Melville's Missionaries and the Loss of Culture

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MELVILLE'S MISSIONARIES AND THE LOSS OF CULTURE

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Abstract ......................................................... ii

Introduction .................................................. 3

Chapter One: *Typee*: The Freedoms of the Savage .......... 19

Chapter Two: *Omoo*: The Unconvincing Mission ............ 39

Chapter Three: *Typee* and *Omoo*: The Lost Connection with Nature 57

Conclusion: “But what matters all this?” ...................... 77
MELVILLE’S MISSIONARIES AND THE LOSS OF CULTURE

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Abstract

On January 3, 1841, Herman Melville boarded the whaler *Acushnet* and left the harbor of New Bedford. Traveling through the South Pacific, Melville spent time in the Marquesas, Tahiti, and the Sandwich Islands where he witnessed the missionary efforts among the islanders. The religious conversion and acculturation of the Polynesian natives led Melville to question the missionaries’ activities. The different cultures of these islands increased Melville’s already skeptical outlook on the standards his own culture insisted that he follow. Experiencing both the tranquil Typee Valley and the “civilized” island of Tahiti, Melville felt compelled to write about his island adventures in his first two books, *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847). Observing the influence of the Sandwich Islands’ missionaries, Melville came to the conclusion that the natives of the Pacific would have been better off left to their own devices, as opposed to being converted to the Euro-American standards of civilized living. Instead of receiving the benefits of Christian living, the natives had been reduced from the Edenic state of the Typee Valley to the devastating, dehumanizing existence Melville witnessed in Tahiti and Hawaii. The contrasts Melville draws between the primitive Typee and the converted Tahitian cultures illustrate his belief that the missionaries were actually driving the natives toward a cultural death through the removal of pagan practices and the introduction of the “civilized” Christian beliefs governing Euro-American society.
Introduction:

The missionary and colonizing efforts in the South Pacific during the first half of the nineteenth century brought radical changes to the natives who inhabited the islands. Along with the supposedly humane improvements, numerous negative effects occurred which weighed heavily on the Polynesians. The missionaries followed closely on the heels of sailors exploring the foreign islands, and these religious emissaries quickly established themselves as providers of the one true religion which could replace the pagan beliefs and taboo systems of the natives. The self-proclaimed success of the missionaries led to an increased interest from the evangelists' homelands in the conversion of the pagans. In his introduction to C. S. Stewart's *A Residence in the Sandwich Islands* (1839), William Ellis summarizes this event:

In the course of the last eight or nine years, public attention, in Europe and America, has been frequently directed to the Sandwich Islands. The demolition of the ancient temples, the destruction of the idols, the renunciation of the national religion in 1819, and the establishment of a Christian mission among them early in the following year, were events remarkable and important in the estimation of all who take an interest in the propagation of Christianity throughout the world. (xvii)

The beginning stages of civilization, as viewed by the missionaries, were occurring simultaneously in the Polynesian ports frequented by whaling vessels needing fresh supplies. This development greatly assisted the efforts of the missionaries by providing them with means of communication. Ellis' introduction continues: "The discovery of vast numbers of sperm whales [...] has occasioned an increase of the shipping accustomed to resort for repairs and refreshments to the Sandwich Islands, to so great a degree that, instead of a few uncertain calls, not less than one hundred vessels touch at the islands in the course of a year" (xvii). Increased interaction with ships traveling
through the Pacific enabled the missionaries to send quicker reports home concerning their progress in removing the pagan practices and instituting Christian beliefs. As a result, the missionaries received further financial support, allowing evangelizing teams to travel to other islands in the Pacific.

