because he retreats and leaves the mysteries of Typee unpenetrated, understanding remains for him a matter of relativity and flux. He forgets the evils of the Typees because, in effect, he tells of them from a new angle of perception, from the perspective of three years of harsh sailor life during which he has seen civilized evils comparatively as great as Typee savagery.

In Typee Valley we see the paradox which the quest for the absolute must unavoidably face, and to which there is no answer. When Tom chooses to remember the Typees as noble savages, he has unknowingly opted for imperfect understanding, and has left the mysteries of the Typees and of Nukuheva unrevealed. His quest repeats the failure of all attempts to comprehend the inscrutable through rational, structured means. In short, Tom fails because he cannot detach himself from the rational process of understanding which both defines and limits his humanity. Tom represents the essential human need to know, to obtain singularity of vision, and his failure to come fully to grips with the mystery at the heart of things is a quintessentially human shortcoming, central to the meaning of Typee, and to Melville's ironic view of the human condition.

CHAPTER I

TOMMO

*"Hither and thither spins
 The wind-born, mirroring soul,
 A thousand glimpses wins,
 And never sees a whole;
 Looks once, and drives elsewhere, and leaves its last employ."*

Empedocles, in "Empedocles on Etna"

Typee begins with the characteristic elements of Melville's fictional world:

Six months at sea! Yes, reader, as I live, six months out of sight of land; cruising after the sperm-whale beneath the scorching sun of the Line, and tossed on the billows of the wide-rolling Pacific--the sky above, the sea around, and nothing else! . . . Oh! ye state-room sailors, who make so much ado about a fourteen days' passage across the Atlantic; . . . what would ye say to our six months out of sight of land? (p. 3)

Here is the immensity of sea and sky, a ship, and a decidedly unhappy narrator; and, most important, here is the main thrust of the quest, the movement from the "scorching" nothingness of the vast Pacific towards something more substantial and secure, "snug anchor" in the haven of "some green cove . . . sheltered from the boistrous winds" (p. 5). And finally, it is here, in the opening chapters of the book, where we get our initial glimpse of Melville's first quest hero.

It is Tom's journey from ocean to safe "haven," from immensity to singularity, which constitutes the novel's story line. Therefore, if we are to understand the nature of the quest in Typee and the reasons for its ultimate failure, we must begin with Tom. He is the most important figure in the book, and arouses a host of vital questions. For instance, why does he leave the "Dolly" in the first place, and what is the nature of that decision? Why is his retrospective version of his island experiences so different from their reality? Why, as he frequently states, does he never understand the Typees? And how does he function in Melville's overriding symbolic method in Typee? These and other questions I hope to answer in the following discussion.

Tom's quest begins innocently enough. Excited by the romantic stories he has heard about native life, and righteously indignant about the treatment the crew of the "Dolly" receives from her tyrannical captain, he decides to "run away." The captain, it seems, is the villain of the piece: he regularly violates the "implied" and "specified conditions" of the ship's articles, "inhumanly" neglects the sick, doles out food in "scanty allowance," and replies to all "complaints and remonstrances" with the "butt end of a hand spike" (pp.20-21). To make matters worse, Tom has no way out other than jumping ship, for he has "left both law and equity on the other side of the cape" (p. 20). He is obviously a very disenchanted young sailor. Like all of Melville's "later heroes," Tommo is "a man 'in difficulties' with his surroundings."¹ Whaling life aboard the "Dolly" offers little that is attractive to an active and enterprising youth: no worthy companions, not even minimally acceptable living conditions, and no

female company. Nor, as he is careful to point out, is there much prospect of having any of these things on a ship with a reputation for "unreasonably protracted" cruises (p. 21).

However, Tom states that any of the above abuses "could have been endured awhile, had we entertained the hope of being speedily delivered from them by the due completion of our servitude." "But," he continues, "what a dismal prospect awaited us in this quarter! The longevity of Cape Horn whaling voyages is proverbial, frequently extending over a period of four or five years!" (p. 21). Beyond all the immediate discomfiture, it is chiefly the possibility of spending his life aimlessly searching the oceans for sperm whale that terrifies our narrator. He admits to being "haunted" by "remembrance" of the "Perseverance," a ghost-like ship which circles the globe in vain and monomaniacal quest of profit, never reaching home and, Tom supposes, "still regularly tacking twice in the twenty-four hours somewhere off Buggerry Island, or the Devil's-Tail Peak"(p. 23). He has, however, heard only "a shadowy report" of the "Perseverance," and has had only a "presentiment" that the "Dolly" will make a similarly "unfortunate voyage" (p.23). In fact he points out that the "Dolly's" voyage had only "just commenced"(p. 23). What is significant in all this is that Tom is provoked into action largely on the basis of hearsay, by tales; that he is predisposed to expect the worst, and the "Perseverance" comes to symbolize what is worst for him--life wasted in aimless commercial endeavour, perseverance without meaning in a vast and dangerous world of sea and scorching sun.

Similarly, it is largely through what he has been told that he conceives Nukuheva to be a snug anchor abundant in everything the sterile "Dolly" lacks. He is predisposed to expect the best of the South Seas, and feels an "irresistible curiosity to see those islands which the olden voyagers had so glowingly described": "The Marquesas! What strange visions of outlandish things does the very name spirit up! Naked houris--cannibal banquet--groves of cocoa-nut--coral reefs--tattooed chiefs--and bamboo temples; sunny valleys planted with bread-fruit trees--carved canoes dancing on the flashing blue waters--savage woodlands guarded by horrible idols--heathenish rites and human sacrifices" (5). Nukuheva "spirits up" wildly romantic fantasies of exciting and full-blooded adventure. In Tom's mind it is the exact symbolic opposite of the "Perseverence."²

So on the one hand we have a rather calculating young man who rationalizes his decision to jump ship, and on the other one who entertains predominantly romantic notions of south sea island life. More importantly, though, we have a man at a vital crossroads in life. The childish connotations of the name "Dolly" suggest that Tom is in an infancy of sorts, on the threshold of deciding what he will do with his life. Will he pursue the protestant ethic aboard a commercial vessel in a conventional yet meaningless way, or will he opt for a life of sensuous and sensual adventure in a south sea paradise? He is on the verge of finding purpose in his life, or imposing a personally meaningful order on his world within which he may find happiness. Tom must make a vital choice between the world of the "Perseverence" and the world of the Marquesas.

It is especially important to note, though, that Tom's expectations in both cases are based upon hearsay and not upon fact. Tom's journey is initiated, and in fact motivated by, certain preconceptions which, as Melville is at pains to indicate, have little to do with certain knowledge. Even at the outset the relationship of Tom's understanding to reality is called into question: the evils of life aboard the "Dolly," though palpable enough, become clearly more awful in Tom's mind, and it is partially on that basis that he decides to leave. And his notions of the Marquesas are even more questionable, for he has had no experience whatever of the South Seas on which to base his speculations, only sailor stories. In other words, Tom's expectations are called into doubt even before he reaches the islands: the "Dolly" is not necessarily going to become another "Perseverence," and the Marquesas are not necessarily the paradise he imagines they are. Once he arrives in Nukuheva harbour, these preconceptions run rapidly into trouble.

The "vague accounts" of island beauty generally believed by visitors (himself included) do not quite correspond with the first glimpse of Nukuheva; Tom states that "many people are apt to picture to themselves enamelled and softly swelling plains, shaded over with delicious groves, and watered by purling brooks, and the entire country but little elevated above the surrounding ocean." "The reality," Tom continues, "is very different; bold rock-bound coasts, with the surf beating high against the lofty cliffs, and broken here and there into deep inlets, which open to the view thickly-wooded valleys, separated by the spurs of mountains clothed with

tufted grass, and sweeping down towards the sea from an elevated and furrowed interior, form the principal features of these islands" (p. 12). Rather than a lush green Eden beckoning the traveller with hints of exotic pleasure, Nukuheva is fortress-like in aspect, and almost forbiddingly rugged.

Arrival in Nukuheva harbour holds a further surprise:

No description can do justice to its beauty; but that beauty was lost to me then, and I saw nothing but the tri-colored flag of France trailing over the stern of six vessels, whose black hulls and bristling broadsides proclaimed their warlike character. There they were, floating in that lovely bay, the green eminences of the shore looking down so tranquilly upon them, as if rebuking the sternness of their aspect. To my eye nothing could be more out of keeping than the presence of these vessels; but we soon learnt what brought them there. The whole group of islands had just been taken possession of by Rear Admiral Du Petit Thouars, in the name of the invincible French nation. (p. 12)

And, upon meeting his first islanders, Tom's capacity for romanticizing receives another jolt. Captivated by the "savage vivacity" of the island "mermaids" by day, he is repulsed when they reveal another side to their characters in the warm tropical evening, becoming active and, one supposes, willing and able participants in "every species of riot and debauchery." This "grossest licentiousness," Tom observes with disdain, "prevailed, with occasional and but short-lived interruptions, during the whole period" of the "Dolly's" stay (p. 15).

Even his cherished notions concerning the Typees and Happarees are eventually shattered. "Even before visiting the Marquesas," Tom tells us he has heard stories of Typee savagery and the warnings of a shipmate: "As we stood gazing over the side at the verdant headlands, Ned, pointing with his hand in the direction of the treacherous valley, exclaimed, 'There--there's Typee. Oh, the bloody cannibals,

what a meal they'd make of us if we were to take it into our heads to land! but they say they don't like sailor's flesh, it's too salt. I say, maty, how should you like to be shoved ashore there, eh?'" (pp.25-26). And upon reaching Nukuheva harbour he observes that "These celebrated warriors appear to inspire the other islanders with unspeakable terrors. Their very name is a frightful one; for the word 'Typee' in the Marquesan dialect signifies a lover of human flesh" (p. 24). The Happars, on the other hand, are said to be a friendly, peaceable lot, and so Tom learns by word of mouth to love the Happars and hate the Typees, and makes his plans accordingly. He resolves to avoid falling in with the Typees at all costs, and to await the sailing of another ship among the Happars. As it turns out, of course, the Happars are the ones to be feared, and it is the Typees who embody, at least superficially, the primitive ideal.

Yet even at the end of his adventures in the Typee valley, Tommo maintains his romantic notions of Nukuheva. He remembers the island for its "delicious" groves and not for the "elevated and furrowed interior" with which he has bitter experience. He remembers the enchanting Fayaway and not the corrupted Nukuhevan "mermaids." And if he does not exactly forget that the natives are cannibals, he attempts a high minded rationalization of their culinary persuasion (p.125). Tom stubbornly resists any facts which give the lie to his vision of the state of things in paradise. Against evidence of great, even monstrous, imperfections, Tom clings to his belief: for him Nukuheva, as typified by Typee Valley, remains the ideal. The

realities of Nukuheva and the way Tom understands them are seen to have very little in common. His beliefs are his alone.³

Tom's plunge, "diver fashion," into the vale of Tior offer a fine example of this insularity. The "impression produced," he says, "will never be obliterated": What a delightful sensation did I experience! I felt as if floating in some new element, while all sorts of gurgling, trickling, liquid sounds fell upon my ear. People may say what they will about the refreshing influences of a cold-water bath, but commend me when in a perspiration to the shade baths of Tior, beneath the cocoa-nut trees, and amidst the cool delightful atmosphere which surrounds them"(p. 28). Here the vale of Tior answers perfectly his longing for the romantic and sensuous as opposed to the "sickly green" world of the "Dolly." The comparison between civilization and the south seas is as light hearted here as it is bitter in other parts of Typee, but its message is the same always: the south sea islander is the innocent and noble primitive and civilized man the corruptor. Thus his "philosophical reflections" on the meeting he observes in Tior are perfectly in character.