While the missionary work was being established in the Pacific region, travelers started arriving with a different perspective on the "advancement" of the Polynesians. Soon, certain explorers began to record their personal observations concerning the work of the missionaries. Gradually, criticisms against the missionary efforts started to appear; these criticisms focused on the destruction of the natives' original culture and the negative impact of Western influence. During the process of modernization, Herman Melville began traveling through the Pacific. Roughly twenty years after the first missionary efforts to the Sandwich Islands were established, the young, directionless, financially unstable Herman Melville boarded the whaler Acushnet and left the harbor of New Bedford on Sunday, January 3, 1841. This decision would affect Melville in such a way that within the next five years he would find himself one of the primary writers of anti-missionary criticism. Spending time in the Marquesas, Tahiti, and the Sandwich Islands, Melville witnessed many events which made him question the missionaries' activities. The different cultures increased Melville's already skeptical outlook on the standards his own culture insisted that he follow. Experiencing both the tranquil Typee Valley and the "civilized" island of Tahiti, Melville felt compelled to write about his

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1 In most cases throughout this thesis, the terms "advancement" and "civilized" will be used from the perspective which the missionaries held with regard to the natives being savages. Within the missionaries' beliefs, the natives are naked "pagans," practicing idolatry, cannibalism, and a score of other deplorable acts. Because the Polynesians function in a different cultural system, the missionaries believe that they are actually below the Euro-American definition of civilization. Therefore, the missionaries conclude that the natives are in dire need of conversion and advancement to a "higher" level of civilization.
island adventures in his first two books, *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847). The contrasts Melville draws between the primitive Typee and the converted Tahitian cultures illustrate his belief that the missionaries were actually driving the natives toward a cultural death through the removal of pagan practices and the introduction of the "civilized" Christian beliefs governing Euro-American society.

Several important books have been published concerning *Typee*, *Omoo*, and Melville's time among the Polynesian Islands. Among these, three specific resources have been invaluable. The primary work is Charles Roberts Anderson's *Melville in the South Seas* (1949). Anderson provides a detailed look at the historical, political, and cultural aspects of Melville's South Seas novels. By comparing Melville's information with both missionary and exploration narratives, Anderson helps to elucidate not only Melville's observations but also the sources from which he drew many of his passages. In *Marquesan Encounters: Melville and the Meaning of Civilization* (1980), T. Walter Herbert, Jr., focuses primarily on the experiences of the missionaries, Captain David Porter, and Melville in the Marquesas. Herbert parallels these three accounts and the resulting perspectives on the Marquesan natives. By doing so, he explains how the differing views of each party affected the outcome of their interaction with the Typee natives. Herbert's study is important for understanding the historical events occurring before Melville's exploration of the Typee Valley. A final work worth noting is James Baird's *Ishmael: A Study of the Symbolic Mode in Primitivism* (1956). Baird's book is a philosophical approach to the study of Melville's novels, showing how *Typee* and *Omoo* symbolize the Polynesian world. It also explores how writers, sensing a religious dilemma, have attempted to search out new cultures (Asia and Polynesia) in order to find
symbols which help lead to a spiritual unity in a disjointed world.

There are countless scholarly articles and chapters on *Typee* and *Omoo*, although few treat Melville’s perspective on the missionaries’ cultural influence on the Polynesian natives. One of the most important is Carol Colatrella’s *Literature and Moral Reform: Melville and the Discipline of Reading* (2002). In chapter three, “Creative Ethnographies: Reading Culture and Developing Character in *Typee, Omoo, and Mardi,*” Colatrella elaborates on how *Typee* and *Omoo* criticize the improvement of the natives because it results in their denationalization through capitalism and missionary endeavors. John Alberti, in “Cultural Relativism and Melville’s *Typee*: Man in the State of Culture,” develops a similar perspective by showing how Tommo questions the idea of culturally converting the islanders because, “[r]ather than being based on a universal and essential identity, the ‘being’ of the Typee may depend more, it seems, on their culture” (335). Joyce Sparer Adler’s “Melville’s *Typee* and *Omoo*: Of ‘Civilized’ War on ‘Savage’ Peace,” and Stephen de Paul’s “The Documentary Fiction of Melville’s *Omoo*: The Crossed Grammars of Acculturation,” focus on the advancement of the natives and how the negative outcome which Melville predicts is inevitable. Finally, Michel Despland is concerned with Melville’s attempt to observe a Polynesian religion. In “Two Ways of Articulating Outsider’s Knowledge of Polynesian Culture and Religion: Melville’s *Typee* and *Mardi,*” Despland sees Tommo’s negative claims against the missionaries as an attempt to contrast Euro-American religious practices with those of the Polynesians. These works help provide a starting point for the historical setting and a critical analysis of *Typee* and *Omoo.*
Deserting the *Acushnet* on July 9, 1842, Melville bushwhacked his way into the Typee Valley (Forsythe 2). After spending a brief time among the cannibals, he was rescued by the Australian whaler *Lucy Ann*. Upon reaching the Tahitian Islands, Melville and other crew members mutinied and were taken ashore to be jailed. While in the Tahitian jail, Melville was free to wander the island during the daytime; it was during this stay that he started to expand his views on the missionary work and its devastating impact on the Polynesians. Following the *Lucy Ann*’s return to sea, Melville easily escaped the loose jailing system established as part of the colonization of the island. Soon afterward, Melville went to the isolated island of Eimeo, where he witnessed more traditional aspects of Tahitian culture that remained unaffected by missionary activity.