While basking in the sensuous riches of the vale Tom witnesses a conference between the native sovereign and the French admiral Du Petit Thouars, and indulges the following thoughts: "At what an immeasurable distance . . . are these two beings removed from each other. In the one is shown the result of long centuries of progressive civilization and refinement, which have gradually converted the mere creature into the semblance of all that is elevated and grand; while the other, after the lapse of the same period, has not advanced

one step in the career of improvement. 'Yet, after all,' quoth I to myself, 'insensible as he is to a thousand wants, and removed from harassing cares, may not the savage be the happier man of the two?'"(p. 29). This is a purely rhetorical question. Tom firmly believes that the native is the happier man. Yet, in the light of Tom's stubborn refusal to accept the fact of native corruption--his righteous insistence that they are victims plain and simple--one is hardly inclined to accept his speculations here. Tom's idealism is misplaced and his conception of South Sea life consequently misguided.

Tom views the rustic ceremony from the isolation of his romantic preconceptions regarding the true nature and relationship of these cultures. In Tior, detached and thrilling with delight in verdant nature, he can easily conceive of reality as edenic, and is not only complacent, but fairly joyous, in his understanding. The bower of Tior reflects Tom's state of mind, a self-contained world in which things seem to make perfect sense. But that sense is only relevant to the physical and symbolic isolation of Tom's preconceived point of view. He is, in fact, doubly isolated from the heart of island culture: the bower is closed off from the shore, and the shore is shut off from the mysterious central heights of the island from which all valleys and streams radiate. It is ironic, and highly typical that, indeed, Tom's "impression" is never "obliterated." The vale of Tior finds its exact parallel in the home of old Tinor, where Tom uncovers the awful secret of native cannibalism, a secret he forgets in remembering Nukuheva as a Tior-like paradise. In Tior, as everywhere else, Tom sees only what it suits him to see. He remembers

only his pleasant experiences and forgets the unpleasant ones, of which we will see there are many.

Clearly Tom's point of view and reality do not have much in common; reality in Typee is relative to the beholder, to his angle of vision. And the harbour scene, previously mentioned as one of Tom's early disappointments, provides an excellent case in point, one brilliant, I think, for its subtlety. At any rate it has rarely been commented upon.

Having completed the rigorous climb up the mountain side, Tom gazes back on the harbour and is moved to say:

The lonely bay of Nukuheva, dotted here and there with the black hulls of the vessels composing the French squadron, lay reposing at the base of a circular range of elevations, whose verdant sides, perforated with deep glens or diversified with smiling valleys, formed altogether the loveliest view I ever beheld, and were I to live a hundred years, I should never forget the feeling of admiration which I then experienced. (p. 40)

This exact scene, previously described by Tom at copious length, as one of corruption and moral decay bred by western influence, has somehow been purified by distance. It directly parallels an earlier passage when, to Tom, the "black hulls and bristling broadsides" of the French ships seemed "out of keeping" with the natural beauty of the harbour. Here, the French ships previously associated with military arrogance and cruelty, blend into a vision of sheer, harmonious beauty. This is ironic indeed, for Tom has "forgotten" what all this had meant to him before. In Tom we see two diametrically opposed opinions on the symbolic nature of the same scene. The parallel is plain, and so, too, is its meaning.

Reality here is relative to the angle of perception; just as the doubloon in Moby Dick may mean many things, so too can this scene have multiple and very different meanings for the observer. Moreover, the relativity of opinion illustrated by the doubloon passage is, here, confined to the workings of one mind, not many. What Melville is attempting to underscore through this parallel is his theme of the vagaries of human understanding--the elusive, arbitrary nature of what we hold to be real. The scene being observed cannot have changed in any essential, physical way, but its significance to Tom has, simply because he is looking at it in a different way. His past understanding is totally different from his present understanding.

Literally the harbour has a different aspect because Tom has changed his vantage point. Symbolically, though, the reality of the scene has, in effect, actually changed for Tom. From the cliff Tom sees new ships and a new harbour, a new angle of perception has produced a fresh version of reality, and the scene now means something totally different to Tom. The implication is that reality is a function of the angle of perception, and since perception is a function of the individual mind, then reality is bound to be an individual thing. A man's reality becomes a symbolic creation, having little or no relation to any static or absolute truth, beyond the fact that the real world furnishes the sense data with which that symbolic edifice, understanding, is created and creates.

Melville does not doubt the existence of a solid, changeless reality. Quite the opposite. Reality is made palpable throughout Typee, in the beaches and thickets of the island, in the harsh central

heights, and finally, in the consummate horror of the cannibal remains at the Ti. Melville simply questions the way men understand such reality, and does so through his narrator. Tom's about face concerning the harbour emphasizes the fact that reality is relative to the perceiver and, effectively, has no point of reference beyond the human mind. For Tom Nukuheva is the way he remembers it, though the veracity of his recollections is to be doubted.

However, the question of understanding in Typee does not begin and end with Tom. Melville abstracts Tom's intellect, universalizes it, to assert the relativity and consequent unreliability of all human understanding. This he accomplishes largely through his symbolic treatment of Nukuheva Island. Nukuheva may be seen as Melville's symbol for the human condition itself, a condition which Tom's constant misunderstanding serves to confirm. Nukuheva comes to symbolize both the mysteries of the universe and the relativity of understanding unavoidably obtaining in human culture because those mysteries are ineffable. The island is, finally, Melville's central symbol in Typee, and crucial to the novel as a whole.

CHAPTER II

NUKUHEVA

"And if time was, when this round earth, which to innumerable mortals has seemed an empire never to be wholly explored; which, in its seas, concealed all the Indies for over four thousand five hundred years; if time was, when this great quarry of Assyrias and Romes was not extant; then, time may have been, when the whole material universe lived its Dark Ages; yea, when the Ineffable Silence, proceeding from its unimaginable remoteness, espied it as an isle in the sea."

Babbalanja, in Mardi
(I, 230)

The significance of Nukuheva as a whole, round island has not often been noticed.¹ Most critics have confined their attentions to Typee Valley alone, and in doing so have forgotten that Typee is only a small part of Nukuheva. In fact before Tom ever sets foot on dry land, and long before Typee achieves any importance in the novel, Nukuheva, the theatre of Tom's misadventures, is pointedly described:

The bay of Nukuheva in which we were then lying is an expanse of water not unlike in figure the space included within the limits of a horse shoe. It is, perhaps, nine miles in circumference. You approach it from the sea by a narrow entrance, flanked on either side by two small twin islets which soar conically to the height of some five hundred feet. From these the shore recedes on both hands and describes a deep semicircle.

From the verge of the water the land rises uniformly on all sides, with green and sloping acclivities, until from gently rolling hillsides and moderate elevations it insensibly swells into lofty and majestic heights, whose

blue outlines, ranged all around, close in the view. The beautiful aspect of the shore is heightened by deep and romantic glens, which come down to it at almost equal distances, all apparently radiating from a common centre, and the upper extremities of which are lost to the eye beneath the shadow of the mountains. (pp. 23-24)

The island is divided into what is known and what is unknown. The shore is "closed in" by the mysterious "shadow" of the central heights, around which are configured the harbour natives on one side, the Happers on another, and the Typees on still another, and all circle Nukuheva's shrouded heartlands. An examination of these central heights will, I think, establish the fact that the whole of Nukuheva, and not just Typee Valley alone, is Melville's main symbol in Typee.

As we have seen, Tom's expectations are confused from the start, and this state of affairs does not change once he and Toby have embarked on their journey. Their adventures are misconceived from the moment they decide to jump ship. Tom's original idea is to reach the mountains and leisurely await the "Dolly's" departure. He says that "Having ascertained . . . that the islanders, from motives of precaution, dwelt altogether in the depths of the valleys, and avoided wandering about the more elevated portions of the shore, unless bound on some expedition of war or plunder, I concluded that if I could effect unperceived a passage to the mountains, I might easily remain among them, supporting myself by such fruits as came in my way until the sailing of the ship, an event of which I could not fail to be immediately apprised, as from my lofty position I should command a view of the entire harbour" (pp. 30-31). Not an unreasonable expectation,

for Tom is always reasonable in his way. That way, however, is to anticipate what will be, and is always marked by his romantic, whimsical imagination. Thus he is even undaunted by the distinct possibility of "falling in with a foraging party of . . . bloody-minded Typees" (p.31). He lays that fear to rest, in typical fashion, by recalling something he has heard about the natives: that they never "quit" their own vales or "fastnesses"(p. 31). Tom finds comfort in this and his jumping ship becomes a planned, decided thing.

Soon Toby joins the conspiracy and together, with naive over-confidence, he and Tom outfit themselves with clothes only fit for the quarter deck, and with but a few days ration of biscuit and tobacco. Such improvidence earns them extreme discomfort, but is understandable in light of the ease with which they expected to gain the heights and find abundant food and easy travelling. Their expectations, however, are thwarted; Tom tells us that his "curiosity had been not a little raised with regard to the description of the country we should meet on the other side of the mountains; and I had supposed, with Toby, that immediately on gaining the heights we should be enabled to view the large bays of Happar and Typee reposing at our feet on one side, in the same way Nukuheva lay spread out below on the other. But here we were disappointed. Instead of finding the mountain we had ascended sweeping down in the opposite direction into broad and capacious valleys, the land appeared to retain its general elevation, only broken into a series of ridges and inter-vales, which as far as the eye could reach stretched away from us . . . and . . . among which . . . we perceived none of those trees upon whose fruit

we had relied with such certainty" (p. 41). Tom and Toby have encountered another in what is to become a long series of obstacles which are at once physical and, in a sense, spiritual or psychological as well. They are rendered more oppressive to Tom because they are unexpected, because they give the lie to his whole preconditioned state of mind.

Once on the "upper extremities" Tom is without the familiar points of reference he has found so comforting on the shore, and in Tior in particular. He has turned his back on what he knows and finds his prospects barren. Ironically enough, however, the mountain is the only place where Tom truly understands what lies before him: silent, desolate wilderness. There are no apparent civilized evils and native virtues to be compared and misconstrued here, only nature itself:

The whole landscape seemed one unbroken solitude, the interior of the island having apparently been untenanted since the morning of the creation; and as we advanced through this wilderness, our voices sounded strangely in our ears, as though human accents had never before disturbed the fearful silence of the place, interrupted only by the low murmurings of distant waterfalls." (p. 44)

This is the "fearful silence" of Moby Dick, and the still, primeval heart of the island around which Tom's quest revolves.

Typee, Happar, and Tior are only a few of the valleys radiating from this "common centre." This centre, though never stressed as being in any way important to the novel, is a vital consideration. It is the centre of the story as well as of the island on which the story takes place. It provides the pivotal point for the whole book.

Until Tom reaches the central heights, he has journeyed uphill, in confident belief that, despite the setback among the reeds, he has understood and planned things correctly, and is in control. Afterwards his journey turns downhill in an increasingly frenzied and hazardous attempt to reach the goal he has in mind, thereby to ratify his notions concerning the state of paradise. Tom's brief encounter with the "fearful silence" of the island's heart consolidates Melville's two main concerns in Typee: the quest for understanding, and the mystery, symbolized by Nukuheva's central mountain, which cannot be understood yet cannot be ignored. Melville uses Tom's reaction to silence here, and later in Typee Valley, to render it a symbol for the mystery at the heart of things.²

Tom has achieved singularity of vision through his belief that Nukuheva offers edenic perfection in contrast to the corruption of western civilization, and once possessed of this belief, rationalizes any evidence which might contradict it. By one rhetorical twist or another he is always able to bend any dissonant elements to fit his harmonious vision of paradise. Once things have been arranged in this way, they make sense to Tom, and he is able to talk about them, indulging in typically copious "philosophical reflections" on the state of things in the south seas.

Understanding inevitably becomes self-expression for Tom,³ and until he reaches the mountain top he encounters nothing he cannot philosophize about. Until he reaches the mountain's crest he encounters nothing he cannot incorporate into his beliefs, and thereby

"understand." Once in the trackless solitude of the island's heartlands, however, he is comparatively silent. He can only describe what he sees and cannot abstract or philosophize upon it. On the mountain top Tom encounters the incomprehensible--the unspeakable. Because he cannot understand it, because it does not fit the closed system of his romantic preconceptions, he must avoid it; and the rest of his journey is a retreat away from the awful nothingness of the central heights, towards the shore and what he already understands. The mountain remains behind, inscrutable and unconquered, "cut off" from the narrow shore of human understanding. Hereafter Tom journeys away from the unspeakable.

What Melville presents us with in Nukuheva is a symbol of the whole round world of finite human actuality in the ocean of infinite possibility; or, as Feidelson expresses it, "Here the waters are the cosmos, and the island is a microcosm."⁴ From the ocean, the source of all life and all mystery for Melville, has risen Nukuheva, symbolic of the mystery at the heart of the universe. It is roughly circular, and around it, on the margin between the mystery and its source, between the mountain and the sea, runs the relativistic cycle of human culture, from primal beginnings to Nineteenth Century present. On one side of Nukuheva is the harbour of western influence; on the other are the Typees who, we will see, represent the exact opposite in cultural terms; and on still another are the Happers, the supposed happy medium between the two, unspoiled yet friendly.

Nukuheva presents, in circular form, the whole continuum of human understanding, from primitive to civilized. Nukuheva is a diagram of human

culture or history revolving around the inscrutable heart of the natural, the eternal, and the unhuman. Tom's journey thus skirts the only part of this symbolic island which is not transient or changeable. His search repeats, in effect, the cycle of human culture and its ageless attempts to come to terms with what the island's heartlands represent: the unfathomable, unspeakable mystery which broods over us all. Nukuheva is, ultimately, a symbol of the human condition, a condition of mystery and misunderstanding, and one which Tom's quest for understanding is predestined to emulate. Tom's singularity of vision, his perception of the world, has proven inflexible and incomplete. His understanding is a failure, and the descent to, and consequent entry into, Typee Valley serve to broaden the implications of that failure, and, finally, to confirm the fact that his search could never really have succeeded--that he has been beaten from the start.

CHAPTER III

THE DESCENT

*"Midway upon the journey of our life
 I found that I was in a dusky wood;
 For the right path, whence I had strayed, was lost.
 Ah me! How hard a thing it is to tell
 The wilderness of that rough and savage place,
 So bitter was it, death is little more so:
 But that the good I found there may be told,
 I will describe the other things I saw."*

Dante, from The Inferno, Canto I

The descent from the mountain top provides a kind of interlude in Typee, involving almost four chapters of Tom's and Toby's thrashing about the mountain side, completely lost. The story line, having progressed steadily from ship, to harbour, to mountain, comes effectively to a halt, as the adventurers wander aimlessly in circles through the island's dense brush. In one way, though, their predicament simply continues Melville's main thematic concerns in Typee. Tom's search for experience of paradise continues downhill from the mountain, and as it does, the symbolic properties of Nukuheva's terrain are given free play. Tom's thrust towards singularity of vision nearly comes to a tragic end in the multiplicity of alternative routes radiating from the island's centre. He encounters the confusing maze of approaches to that mystery, to the absolute; symbolically, he comes face to face with relativity and is almost undone.

However, there are other things to be considered in the descent as well. The thrust of Tom's journey is diffused, and

its object postponed, to a definite purpose. During the long return to the shore the meaning of Tom's search is broadened and elaborated considerably--expanded to its fullest--before the final crucial and climactic episodes in Typee Valley. This amplification is accomplished in basically two ways.

First the descent gives us our only prolonged look at Tom and Toby together, and establishes and clarifies the importance of their relationship. Toby emerges as practical and physically strong and resolute, and comparison to him confirms Tom as representative of opposite qualities, as representing the ability to think as opposed to the ability to do.

Before the descent begins we already know a good deal about Tom. He is romantic by temperament, and well able to rationalize his actions on the basis of naive opinions and expectations. However, having reached the elevated centre of the island and having descended from there, he is no longer within the familiar limits of the shore. Here he becomes enmeshed in a labyrinth of possibilities, of prospective routes to take, all of which are dangerous, strange, and quite disarming to Tom, the man who thinks he knows what lies ahead. Until the nightmarish descent into the valley, Tom is a man given to the complacent notion that he understands things and can guide his destiny on the basis of that understanding.

Of Toby we know almost nothing until the descent; he is only described. That description, though, is very evocative. He is portrayed as "one of that class of rovers you sometimes meet at sea, who never reveal their origins, never allude to home, and go rambling

over the world as if pursued by some mysterious fate they cannot possibly elude" (p. 32). Toby is "a strange wayward being, moody, fitful, and melancholy--at times almost morose," and has "a quick and fiery temper too, which, when thoroughly roused," carries him "into a state bordering on delerium" (p. 32).

It is clear that to some extent Toby suggests, even prefigures, the violent passions of Bembo, Taji, and Jackson, and the promethean power of Ahab. But it would be a mistake to push this too far; Melville does not. What does become important, rather, is Toby's strongly emphasized physicality, his "great flexibility of limb" (p. 32). We come to see Toby as a man who approaches difficult situations realistically and is physically capable of handling them. If Tom is associated with more cerebral flights of reflection and romantic whims, Toby is more down to earth, more physical, and better able to engage the contingencies of the here and now. These roles become quite clear during the descent, and we will see their relationship undergo a subtle and significant change before Typee Valley is penetrated.

At the outset, having been momentarily put off by the "unlooked for discovery" of the island's barren interior, our adventurers stand poised on the brink of a crevice. Their reactions begin to establish the way each looks at things:

"And so," said Toby, peering down into the chasm,
"every one that travels this path takes a jump here,
eh?"

"Not so," said I, "for I think that they might manage
to descend without it; what say you,--shall we attempt
the feat?"

"And what, in the name of caves and cave-holes, do you expect to find at the bottom of that gulf but a broken neck--why it looks blacker than our ship's hold, and the roar of those waterfalls down there would batter one's brains to pieces." (p.44)

Here Tom is consistent. Prompted again by curiosity, he is willing to risk the climb down, completely unaware that this chasm is only one of many standing between him and the goal he still has in mind--to reach 'snug anchor' among the Happars. Tom is certainly more comfortable with the pursuit of his plans than with the nothingness of the mountain top, and is exhilarated by the prospect of adventure. He is more than willing to follow the footprint they find, a sign of the familiar, and descend into the crevice.

Toby, on the other hand, is the voice of common sense, expressing fears which are plainly well founded. Here, too, Toby's physical superiority comes to the fore: he "quickly outstrips" his companion, "dropping . . . with the activity of a squirrel" (p. 45) the bottom of the chasm. Even though he follows Tom's "example," it is Toby who first, and most successfully, negotiates the obstacle.

At the beginning of the descent, then, the roles of Tom and Toby are established. Tom is the leader, and his romantic naivety provides the impulse for the venture; Toby is the follower, and his physical prowess provides the resolution. And here, too, is established the way each tends to regard his commitment. Tommo, with his usual over-confidence, thinks that no dangerous leap need be made in order to reach the valley of the Happars. Toby fully recognizes the dangers involved, but is capable of minimizing them through clear-eyed resolution and strength of limb.

However, when faced with a similar predicament and the need for another decisive commitment, another leap to be made, at the end of the descent, their relationship has changed markedly. By this time Tom is the follower and Toby is "in the van." Tom, the intellectual, is too confused to lead, and is able only to ask "'What's to be done now?'" His companion, in common sense fashion, replies that the only way to defeat their "present strait" is to "get out of it as soon as possible"(p.63), to which end he makes a daring leap to the tree tops in the valley below. So things have changed. Tom's notions of adventure, indeed all his plans, have gone awry, and he is helpless. Toby takes the lead. He does what there is "no alternative" to doing and, through bold, unpremeditated action, shows the way out of difficulty. The roles of leader and follower have reversed, and this underscores what I consider the purpose and meaning of Tom and Toby's relationship to be.

Melville uses Toby as a foil to his hero, intending Toby's characteristics, as they emerge during the descent, to further define Tom's function in the novel. Over the course of the long climb down, which largely serves to demoralize Tom by defeating his expectations at every turn, Toby gradually takes over. When Tom's plans are no longer equal to the bewildering maze of possibilities represented in the innumerable ridges and valleys of the mountain side, Toby's common sense and physical abilities take over.

In Tom is seen the restless mind, and in Toby the ability to resolve, through instinctive, spontaneous action, the difficulties the mind gets into. They represent the ability to conceptualize,

to think, and the ability to act. They need one another, and have been bonded in a "wedding of palms"(p.33). And here Toby's Ahabian air assumes some significance: if Toby represents the resolute action we associate with Ahab, then Tom is linked to that particular capacity for speculative thought we associate with Ishmael. Of course these two ways of coming to grips with experience are not developed here to the extent they are in Moby Dick, but they are, nonetheless, present.

We see the intellectual and cerebral played off against the physical and practical, and the outcome is obvious. Toby not only takes over the journey, he threatens to dominate the whole book. He is a much more attractive and compelling figure than Tom, and is finally eliminated to maintain Tom as the story's focal character. Melville manages to dispose of Toby, first by making him the agency for one of the book's most ironic twists--for it is Toby's painful fate to discover the real nature of the Happers, and finally by making him a sort of deus ex machina--for it is Toby who, after effecting his escape, sends the boat which rescues Tom in the end.

Toby's disappearance is neatly executed and functional. He departs for Nukuheva harbour having served several purposes for his creator, the most important of which is to confirm Tom in the role of intellectual, and to show how ineffectual sheer intellect can be in the face of dilemma. However, comparison to Toby is only one of the ways in which Melville develops the meaning of Tom and his journey during the descent.

The second method by which the significance of Tom's journey is expanded is through Melville's use of mythical allusions. These provide a recognizable literary context which bears directly on the meaning of Tom's search. They fall into two categories: the classical descent motif¹ and the Eden myth as it is presented in Paradise Lost, and the use to which Melville puts them is perfectly in line with his main theme in Typee. Melville uses them to further emphasize the essential ambiguity of human understanding. Melville rather ambitiously undercuts both medieval and renaissance notions of certainty on his way to making Typee's primary statement: denial of the very metaphysical certainty which informs the classical tradition in western literature. In Typee Melville, too, explores the ultimate questions of human existence, but does so without the comfort of the pat systems of belief held by medieval and renaissance thinkers.