The experiences in the Marquesas and Tahitian Islands provide the basis for Melville’s narratives. Upon leaving Eimeo, Melville was hired aboard another whaling ship. Several months of unsuccessful whaling left him at Lahaina, in the Sandwich Islands. It was here that Melville’s perception of the negative impact of the missionaries developed into a serious concern for the Polynesians. Observing the influence of the Sandwich Islands’ missionaries, Melville came to the conclusion that the natives of the Pacific would have been better off left to their own devices, as opposed to being converted to the Euro-American standards of civilized living. Instead of receiving the benefits of Christian living, the natives had been reduced from the Edenic state of the Typee Valley to the devastating, dehumanizing existence Melville witnessed in Tahiti.

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2 Robert Forsythe, in “Herman Melville in the Marquesas,” has been able to locate the ships’ logs for almost all of the ships on which Melville sailed. This information has enabled Forsythe to procure dates for almost every activity occurring in *Typee* and *Omoo*.

3 Melville’s phonetic representation of the Polynesian languages often renders his spelling of the words inaccurate. For instance: instead of Eimeo, Melville spells the island name as Imoe. Robert Louis Stevenson noted that “[o]ur admirable friend Herman Melville of whom, since I could judge, I have thought more than ever, had no ear for languages whatever: his Happar tribe should be Happa, etc.” (qtd. in Anderson 451).
and Hawaii.

In both *Typee* and *Omoo*, Melville’s narrators give long, detailed descriptions concerning the missionaries’ efforts. Both narrators portray the work of the missionaries as being detrimental, rather than beneficial, to the lives of the natives. *Typee* and *Omoo* work together to show the disparity in the living situations which have been created for the natives. Thus, these books are more than just travel narratives; as Carol Colatrella argues, *Typee* “goes beyond the boundaries” of this type of literature in order “to present social criticism about cross-cultural interaction, formulating a critique of colonialism that responds to contemporary moral theories of rehabilitation,” whereas *Omoo* focuses on “transgression and punishment within Tahitian society influenced by the conversion attempts of Protestant and Catholic missionaries [...]” (87). By contrasting the radically different living conditions, *Typee* and *Omoo* help demonstrate how Melville perceives the missionaries’ activities in the South Pacific.

In his narratives, Melville believes he is giving readers an unbiased view concerning the impact of Western influence in the Pacific Islands: he is attempting to enter “literature as a spokesman for the aboriginal victims of Manifest Destiny” (Rogin 48). As a spokesman, setting down the perceived truth is essential; in the preface to *Typee*, Melville states:

There are a few passages in the ensuing chapters which may be thought to bear rather hard upon a reverend order of men, the account of whose proceedings in different quarters of the globe—transmitted to us through their own hands—very generally, and often very deservedly, receives high commendation. Such passages will be found, however, to be based upon facts admitting of no contradiction, and which have come immediately under the writer’s cognizance. The conclusions deduced from these facts are unavoidable, and in stating them the author has been influenced by no feeling of animosity, either to the individuals themselves, or to that glorious cause which has not always been served by the proceedings of some of its advocates. [...] He has stated such
matters just as they occurred, and leaves every one to form his own opinion concerning them; trusting that his anxious desire to speak the unvarnished truth will gain for him the confidence of his readers. (xii-xiii)

Three specific points should be elaborated upon: first, Melville realizes that the narrative contains potentially slanderous information against the missionaries; next, he states that the information is based on first-hand observations which can hardly be refuted; finally, he maintains that his intentions are honest, and so the reader should believe the reports. These points can be combined with *Omoo*’s preface, wherein Melville reiterates his interest in the state of the natives: “Another object proposed is, to give a familiar account of the present condition of the converted Polynesians, as affected by their promiscuous intercourse with foreigners, and the teachings of the missionaries, combined” (7). In both prefaces, Melville establishes his intent of focusing on the influence of the missionaries—and he does so at the risk of his own reputation.4

Melville’s awareness of writing slanderous material is not unfounded. The first half of the nineteenth century saw an increase in the Euro-American middle-class’s attack on the immorality of depraved people in society. Carl Randall Cluff has noted in *Salvaged Cargo: Herman Melville, John Wiley, and the Revised Edition of Typee* that there was a growing reform movement based on a “rising urban social consciousness” focusing on “the poor and their problems.” This consciousness resulted in “the activism that animated the flourishing and energetic reform movements of the time” (42). The reform movement would be expanded to include the indigenous people of the world

4 Herman Melville became a familiar name in the missionary societies in Britain and America, however, not in a positive way. Melville’s attacks against the missionaries led his editor, John Wiley, to make major revisions to the original text of *Typee*. The second printing had “twelve lengthy passages of direct commentary omitted from the American revised edition. These omissions, totaling over twenty pages of text in the Northwestern-Newberry edition, are in every instance concerned with the declarative comparison of primitive and civilized states of being” (Williams 38).
through missionary efforts heavily funded by the Euro-American middle-class. Melville was aware of this new consciousness and specifically attempts to cater to it in Typee’s preface: “The great interest with which the important events lately occurring at the Sandwich, Marquesas, and Society Islands, have been regarded in America and England, and indeed throughout the world, will [...] justify a few otherwise unwarrantable digressions” (xiii).

Melville thus defends his heavy concentration on the missionary activities in the Pacific region; however, his comments clearly show that he was not in favor of those activities. The religious perspective in Typee and Omoo attacks the ideological views of the missionaries. What Melville witnessed in the Pacific was the forceful assimilation of the natives into the views of the dominant Christian parties. Leonard Cassuto, in The Inhuman Race: The Racial Grotesque in American Literature, describes what went on in the Tahitian and Sandwich Islands between the missionaries and natives:

All people divide up the world in order to understand it, not just dogmatists, and any encounter with a radically different culture, one outside the realm of expectation and understanding, will provoke a challenge to the realm of the familiar. When something challenges an individual’s system of understanding, the system must accommodate or risk collapse. (173)

Because of the governing power held by the missionaries, the Polynesian system is forced to accommodate (or adjust to) the changes; as a result, the natives, unable to adapt to the removal of their culture, lose everything real to them. Cluff refers to this civilizing domination as an “elitist cultural bias” which stemmed from the upper middle-class’s view of being superior to those living outside the moral foundations of Euro-American society; this elitist prejudice “defined the operating principles of the missionaries in spreading spiritual and social salvation and seeking the complete reform of native peoples
both within and beyond the borders of the United States” (42). Melville shows the results of the missionaries’ bias through his contrasts between the primitive Typee culture and the “civilized” Tahitian mode of living; in *Typee* and *Omoo*, Melville is directing a damning finger at the missionary efforts—and that finger points all the way back to the Euro-American parlor rooms. As narratives, both books are “skilled work[s] of art [in which] the author aims to change the consciousness of Americans rather than tell them how the natives should be changed” (Despland 110), thereby guaranteeing that Melville would receive heavy criticism from the missionary supporters.