The descent motif has a long history, and has variously portrayed a hero descending into the underworld in pursuit of a desired object or loved one (Orpheus and Eurydice), or of special knowledge (Aeneas and Anchises). It has also traditionally been informed by notions of an absolute and divine plan governing the universe. In the Divine Comedy, for example, the poet descends into the darkness of sin, there to be purged of worldly dross and to rise again, purified and radiant with knowledge of divine perfection. Dante makes the descent a testament of medieval faith in a vision of the absolute towards which human nature strives, an allegorical expression of belief in absolute and divine certainty. It is with these questions of faith and certainty, however, that Melville, the Nineteenth Century man, breaks

with tradition. Melville had no profound religious faith, no comfort in metaphysical verities. He was assailed, rather, by profound doubt as to the possibility of a knowable cosmic order, and his unique use of the descent in Typee is in accord with that scepticism. The outcome of descent in Typee points not to perfect knowledge, but to the perfect lack of it.

Tom and Toby descend into a sort of underworld, which Dillingham calls "a damp inferno;"² like Dante they take a wrong turn in the forest and end up in distinctly infernal regions. The landscape is continually described as hellish. Having had a miserable first night of it, Tom says: "I have had many a ducking in the course of my life, and in general cared little about it; but the accumulated horrors of that night, the death-like coldness of the place, the appalling darkness and the dismal sense of our forlorn condition, almost unmanned me" (p. 46). Their first camp, though, is no less "infernal" than any other they make. The mountain of Nukuheva is terraced by such "dark and fearful" chasms and ridges, much as the mountain in the Divine Comedy is terraced by the various levels of sin and purgatory.

More important, though, in Typee as in the Divine Comedy, Eden and hell are parts of the same mountain. But Melville introduces a vital difference: in the Divine Comedy Eden was at the mountain top and hell at the bottom, and in Typee the reverse seems to be true. The mountain top in Typee, if not distinctly infernal in aspect, is certainly hostile, whereas Tom's "vision of paradise" (Typee Valley) is at the mountain's foot. Melville has reversed the traditional treatment of the mountain as symbol, and has done so with a specific purpose.

He presents us with Dante's landscape minus the absolute values of up and down, good and evil, heaven and hell. The truth of the universe which was for Dante God's heaven is, for Melville, inscrutability itself; it is the silence of the mountain top or, as I have said, the ominous hush later to be associated with the white whale. And just as for Dante Eden is the last stop before the quest is completed in salvation, for Melville Typee Valley is the last stage of the quest--except that for Melville it does not end in consecration in the light of absolute knowledge. It ends in continued darkness, or even in oblivion. Typee society is the human embodiment of the inscrutability of the mountain top.

Beneath the glittering surface of Typee life there is a deadly silence and a mystery which can only consume in death the man who would penetrate its all too beguiling mask. In effect the hell and Eden of Typee are not only parts of the same mountain, they are one and the same place. The symbolic value of elevation in Dante is, in Melville, levelled by the relativity of what is real and true; and that relativity Melville posits squarely in the mind of man.

Tom has been to the mountain and, like the poet Yoomy in Mardi, has found "nothing." Like Yoomy, in seeing 'nothing,' Tom has "seen all."³ Tom has encountered mystery at the mountain top and, though he does not know it, will confront it again in Typee Valley. Tom does not descend into the darkness there to be purged of ignorance and rise a better and wiser man. Quite the reverse. He never transcends his ignorance at all, but remains deluded and in darkness, the prisoner of his own finite and imperfect knowledge or, in broadest

terms, the captive of the inevitably relative and unreliable nature of all human understanding. It is through this question of understanding or knowledge that the other allusions so pervasive during the descent, those to Milton's Eden myth, may properly be understood.

Superficially, they are used to lay the groundwork for one of Typee's most crucial ironies--discovery that Typee Valley is nothing like paradise. We will see in the next chapter that it is at least as infernal as it is edenic. For now, though, a more immediate concern is with Melville's allusion to the sin of knowledge, the obvious symbolism of Tom's mysteriously "bitten" leg.

Tom is considerably discomfited by his inexplicably afflicted limb: "Cold shiverings and a burning fever succeeded one another at intervals, while one of my legs was swelled to such a degree, and pained me so acutely, that I half suspected I had been bitten by some venomous reptile, the congenial inhabitant of the chasm from which we had lately emerged" (p. 48). However, he remarks that "all the islands of Polynesia enjoy the reputation, in common with the Hibernian isle, of being free from the presence of any vipers; though whether Saint Patrick ever visited them, is a question I shall not attempt to decide" (pp. 48-49). Literally the snake bite is something of a paradox. Symbolically, though, it is easily explained.

There need not be any snakes on the island for, in effect, Tom is by nature sinful. He is of the progeny of Adam, and it is his human fate to feel the serpent's fang in his heel. Like Milton's "first parents" he too seeks knowledge, and must suffer for it. Knowledge, as symbolized by Tom's poisoned limb, is an impotence of

a kind. The urge to know "unmans" him because its consummation in the discovery of absolute truth is not humanly possible, though he does not recognize this unromantic fact of human existence, and the painful swelling of his leg is the price he must pay for attempting, as every man must, to commit the sin of knowledge anew. The symbolic properties of the leg injury serve to confirm Tom as a man in hopeless pursuit of knowledge predestined never to be his. He carries the painful burden of honestly wanting to know what is unknowable. By the time Tom makes the final leap into Typee Valley he has been purged of all physical and intellectual comfort, of everything but this urge to know which is the essence of all his human anxiety, and which is to become, in Typee, the salvation of his humanity.

To look ahead for a moment, then, in Typee Valley Tommo can never really free himself from the awful notions he entertains concerning the Typees. Typee "savagery" is still part of his whole pre-determined set of ideas about the state of things on Nukuheva island. So it is that whenever anything suggests to Tommo something vaguely ominous or odd about the Typees, all these preconceptions rear their heads again and his leg flares up to cripple him once more. When Toby disappears, for example, Tommo falls "a victim to despair" and "bitter remorse," and suspects the "treachery" of the Typees (p. 109). And of course his leg injury, which had not been responding to the herbal remedies of the native doctor, grows even worse. After Toby's mysterious departure, Tommo tells us, he becomes "almost a cripple" (p. 118). It is only when "sunk insensibly into that kind of apathy which ensues after some violent outbreak of despair" (p. 123) that his

leg heals at all and allows him to give himself up to the "passing hour" (p. 124).

In other words, Tom can only be content in Typee when he is thoughtless, when he "drives away" any "disagreeable thoughts" (p. 124), and devotes himself to the valley's many pleasures. "Peace of mind" in Typee is contingent on the "many enjoyments" (p. 131) available. When Tommo does not think--when he detaches himself from his previous state of mind--he is happy. Such detachment, however, is not completely within Tommo's reach. He is frequently jolted out of his complacency, suspects that things are not as they appear, and is incapacitated again.

Tommo's leg injury is at once the cause of his misery in Typee and the source of his deliverance from there. It is symbolic of the sometimes crippling burden of human intelligence, of thought.⁴ It is primarily the persistence of the urge to think in Tom, and the accompanying pain of the "serpent's bite," that Tom is able to resist the lulling, enervating influences of Typee life--that mindless existence in pleasure which, as we will see in the next chapter, offers oblivion to the thinking man who would surrender to its siren-like appeal. Finally, Typee Valley offers an end to questing through an end to thought, a dubious happiness to which, in Melville's view, the quester dares not acquiesce.

During the long descent, then, the meaning of Tom's search is very much broadened. By comparison to Toby, Tom is firmly established in the role of the intellectual, and that role is given a literary, historical context. In Tom we see the questing intellect in search

of a certainty which, for the medieval and renaissance temperaments, was a deeply believed fact of life, and which for Melville, the sceptical Nineteenth Century writer of philosophical novels, was an illusion. For Melville, the quest for any sort of perfect knowledge eventually was bound to confront the fundamental ambiguity of the world.

Unlike Dante, Tom becomes lost in infernal regions, and undergoes a sort of purgatory, yet does not re-emerge an enlightened man. Tom's quest for singularity of vision turns downhill to find good and evil, virtue and depravity in Typee Valley and in the breasts of its primitive inhabitants. Tom's Beatrice is Fayaway who, though charming enough, is associated more with the physical than the spiritual, and who, though child-like and innocent, is nonetheless involved in all the valley's dark secrets. The only epiphany Tom experiences in edenic Typee is the horrific revelation of Tinor's bundle and of the altar at the Ti. The only paradise he finds is within himself, in his own memory of Typee Valley which, as we shall shortly see, is in no way accurate. Finally, Tom may be regarded as a fool, though in this he is in good company; like Taji and Ahab, Tom also reaches after the unattainable. It only remains here for an examination of Typee Valley's realities to play out the themes discussed thus far, and to see why it is that, for Melville, truth is a mystery, and the quest for that truth predestined to failure.

CHAPTER IV

TYPEE VALLEY

*"One vale there is upon this southern isle,
 This seal of velvet on the Ocean's smile,
 One vale, all breasted in with precipices,
 Whose ample side the clinging root caresses;
 And from the Ocean to the mountain's face,
 But some few miles their intervention trace:
 Within this narrow limit there are men,
 Of whom I loved to read, and read again,
 Such strange and placid lives there seem to be
 Upon that vale far on the deep South Sea. . . ."*

William Ellery Channing, from a poem
 written in tribute to Melville's
Typee

The chapters dealing with Typee Valley are in many ways the most troublesome in the book, containing the passages which so infuriated and beguiled Melville's contemporaries, and which largely provide the basis for theories of Typee as south sea romance. They are also the most crucial chapters in the book, and any new reading of Typee must deal with them in a substantial way. Here, I intend to show that, rather than symbolizing a primitive ideal, or even a level of human consciousness, the world of the Typees provides the book's consummate statement concerning the inevitable relativity of thought which is the source of Melville's ironic view of the quest for knowledge.

There are really two Typees, one very light and one very dark. As Sophia Hawthorne noted long ago, the "golden splendor" of native

beauty coexists with the "dark refrain of cannibalism."¹ More recently, William B. Dillingham discusses the "two Typees," "one evoking joy and glad animal spirits, the other fear and horror."² There are two sides to Typee Valley, representing the two possible contexts for human understanding, and Tom has his choice. He can describe and speculate on what he sees by day in Typee's sunlit vales, and understand native culture that way; or he can attempt to unravel what he sees by darkness and in the valley's heavily shaded groves. Tom can address himself solely to the secular side of Typee life, to their mindless round of pleasurable duties and their equally mindless duty to pleasure; or he can address himself to the religious side of Typee culture, to the mysteries of taboo, rites of passage (tattooing), and midnight ceremonies which are, ultimately, associated with human sacrifice and cannibalism. In the first he succeeds; in the last he fails completely.

Tom can readily understand the light, harmonious side of Typee life, because it conforms perfectly to his romantic expectations of the Marquesas; but, as he says time and again, he can "never comprehend" the darker side of ritual, idolatry, and taboo. In Typee Valley are represented the two possibilities open to the questing mind Tom represents: commitment to a vision of the world where thought is incomplete, or commitment to the unthinkable. Tom can speculate on the surface of things from the security of his preconceived outlook, or he can detach himself from all preconception, all thought, and plunge unaided into the darkness of mystery. One approach is comfortable and inconclusive because it requires no dangerous leap to be made;

the other is hazardous and absolute because it does. Together they constitute the essential ambiguity of experience, an ambiguity which, at the very least, forbids perfect and complete understanding. Moreover, in Typee, both hold great dangers for the questing intellect.

Happiness in Typee requires a sort of "perseverance" which, though seemingly more pleasant, is nonetheless fundamentally as perverse and dehumanizing as the singleminded pursuit of commercial gains characterizing the world of ships Tom has fled. Tom runs away from the prison of the "Dolly" and the tyranny of her captain, only to be confined again in Typee Valley, under the gentle, yet stern, control of another autocrat. He has never really escaped at all and, in the end, is again on the shore, and cut off from the mystery above.

Finally, the Typees are linked symbolically, through silence, to the mystery of Nukuheva's mountain top, and Tom's confrontation of them crystallizes the dilemma of the quest for knowledge: the Melvillean quester is a thinking man always, and yet the mysteries to which he addresses his powers lay beyond thought, beyond commitment that is rational in any way. Thought and the death of thought, humanity and the surrender of humanity, are the two sides to the dilemma symbolized in Typee Valley, and to which there is no answer but Tom's--retreat.

It is obvious that Typee represents, at least superficially, a paradise of sorts,³ an idealized primitive social order. Mehevi typifies the virile native male, Fayaway the innocently uninhibited damsel, and Kory-Kory the faithful man Friday. Tom fits right in, becoming a foster child for Tinor, an "industrious", solicitous old

mother figure, and "warm hearted" Marheyo, a slightly addled and comically eccentric patriarch.

The family of Tinor and Marheyo is one of many, for the natives characteristically form "nuptial alliances" within the framework of a happily "regular system of polygamy." Damsels are "wooed and won," and, although "separations occasionally happen," "wedlock" is generally of a "distinct and enduring nature" among the Typees. "Virtue," Tom remarks with approval, "without being clamorously invoked, is . . . unconsciously practised" (pp. 191-92).

Leisure and love-making, certainly the primary activities in the valley, are pursued by all and enjoyed by all, though work, such as it is, has a place. Every Typee participates in some sort of easy industry, whether fruit gathering, tappa making, or fishing, and goods are distributed so as to maintain slight and acceptable degrees of wealth. All Typees attend the religious festivals at the Hoolah Hoolah ground, and strictly observe the laws of taboo. They are model citizens.

Over this society reigns a model king, Mehevi, the "sovereign of the valley." From the seat of government at the Ti, surrounded by elder counsellors and the war chief Mow Mow, Mehevi rules firmly, but without the "ceremonious pomp which usually surrounds the purple" (p. 187). He is easy-going and physically superior; in short, Mehevi is "one of Nature's noblemen" (p. 78). An ideal secular monarch, he is kind to his people, resolute in time of danger, and properly deferential to the god Moa-Artua and his many priests.

Overall, Tom is a fervent admirer of Typee society, for it is without "those thousand sources of irritation that the ingenuity of civilized man has created to mar his own felicity" (p. 126). He says: "When I looked around the verdant recess in which I was buried, and gazed up to the summits of the lofty eminence that hemmed me in, I was well disposed to think that I was in the 'Happy Valley,' and that beyond those heights there was nought but a world of care and anxiety" (p. 124). And, to some extent, he is correct.

It cannot be denied that Tommo does find a measure of happiness in Typee Valley. He is never more content, for instance, than when boating on the lagoon with the lovely Fayaway. He describes one such "delightful little party on the lake" as follows: "We floated about [thus] for several hours, when I looked up to the warm, glowing, tropical sky, and then down into the transparent depths below; and when my eye, wandering from the bewitching scenery around, fell upon the grotesquely-tattooed form of Kory-Kory, and finally encountered the pensive gaze of Fayaway, I thought I had been transported to some fairy region, so unreal did everything appear" (p. 134). Here, in the charmed circle of the lagoon, Tommo is "transported" into a sensuous limbo, hovering between "transparent depths" and luminous sky. Tommo enjoys a magic moment in a magic world, and his gaze seems to take in everything, the sky above, the water below, the "bewitching scenery around," and his dearest companions, lover and servant. The edenic picture is complete, just as it was when Tom felt as if "floating in some new element" in the "shade baths" of Tior. Yet the charm, though strong and captivating totally, is momentary.

"The strong trade wind," as Tommo tells us it sometimes does, "sweeps" across the valley, "ruffling in its passage the otherwise tranquil surface of the lake" (p. 134). The same winds that carried Tom to Nukuheva, and which are to carry him away, shatters this transcendent moment, bringing Tommo back to the here and now, and to the arrival of Marnoo, an event which is to eventuate in more pain and anxiety for our narrator. The sojourn on the lake, like many of Tommo's diversions in Typee, is "unreal"--at least in the sense that it does not constitute the whole reality of the valley. That reality, to paraphrase an earlier comment by Tommo, is very different from its purely idyllic appearance.

Tom is, in fact, "hemmed in" or "buried" in this "Happy Valley" of Typee. The Typees' thoughtless round of physical pleasures is inimical to what motivates Tom: the restless urge to think and to understand. Happiness in Typee is a mindless thing, springing from the "all-pervading sensation . . . of a healthful physical existence" (p. 127). The Typees are happy through an instinctive response to nature alone, and because of that Tommo is a stranger among them.

The intellectual and spiritual indolence of the Typees threatens a kind of death in life to Tommo. To be happy in Typee one does not need to think. In fact Tom is more content when he does not. The pleasurable sameness of the valley is at once its greatest attraction, and, in a way, its greatest menace, because it simply never changes. "Nothing," Tom tells us, "can be more uniform and undiversified than the life of the Typees; one tranquil day of ease and happiness follows another in quiet succession; and with these unsophisticated savages

the history of a day is the history of a life" (p.149). This uniformity of life is as menacing, in its way, as the confusing sameness of the mountain terrain from which Tommo has emerged. The two are analogous.

When lost amid the maze of valleys and ridges on Nukuheva mountain, Tom is unnerved mainly because he cannot chart his progress or, indeed, be sure that he is progressing at all. He says,

There is scarcely anything when a man is in difficulties that he is more disposed to look upon with abhorrence than a right-about retrograde movement--a systematic going over of already trodden ground; and especially if he has a love of adventure, such a course appears indescribably repulsive, so long as there remains the least hope to be derived from braving untried difficulties. (p. 54)

Thus Tom is only free from pain and anxiety when he resolves to do as the Typees do, to "bury all regrets and all remembrances" in the "wild enjoyments" afforded by the valley. To exist in Typee Tommo must forget who he is, must not think at all really, and that is a kind of death, a death in life. Typee life style represents another sort of perseverance--total commitment to thoughtless ease. Typee is no home to the intellect and the higher aspirations of the human spirit.⁴

The Typees, despite their apparent happiness, ought not to be emulated. Theirs is a childish world, instinctive, inexperienced, and insular. They are continually described as being child-like in their delights, and even in their religious observances. After watching Kolory's antics with the "baby-god," the doll-like Moa Artua, Tommo comments that the proceedings "were like those of a parcel of children

playing with dolls and baby houses" (p.176). As Miller observes, such recurring child metaphors "tend to deprive the Typees of those distinctively human attributes, a mind and a soul."⁵

Their childishness, undeniably charming as it is at times, is marked by a capriciousness which, in the physically mature, is a little frightening. The Typees are capable of spontaneous rage as well as joy. Like children, they make themselves understood without speaking and with no thought of masking their emotions. As Tom says at the abrupt conclusion of his interview with Marnoo: "The lively countenances of these people are wonderfully indicative of the emotions of the soul, and the imperfections of their oral language are more than compensated for by the nervous eloquence of their looks and gestures. I could plainly trace, in every varying expression of their faces, all those passions which had been thus unexpectedly aroused in their bosoms" (p.142). The Typees are as easily angered as pleased, and Tom learns a proper respect for the ire of men like Mehevi and Mow Mow. He has to. He is a prisoner in Typee, "an adult among children."⁶ It is a gentle tyranny, but tyranny nonetheless. Typee is, ultimately, as much a prison as the world of the "Dolly" and "Perseverance," for both lack the possibility of spiritual fulfillment. They are perverse and dehumanizing, equally vacuous and comparably inane, and both are deadly to what Tom represents--the irrepressible human urge to know.

The idea that Typee represents the noble savage is a romantic half-truth, for it is directed to only one side of Typee life. Beneath the glittering and alluring surface of Typee life, typified by the

"fairy region" of the lagoon, is a darker side, full of vaguely awful threats which, though Tommo cannot understand them, are nonetheless ominous and plain for us to see. Seduced by the sparkling vivacity of the Typees Tommo very nearly loses his life and his will. The reader who makes the same mistake stands to lose Melville's meaning. There is indeed a "spirit in the woods" of Typee Valley, but it is not a friendly one.

Immediately upon entering the valley, and almost in the same breath, Tommo describes the "much decayed" fruit he and Toby hungrily devour (p.67), and the Adam and Eve-like couple they encounter there, "slender and graceful, and completely naked, with the exception of a slight girdle of bark, from which depended at opposite points two of the russet leaves of the bread-fruit tree" (p.68). It is no accident that the bread-fruit they partake of--the fruit of paradise and the life food of the Typees--is blighted; physical and spiritual decay are as much a part of Typee life as the gentle beauty of this native "boy and girl." For every attractive image of Typee there is an opposite one which, if it is not exactly repulsive, though some are, is at least forbidding and somehow ominous. There is direct correspondence of light and dark, innocent pleasures and strong hints of evil, in Typee. And through the constant, though rarely insightful, observations of our narrator, we may see them all.

Tommo is impressed by virtually every aspect of Typee life, but by none more than the physical strength and beauty of the natives. For the comely Fayaway he is full of hyperbolic praise, calling her "free pliant figure" the "very perfection of female grace and

beauty" (p.85). She is his "peculiar favorite," his lover. Yet the other woman prominent in his Typeean life, his "dear, good, and affectionate" foster mother Tinor, is the guardian of the bundle in which Tom first discovers evidence of Typee barbarity.

Of the males of the valley, Mehevi is the most impressive specimen. He is the ultimate Typee man, and he is "imposing":

The splendid long drooping tail-feathers of the tropical bird, thickly interspersed with the gaudy plumage of the cock, were disposed in an immense upright semicircle upon his head, their lower extremities being fixed in a crescent of guinea-beads which spanned the forehead. Around his neck were several enormous necklaces of boars' tusks, polished like ivory, and disposed in such a manner that the longest and largest were upon his capacious chest." (pp. 77-78)

In full regalia, muscles rippling beneath a bronzed and tattooed skin, Mehevi must have been an impressive spectacle. Yet, beside Mehevi must be placed his war chief, "the hideously scarred" and bloodthirsty Mow Mow, whose ferocity nearly proves the undoing of Tom's escape. Together, Fayaway and Tinor, Mehevi and Mow Mow, provide contradictory images of the Typees.

Even the overall impression of Typee health and beauty finds a striking contrast. There is another side to this impression of Typee life, and it is revealed when Tom, accompanied by Kory-Kory, visits the seat of Mehevi's government at the Ti:

As we advanced further along the building, we were struck with the aspect of four or five hideous old wretches, on whose decrepit forms time and tattooing seemed to have obliterated every trace of humanity . . . the bodies of these men were of a uniform dull green colour--the hue which the tattooing gradually assumes as the individual

advances in age. Their skin had a frightful scaly appearance, which, united with its singular colour, made their limbs not a little resemble dusty specimens of verde-antique. Their flesh, in parts, hung upon them in huge folds, like the overlapping plaits on the flank of a rhinoceros. Their heads were completely bald, whilst their faces were puckered into a thousand wrinkles, and they presented no vestige of a beard. (p. 92)

These figures embody all the infirmities of old age, and are hideous indeed. There is a darker side to the youthful health of the Typees, for here in the deep shades of the sacred grove, these aged creatures seem almost ready to blend, in the green decay of age, into the primeval forest all around, to "go back" in a way that critics have ignored in Typee.

And just as the image of youthful beauty and strength finds its counterpart here, so do Typee's sun-bathed glades have an opposite. Adjacent to the Ti are the darkly shaded Taboo groves, the "scene," Tom speculates, "of many a prolonged feast, many a horrid rite":

Beneath the dark shadows of the consecrated bread-fruit trees there reigned a solemn twilight--a cathedral-like gloom. The frightful genius of pagan worship seemed to brood in silence over the place, breathing its spell upon every object around. Here and there, in the depths of these awful shades, half screened from sight by masses of overhanging foliage, rose the idolatrous altars of the savages, built of enormous blocks of black and polished stone, placed one upon another, without cement, to the height of twelve or fifteen feet, and surmounted by a rustic open temple, enclosed with a low picket of canes, within which might be seen, in various stages of decay, offerings of bread-fruit and cocoanuts, and the putrefying relics of some recent sacrifice." (p. 91)

Ironically, of course, Tommo is quite right to sense the evil here; it is at the Ti that he makes his final awful discovery. But for now what is important to note is that there is this darker side to Typee life, brooding in the shades amid decaying idols, and exploding occasionally in midnight ceremonies where the natives dance "like so many demons" before the flames of sacrificial fires.

Furthermore, Mehevi, who embodies all the virtues of the Typees, is associated with all their ultimately horrid vices. The Ti and the Taboo ground, where Mehevi lives and rules, constitute the heart of Typee culture, and a black heart it is. It is finally linked to the cannibalism which, no matter how Tommo rationalizes it, gives lie to the notion that Typee represents the primitive ideal. The realities of island culture are to be found here, and not, as Tommo thinks, in Typee's sunnier groves or in the vale of Tior. Yet, whatever that reality is, Tom never discovers it. Whatever the true nature of Typee culture is remains a mystery, a conspiracy of silence, and it is silence which provides perhaps the most substantial clue to the symbolic function of the Typees.

When Tom is bold enough to question his captivity or certain vital taboos, he is met with lies or hostile silence. This silence, however, goes beyond mere dissembling; it is characteristic of the island as a whole which, besides the human voice, is absolutely soundless. Tommo observes that "There are no wild animals of any kind on the island, unless it be decided that the natives themselves are such. The mountains and the interior present to the eye nothing but silent solitudes, unbroken by the roar of beasts of prey, and

enlivened by few tokens even of minute animated existence" (p. 212). Even the birds in the valley make no sound: "Birds--bright and beautiful birds--fly over the valley of Typee Their plumage is purple and azure, crimson and white, black and gold; with bills of every tint:--bright bloody-red, jet black, and ivory white; and their eyes are bright and sparkling; they go sailing through the air in starry throngs; but alas! the spell of dumbness is upon them all--there is not a single warbler in the valley!" (p. 215).

Now if we remember that Mehevi's head dress, the symbol of his chieftainship, is made of these feathers, then we might begin to associate symbolic silence with the human residents of the valley. As Merlin Bowen perceptively comments, "The beautiful but voiceless birds . . . seem . . . emblematic of the islanders themselves, cut off from him [Tommo] by the wall of language, and so made indistinguishable from the dumb mystery of nature."⁷ The silence of the island's "interior solitudes" is symbolically associated with the Typees themselves; the Typees are the human embodiment of the "dumb mystery of nature," of the ineffable quietude of the central heights. As John Seelye points out, the "'hushed repose'" of the valley is "itself a counterpart to the 'fearful silence' and 'unbroken solitude' at the island's interior."⁸ Just as Tommo can say nothing about the barren centre of the island, so can he never comprehend the true nature of the Typees. Their secrets are primeval and inscrutable, their mysterious culture, symbolized by the Druidic Pi Pi's so puzzling to Tom, "coeval with creation" (p. 154).

This symbolic muteness is made even more evident in the custom of tattooing. Mehevi's markings are typical: "Two broad stripes of tattooing, diverging from the centre of his shaven crown, obliquely crossed both eyes--staining the lids--to a little below either ear, where they united with another stripe which swept in a straight line along the lips and formed the base of a triangle"(p.78). The tattoos cover every organ of communication, symbolically and indelibly linking Mehevi, and all the Typees, with silence. And, unfortunately for Tommo, a similar "mystic triangle"(p.220)is desired for him by his keepers.

Tommo is terrified by the prospect of being tattooed, a fate Karky and even Mehevi press upon him continually: "Hardly a day passed but I was subjected to their annoying requests, until at last my existence became a burden to me; the pleasures I had previously enjoyed no longer afforded me delight, and all my former desire to escape from the valley now revived with additional force"(p.220). Tommo becomes thoroughly miserable, feeling convinced, as he says, that "in some luckless hour 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"(p. 219).

This is a frightening thought for Tommo, made all the more fearful because, as he states, "Although convinced that tattooing was a religious observance, still the nature of the connection between it and the superstitious idolatry of the people was a point upon which I could never obtain any information. Like the still more important system of the 'Taboo,' it always appeared inexplicable to

me" (pp. 220-21). Ritual disfigurement is repulsive to Tommo for aesthetic reasons, but is frightening, too, because, like all Typee religion, indeed the whole dark and mysterious side of native culture, it is incomprehensible to him.

Tattooing is only a part Typee religion, a rite of passage into, and a mark of kinship in, the pervasive system of taboo. The taboo is all-powerful and deeply mysterious; Tommo says,

There is a marked similarity, almost an identity, between the religious institutions of most of the Polynesian islands, and in all exists the mysterious "Taboo," restricted in its use to a greater or less extent. So strange and complex in its arrangements is this remarkable system, that I have in several cases met with individuals who, after residing for years among the islands in the Pacific, and acquiring a considerable knowledge of the language, have nevertheless been altogether unable to give any satisfactory account of its operations. 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. Those effects were, indeed, widespread and universal, pervading the most important as well as the minutest transactions of life. (p. 221)

Typee culture, in fact the majority of the Polynesian societies, is controlled absolutely by this system of taboo. "The savage," Tom concludes, "lives in the continual observance of its dictates, which guide and control every action of his being" (p. 221). And Tommo's frequent assertion that he does not understand, that he never "comprehends" it, becomes almost a refrain in Typee, and points to the fact that understanding of this inexplicable system of taboo, which so fully controls the native's "being" is not, ultimately, a rational thing at all. It calls for a commitment to something one does not comprehend.

There is only one way Tommo can get behind the mask of silence the Typees wear, and that is to wear the mask himself. He must give himself up to Karky the tattoo artist and have his visage crossed indelibly with symbols he does not know the meaning of. Such a commitment is absolute; once tattooed, there could be no turning back for Tommo. He would be rendered "hideous for life" and become an outcaste, "tabooed" like Marnoo, and able to call no place home. Moreover, the hazards of participation in the taboo go beyond this threat of alienation for, just as tattooing is involved in the system, so is cannibalism, the ultimate danger of Typee culture. It is the discovery of this awful secret, which, as Merlin Bowen comments, "comes to Tommo with the shock of a familiar door opening suddenly upon darkness,"⁹ that finally impels Tommo to flee for his life.

One day, just previous to his departure, Tommo's "unexpected return" from the Ti throws the natives seated in Tinor's home "into the greatest confusion." "The evident alarm the savages betrayed," Tommo relates, "filled me with forbodings of evil, and with an uncontrollable desire to penetrate the secret so jealously guarded. Despite the efforts of Marheyo and Kory-Kory to restrain me, I forced my 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" (p.232). And, "to his horror," Tommo sees "Two of the three were heads of the islanders; but the third . . . was that of a white man" (p.233). Naturally he is appalled, and spends the next several days in a state of forboding which, about a week after his discovery of the contents of the mysterious packages, proves even more well-founded.

Happening to be at the Ti, Tommo's curiosity is aroused by the sound of the "war-alarm," and of musket fire in the distance. "An hour or two after . . . termination" of the "skirmish" he observes the approach of a Typee war party bearing the bloodied bodies of four Happar warriors. "When the crowd drew up opposite the Ti," Tom says, "I set myself to watch their proceedings most attentively; but scarcely had they halted when my servitor [Kory-Kory] . . . touched my arm, and proposed our returning to Marheyo's house" (p. 236). Tommo refuses but, under Mow Mow's stern injunction, finally complies. The proceedings are obviously none of his business. Again his curiosity is stifled by the Typees' conspiracy of silence, though not for long.

The sound of drums, "the same thundering sounds . . . of the Feast of the Calabashes," begins and continues through the night and the whole of the next day, in what Tommo supposes to be the celebration of "another . . . horrible solemnity" (p. 236). He is correct. The next morning, while strolling with Kory-Kory at the Ti, Tommo spies "a curiously carved vessel of wood" which, he concludes, "must have some connection with the recent festival" (p. 238). "Prompted by . . . a curiosity I could not repress," Tommo says, "in passing it I raised one end of the cover; at the same moment the chiefs, perceiving my design, loudly ejaculated, 'Taboo! taboo!' But the slight glimpse sufficed; my eyes fell upon the disordered members of a human skeleton, the bones still fresh with moisture, and with particles of flesh clinging to them here and there" (p. 238).

These grisly remains of the Happar dead provide conclusive proof that the Typees are cannibals and, furthermore, that cannibalism

is an inherent part of the system of taboo. Cannibalism constitutes the ultimate taint on Typee culture, a taint which, like the taboo of which it is a part, permeates Typee life and touches even the dearest of Tommo's native companions. The essential mystery of taboo, and the silence which surrounds it, confirms that the mystery of the Typees--and of Nukuheva as a whole--is not only incomprehensible, but deadly to the quester who would penetrate it.

It is no accident that Tom sees three heads when he steals a glimpse into Tinor's bundle: the discovery scene is symbolic. There are three relative cultures surrounding the towering central mystery of Nukuheva, and that mystery is a threat to all of them. Native and white, primitive and civilized, all men must acquiesce or succumb to the mystery at the heart of things.

Commitment to this mystery, through the rite of passage of tattooing, is one that Tommo is finally unable to make, and his extreme reluctance goes far beyond a cultural difference of opinion. As Bowen suggests, "It is the threat . . . of the absorption of his personality into this universal blank of savagery that awakens in him so disproportionate a terror at the suggestion of ritual tattooing."¹⁰ To participate in the mysterious, the incomprehensible and unspeakable, Tom must detach himself from thought itself. Penetration of the unknown can only be accomplished unaided by knowledge of any kind, or by the rational process of thought we see in Tom. For Melville Tom's dilemma is the one the quester after knowledge must confront: the quester may acquiesce to the mystery and emerge from his adventures unscathed and unfulfilled, or he may blindly plunge into it with

absolutely no notion of what the final outcome will be. The only rational decision here is obvious, and Tom makes it: he resolves to flee Typee and return to the world of ship, sea, and sky from which he came. And, with the arrival of a rescue boat from an Australian whaler, he succeeds in this enterprise.

CHAPTER V

ESCAPE

"For now, since by many prolonged, repeated experiences, I have perceived that in all cases man must eventually lower, or at least shift, his conceit of attainable felicity."

Ishmael, in Moby Dick.

Tom's escape brings the quest in Typee full circle. He "runs away" again, this time to return to the civilization he had originally fled. In the end Tommo not only welcomes going back to the world he had detested in the beginning, but fights his way out of Nukuheva with much the same determination as he had fought his way in. Fittingly, Tommo completes his adventures with another about face, another reversal similar to that concerning the harbour scene. The world of sea and ships now means something totally different to Tom from what it meant before.

In the beginning the ocean had been a kind of threat to Tom, inhospitable and vast. However, with escape from Typee at hand, he regards it differently, more in the order of a dear companion. Approaching the beach where the rescue boat lies waiting Tom says, "never shall I forget the ecstasy I felt when I first heard the roar of the surf breaking upon the beach. Before long I saw the flashing billows themselves through an opening between the trees. Oh glorious sight and sound of ocean! with what rapture did I hail you as familiar friends!" (p. 248).

Even the contempt Tom had previously felt for his shipmates, indeed for all "civilized" men, is altered in this rapturous scene. Here he yearns toward them, fancying that he can "distinguish" the voices of his "own countrymen" in the "blended confusion of sounds" emanating from the crowd of natives milling noisily about the rescue boat on the beach (p.248). Instead of arousing the frightening spectre of the "Perseverance" as it had previously done, the world of sea and ships now means kinship, security, and salvation for Tom. It means the opposite of what it meant before. Changed circumstances have again produced a new angle of perception, and a new and different understanding of the world. Tom is consumed by the desire to return to something which, at the beginning of the novel, he had despised with all his being. His return to civilization, however, is no easier than was his departure from it.

It is only through argument, painful physical exertion, and a measure of luck, that Tommo succeeds in boarding the rescue boat and putting out to sea. Yet even as the boat moves away from the beach, Tommo is forced to fight to save his purpose and sustain his escape. Just as he had to cut his way through the reeds which had threatened to foil his flight from the "Dolly," here he has to cut down another obstacle to escape: the ferocious Mow Mow.

After the momentary confusion which had allowed Tommo to enter the rescue vessel undetected, the natives suddenly take drastic action. Led by Mow Mow, a number of warriors take to the water and align themselves to intercept and capsize the boat. The ensuing skirmish gives Typee its most exciting moment. Tom relates that,

"After a few breathless moments I discerned Mow-Mow. The athletic islander, with his tomahawk between his teeth, was dashing the water before him till it foamed again. He was the nearest to us, and in another instant he would have seized one of the oars. Even at the moment I felt horror at the act I was about to commit; but it was no time for pity or compunction, and with true aim, and exerting all my strength, I dashed the boat-hook at him. It struck him just below the throat, and forced him downwards" (p.252). Tommo's effort here is supreme. It requires all his "strength," and it succeeds. The boat is saved, and Tom succumbs to the "strong excitement" of the moment, fainting dead away into the arms of one of his rescuers.

It is tempting to see something of Ahab in Tom's action here. Yet it would be a mistake to say that Tom's blow with the boat-hook is in any way the equivalent of Ahab's harpoon thrust. The actions are similar, but their meanings are not. While Ahab's thrust is towards the heart of the whale and the mystery it symbolizes, Tom's action is, in effect, the opposite of Ahab's.

Tommo is struggling away from confrontation with the dark mystery of his world, and his thrust with the boat-hook is his last attempt to free himself from its grasp. Tommo, unlike Ahab, is moving quite purposely and with all his will, away from the unspeakable secrets of his universe. Ultimately his blow at the savage Mow-Mow is a reaffirmation of membership in the world of men rather than an attempt to probe the secrets of the world itself. As old Marheyo seems instinctively to know, it is in the world of "home" and "mother" (p. 248) that Tommo truly belongs. And to that world he has, in the end, returned.

In a limited sense Tom's quest has been a success, for he has managed to maintain and nourish a rational vision of Nukuheva. Ultimately, though, it has been a failure, because Tom's vision is incomplete and takes no account of the darker and irrational side of Nukuheva's total reality. In Typee Tom comes as close as possible to the essential mystery of nature, but cannot penetrate it by any rational, structured means. Throughout Typee Tommo struggles manfully to understand his world, but finally understands very little. He thinks he has understood but, as Melville makes plain, he has failed. He limps to his salvation still crippled by the burden of imperfect human knowledge, a burden he carries long afterwards when, after experiencing the "pent up wickedness" of men aboard a man of war, he remembers Typee as a paradise it very clearly was not.

Viewed through the uncomprehending mind of Tommo, both during and after his stay in the valley, the reality of Typee remains a mystery, concealed by the silence which links it to the mountain top, at once the center of Nukuheva and the mystery around which the quest in Typee revolves. For Tommo things are the way he remembers them, and his recollections of Nukuheva are not fundamentally different from his original romantic notions concerning the island. Preconception and retrospection come to the same dubious conclusions for Tom, and the real nature of Nukuheva remains hidden somewhere between--hidden only to him, though, and not to us. We can see Nukuheva for what Melville wanted it to represent: the ominous and unfathomable heart of the universe which holds not knowledge, but oblivion, for the man who would discover its secrets.

In the end, the inscrutability reigning over the world of Nukuheva stands unchallenged, impenetrable, and absolute. In the end, the quest in Typee meets with the defeat to which it was predestined, and mystery, the essential ambiguity of the world, is confirmed as the governing law of the Melvillean universe. In this first novel Melville speaks eloquently of the unspeakable mystery of the universe, of the things, as Hawthorne relates in an entry to his "English Notebooks", that lay "beyond human ken."¹ It is perhaps not too much to say that Melville's mature and greatest work is informed by "realization and conviction" of the "wisdom" he had "uttered long ago"--in Typee. Typee sets out, with remarkable depth and fulness, the essential irony of vision which was to characterize the whole of Melville's artistic career.

FOOTNOTES

INTRODUCTION

¹ For the most comprehensive survey of contemporary opinions of Typee see Hugh W. Hetherington, Melville's Reviewers, British and American: 1846-1891 (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1961), pp. 20-65. See also Charles Anderson, "Contemporary Opinions of Typee and Omoo," American Literature, 9 (1937), 1-25.

² Herman Melville, Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1968), p. xiv. Hereafter cited in text.

³ F.O. Matthiessen is an exception here. He considered Typee mainly as a "record of experience." See American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1941), p. 371.

⁴ Warner Berthoff, The Example of Melville (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1962), p. 67.

⁵ James E. Miller, A Reader's Guide to Herman Melville (New York: Noonday Press, 1962), p. 18.

⁶ Critical approaches to Typee tend to fall into three broad categories: it is read as a straightforward romance, as a novel of initiation, or, in varying degrees, as an artistic failure. Charles Anderson keynotes the romantic approach in Melville in the South Seas, Columbia University Studies in English and Comparative Literature, No. 138 (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1939), calling Typee "a whole-hearted defense of the Noble Savage . . . written in the romantic literary tradition inaugurated by Rousseau a century before" (p. 178). Tyrus Hillway calls Typee "overwhelmingly romantic," and, in the same vein, Lewis Mumford sees in Typee "a book to make one go visiting tropical islands, a book to make one question the well-arranged career, the carefully ironed routine, the dull inevitability of the days one has chosen to lead." See Hillway's Herman Melville (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1963), p. 69, and Mumford's Herman Melville: A Study of His Life and Vision, rev. ed. (1929; rpt. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1962), pp. 44-45.

A larger body of criticism views Typee as a novel of initiation in which the young novice confronts and transcends an innocent, spontaneous level of consciousness in order to achieve a degree of adult awareness. Lawrence was the first exponent of this idea, regarding the journey into Typee as an "act of birth . . . a bit of birth-myth or re-birth myth" carrying into "the green Eden of the Golden Age." The tenor of Lawrence's remarks are rather like Anderson's, but Lawrence's ideas differ from the notion of Typee as South Sea idyll in one significant aspect. He sees Typee as a symbol of the primal, innocent consciousness to which modern man may not "go back": "It is one's destiny inside one. . . . Whatever else the South Sea Islander is, he is centuries and centuries behind us in the life-struggle, the consciousness-struggle, the struggle of the soul into fulness." See Studies in Classic American Literature, 2nd ed. (1923; rpt. New York: Viking Press, 1964), pp. 134-37. William Ellery Sedgwick makes a similar observation in Herman Melville: The Tragedy of Mind (New York: Russell and Russell, 1944), stating that "What Melville is finally expressing in Typee is an inward and universal phase of human experience . . . the phase . . . in which as yet no painful cleavage is felt dividing a happy animality from the gentlest and most guileless impulses of the heart" (pp. 27-28). "Nevertheless," he concludes, "one cannot re-enter into full possession of the 'Happy Valley.' One cannot stay long. . . . It is forced upon us to know that Typee is not the human thing itself, and a man cannot duck his human destiny" (p. 30). Milton R. Stern's remarks in The Fine Hammered Steel of Herman Melville (Urbana, Ill.: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1957) are in line with the above: "Tommo has plunged back down into the primitive beginnings of human order only to find that man of the conscious, technological world has travelled too far beyond Eden to find . . . completion . . . possible on the primary, mindless level" (p. 60). Finally, Richard Chase also observes in Typee an idyllic, "carefree," and childish state of being, and says that it is "part . . . of growing up to force oneself to grow beyond the Typee society." See Herman Melville: A Critical Study (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1949), pp. 13-14.

A number of other critics tend to regard Typee as a failure, though some, like Berthoff, qualify that opinion somewhat. Newton Arvin, for example, says that although "there are intimations of complexity" in Typee and Omoo, "it is idle to look for great depths or difficulties in them; to do so would be to miss their special quality of spontaneity and youthfulness." See Herman Melville (New York: William Sloane, 1950), p. 79. Similarly, Merlin Bowen comments that, while "Typee . . . gives us occasional glimpses of a deeper insight," it is "a mistake to suggest that they characterize the book." See The Long Encounter: Self and Experience in the Writings of Herman Melville (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 15-16. Other critics, however, are rather less generous. Alan Lebowitz, for instance, calls Typee and Omoo "slight," and Willard Thorpe says that "Typee is as nearly artless as anything Melville wrote." See Lebowitz, Progress Into Silence: A Study of Melville's Heroes (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana Univ. Press, 1970), p. 24; and Thorpe, Herman Melville: Representative Selections (New York: American Book Co., 1938), p. xlvii.

My disagreements with these three approaches can be briefly stated. The obvious evils of Typee Valley render the idea that it represents the primitive ideal something less than well considered. Those evils hardly encourage one to "go visiting islands." While the initiation reading is more attractive, it has serious shortcomings too. That approach assumes a change or an increase in awareness we simply do not see in Tommo. I argue in this paper that Tom remains deluded to the end and, moreover, that his failure to learn bears importantly on the meaning of Typee. Lastly, I do not believe that Typee is "slight" or "artless." I argue here that it is a conscious work of art of which "depth" and "complexity" are indeed "characteristic."

⁷ Nathalia Wright, Melville's Use of the Bible (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1949), p. 77.

⁸ John Seelye, in Melville: The Ironic Diagram (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1970), also focuses on the essential irony of the Melvillean quest: "If Melville's questers are persistent in their settings-forth, that persistence is quixotic, for all are ultimately baffled by the confusing contradictoriness of a world which has 'no secret,' no absolute basis. Empathizing with his outward-moving heroes, yet aware of their essential fallibility, Melville uses them to explore the shifting, relativistic territory of Truth, a journey which necessarily spirals down into the maelstrom of ultimate mystery" (pp. 8-9). This contradiction and bafflement Seelye sees as vital to the "ironic diagram" of the quest in Melville's work, "the Euclidean expression of truth towards which his art is aimed" (p. 9). However, Seelye's arguments are founded primarily on his reading of the later works, and of Moby Dick in particular, and have comparatively little to say about Typee. Like Berthoff et al., he sees the book as a promising failure: "By means of diagram and half-realized symbol, Melville seems to be suggesting that the Typees, like Moby Dick, are animated nature--a phenomenological whole that baffles inquiry. But these patterns of intimation can be detected only by comparing them to the later works. The materials of symbolism and irony are present, and the young author seems to be hinting at their full significance, but nothing comes of it" (p. 22). I do not agree with Seelye, however. My arguments are directed towards disproving Typee's failure through a discussion of the very concerns Seelye sees as being still born in the novel--symbolism and irony. Moreover, I do not believe that Tommo's quest is "baffled" because the world has "no absolute basis." The world of Typee does present a vision of absolute reality in Nukuheva, and it baffles inquiry because the human mind is too severely limited to grasp it, not because that absolute basis is not there.

For another argument concerning the irony of the Melvillean quest, see Merrell Davis' Melville's *Mardi*: A Chartless Voyage, Yale Studies in English, 119 (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1952), where Davis says that the "seeker . . . is not to be satisfied and will continue his search for his illusive vision" (p. 199).

⁹ Leon Howard, "Historical Note," in Typee, ed. Harrison Hayford et al. (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1968), p. 301.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER I

¹ William B. Dillingham, An Artist in the Rigging: The Early Works of Herman Melville (Athens, Ga.: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1972), p. 30.

² Modern symbolic philosophy provides a convenient gloss on this process. Tom is engaged in what Susanne Langer has called "symbolization," the "essential act of thought." She says that "Man, unlike all other animals, uses 'signs' not only to indicate things, but also to represent them," a skill which allows him to "develop a characteristic attitude towards objects in absentia, which is called 'thinking of' or 'referring to' what is not there. 'Signs' used in this capacity are . . . symbols." Langer believes that the "symbol-making function is one of man's primary activities . . . the fundamental process of his mind" which is responsible for "all his apparently unzoological aims, his wistful fancies, his consciousness of value . . . and his awareness of a 'Beyond' filled with holiness." Tom engages in this "activity" continually. His conceptions of civilization and paradise--the "Perseverance" and the Marquesas--are simply "attitudes to things in absentia," to things he has not experienced. In Langer's terms it is symbolization which is responsible for all Tom's "aims, fancies, and values." See Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1957), pp. 30-31, 40-41.

Symbolic philosophy has had two influential exponents among Melville's critics: Charles Feidelson in his Symbolism and American Literature, 2nd ed. (1953; rpt. Chicago: Phoenix Books, 1959), and Paul Brodtkorb Jr. in Ishmael's White World: A Phenomenological Reading of *Moby Dick* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1965). Feidelson agrees with Langer in saying that "To consider a literary work as a piece of language is to regard it as a symbol, autonomous in the sense that it is quite distinct both from the personality of its author and from any world of pure objects, and creative in the sense that it brings into existence its own meaning" (p. 49). Brodtkorb's phenomenological approach echoes Feidelson in assuming that "arrangements of letters on a page express states of mind and thereby make manifest states of being" (p. 31). Brodtkorb asserts that we must regard *Moby Dick* as Ishmael's creation, "his reconstitution of his world and self" (p. 4). In Feidelson's terms, *Moby Dick* "brings into existence" a "meaning" that is "quite distinct from the personality" of its creator. My disagreement with this approach is that these critics would separate author from

creation or, more specifically, Melville's philosophy from his art. For Langer, Feidelson, and Brodtkorb, art is no longer expressive of a philosophy, a medium to convey meaning; rather art is itself the philosophy, and the medium is the meaning. Feidelson and Brodtkorb read Melville in terms of an aesthetic I do not think can be said to inform his artistic purpose. To paraphrase Feidelson (p. 164), I do not believe that the logic of Melville's aesthetic premises lead him to a skepticism of art; rather, I believe that the logic of his philosophical premises lead him to a skepticism of philosophy, of systematic human knowledge, which he expresses in his art. Further discussion of this matter, however, does not properly belong here, since only Feidelson says anything about Typee, and that is comparatively superficial. Suffice it to say that I consider Melville a pre-eminently philosophical writer, and it is the philosophy he conveys in Typee with which I am concerned to deal in this paper.

³Tom's obviously biased and selective memories of his experiences in Typee bring up the important and complex question of point of view in the novel. William B. Dillingham gives the best account of it yet attempted in An Artist in the Rigging (Athens, Ga.: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1972). He says, "In the Preface . . . the reader is . . . made aware that a period of time has elapsed since Tommo experienced the adventures he is relating," and that "The significance of this remark goes far beyond a leisurely introduction to the narrator. It establishes the two points in time from which the experience is to be regarded--Tommo at the time of his stay with the Typees and Tommo after his escape and subsequent wanderings over the sea of life" (pp. 12-13). "In the nearly four years after escaping from Typee," Dillingham asserts, "Tommo has seen much of civilization, and he has decided that the Typees, in retrospect, were not so bad after all and that his life there was more interesting than it actually was" (p. 17). "In a larger framework," Dillingham concludes, "the two views of Typee suggest a fundamental concept of reality--namely, that it is ultimately unknowable" (p. 25). I have utilized Dillingham's insights with respect to Tom's retrospective distortion of reality, but I disagree with him on one important point. Dillingham believes that reality in Typee is "unknowable" because it is impossible to tell which view of Typee is the "right one" (p. 24), and in doing so makes an error too frequently made by critics of the novel. Typee Valley is only a small part of Nukuheva's total reality, and that reality, focused in the island's mysterious central heights, Tommo cannot be said to have distorted at all. Indeed, it is significant that he does not. See pp. 25-26 here.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER II

¹ Feidelson is an exception here. He calls the topography of Nukuheva "metaphoric," and briefly discussed its importance in "shadowing forth the pattern of Melville's world, which is remarkably like the spherical universe of Emerson." Symbolism and American Literature (Chicago: Phoenix Books, 1959), p. 165.

² Seelye also notes the symbolic quality of silence in Typee, calling it "a token of mystery which suggests the possibility of ultimate nothingness, the 'trick' of the universe." The Ironic Diagram (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1970), p. 12.

³ Again Susanne Langer provides a philosophical gloss on Tommo's intellectual processes. Because symbolization is a "typically human function," she says it requires a "typically human form of overt activity . . . the sheer expression of ideas." Philosophy in a New Key (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1957), p. 43.

⁴ Feidleson, p. 164.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER III

¹ Unlike his many references to Milton's Eden, Melville's exact allegiance here is difficult to specify. My references to Dante in the following pages are in the order of analogies, for Melville's acquaintance with the Divine Comedy probably began no sooner than 1848 (see Jay Leyda, The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Herman Melville, 1819-1891 [New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951], I, 278); and Dante's influence is usually seen to begin with Mardi (see Leon Howard, Herman Melville: A Biography [Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1951], p. 115; Lawrence Thompson, Melville's Quarrel With God [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1952], p. 60; and Tyrus Hillway, Herman Melville [New Haven: College and Univ. Press, 1963], pp. 79-81). There are tempting parallels to be drawn between the Divine Comedy and Typee, but beyond those Dante's poem provides an excellent example of the medieval cosmic view Melville undercuts in his particular use of the descent. I have focused on the Divine Comedy because it is an ideal instance of the western tradition of religious certainty to which I see Melville reacting in Typee.

² Dillingham, p. 28.

³ Herman Melville, Mardi: And A Voyage Thither, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1970), II, 360-61.

⁴ For a different reading of the symbolism of Tom's leg injury, see Robert Stanton, "Typee and Milton: Paradise Well Lost," Modern Language Notes, 74 (1959), 407-11. Stanton regards the leg injury, together with Tom and Toby's ascent of the mountain "in the fashion of serpents" (Typee, p. 39), as identifying the travellers with the "Serpent" (410), and as members of that "corrupt and Satanic civilization which had spoiled so many Polynesian paradises" (411). Stanton makes the mistake of seeing western civilization as perfectly evil and Typee society as perfectly innocent. For further rebuttal of this notion see my note below, p. 72.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER IV

¹ Sophia Hawthorne, from a letter cited in Eleanor M. Metcalf's Herman Melville: Cycle and Epicycle (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1953), p. 91.

² Dillingham, p. 11. Miller, too, notices this dichotomy, remarking on "the horror that exists not far beneath the placid surface" of Typee culture. See A Reader's Guide to Herman Melville (New York: Noonday Press, 1962), p. 33.

³ Henry F. Pommer was the first to see Typee as an unfallen paradise in the order of Milton's Eden. In Milton and Melville (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1950), he draws an explicit parallel between the two, stating that "Melville and Milton had surprisingly congruous visions of what the world would be like if man had not introduced wrong to adulterate God's ways; one expressed it in his first work, the other in his greatest" (p. 16). Though Pommer himself takes the parallel no further, Robert Stanton does. In "Paradise Well Lost" he explores the many obvious parallels between Typee and Milton's Eden, and comes to the same conclusion stated so briefly by Pommer. Stanton also sees Typee as representing a prelapsarian paradise. My disagreement with Pommer and Stanton is that their ideas take no notice of the plentiful evidence in Typee that Typee society is anything but perfectly innocent, and much of my argument concerning Typee Valley is directed to showing that to see Typee in this way is to see only half the picture, and to ignore the incontestable fact of Typee depravity. See also my note above, p. 71.

⁴ Sedgwick makes a similar observation regarding Typee: "For all its loveliness it is wanting in the elements of man's intellectual and spiritual consciousness." Herman Melville (New York: Russell and Russell, 1944), p. 30.

⁵ Miller, p. 32.

⁶ Dillingham, p. 26.

⁷ Bowen, pp. 15-16.

⁸ Seelye, p. 13.

⁹ Bowen, p. 16.

¹⁰ Bowen, p. 16.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER V

¹ The entry is dated November 20, 1856, and this excerpt is from the following passage describing a visit from Melville: "He stayed with us from Tuesday till Thursday; and, on the intervening day, we took a pretty long walk together, and sat down in a hollow among the sand hills (sheltering ourselves from the high, cool wind) and smoked a cigar. Melville, as he always does, began to reason of Providence and futurity, and of everything that lies beyond human ken, and informed me that he had 'pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated'; but still he does not seem to rest in that anticipation; and, I think, will never rest until he gets hold of a definite belief." See Malcolm Cowley, ed., The Portable Hawthorne (New York: Viking Press, 1966), pp. 588-89.

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