By inserting a clause in his preface, Melville is justifying the addition of what might seem to some readers superfluous commentary on Polynesian life. The narratives are related by two different speakers who in one sense represent Melville and in another allow the author to separate himself from the statements in the books. However, as Cluff notes, “[t]here was too much at stake for the Protestant evangelicals to ignore Melville’s claims in *Typee*” (16). From the plethora of negative reviews originating in the missionary sect, it is clear that, with *Typee*, Melville struck a deep nerve—the missionary endeavors were crossing cultural boundaries with which they had no right to tamper. The narrator’s opinion reveals that there may be issues at stake far greater than just the salvation of Polynesians. John Alberti suggests that Melville is dealing with an issue of cultural relativism: “[...] Tommo’s perceptions of the Typee tell more about the social fictions he brought with him to the Pacific than the reality of Typee life. Melville’s travels showed him that reality cannot be told in a single, unified narrative, but that it consists of a variety of worldviews” (329). Alberti is implying that there is more than one perspective of right and wrong relative to each culture, and Melville applies this
belief not only to himself through his narrators, but also to the missionaries.

The narrators in Typee and Omoo stress the importance of being civilized; yet, they are both aware that different cultures cannot easily adapt to each other without some type of internal or external clash. In Typee, this clash occurs when the narrator refuses to assimilate completely into the Typee culture. An external clash arises in Omoo when the missionaries attempt to instill Christian doctrines in the Tahitians. Melville believes that the missionaries are creating a radically different environment for the natives; Cluff clearly defines their efforts:

The missionaries saw themselves in the role of "spiritual liberators." They believed that all mankind was corrupted by original sin. The natives’ primitive methods, their overt and excessive sexuality, and their awkward social structure were taken as evidence by the missionaries of their inherent spiritual corruption. Of course, the missionaries believed that the antidote to the natives’ social and moral degeneracy was the redeeming power of God—provided in the religious and cultural gospel the missionaries had brought to preach them. The missionaries believed that for a social and moral reformation to occur, the natives must undergo an internal spiritual transformation. As the hearts and minds of the natives were transformed and conformed to the will of God, they would alter their outward circumstances and social attainments, thus moving toward a "civilized" condition. (59)

To reach this "internal spiritual transformation," the missionaries felt they had to remove all of the external pagan practices, and any associated characteristics, from the natives’ lifestyle. Melville saw this removal as a complete destruction of the natives’ lives, in effect, driving them to a cultural death. Now, forced into a Euro-American model of a "civilized" world, the Hawaiian and Tahitian natives no longer resemble the powerful people they once were. In contrast, Tommo’s experience in the Typee Valley shows the beauty of the untouched natives and their capability to be "civilized savages."

The idea of the natives as civilized savages greatly upset the Euro-American readers who were supporting the efforts of the missionaries. However, Melville’s first-
hand observations led him to believe that this view was not far from the truth. It suggests that the missionaries were ignoring key aspects of Polynesian life in order to advance their own Christian beliefs. Both narrators see that the missionaries are completely breaking down the foundation of pagan beliefs in order to rebuild the native society under a Christianized doctrine; the problem that Melville identifies is that the natives are left with nothing after they have been converted—leading the narrators to claim that the missionary efforts have, somewhere, gone completely wrong. As Colatrella states, “[t]he missionaries who seek conversion by curbing native appetites instead produce a population ‘schooled into a seeming submission to the new order of things’ and remaining ‘in reality as depraved and vicious as ever’” (96-97); the successful conversions claimed by the missionaries ignore the culturally reduced conditions of the converted Polynesians.

Melville did not rely solely on his own first-hand observations and philosophizing. Throughout *Typee*, and especially *Omoo*, Melville refers to previously published works concerning activities in the South Pacific. These external narratives vary between naval expeditions and accounts of missionary progress. In *Typee*, Melville uses at least two primary sources to assist in his commentary about Pacific life: Captain David Porter's *Journal of a Cruise Made to the Pacific Ocean* (1815) and C. S. Stewart’s *A Visit to the South Seas* (1831). Melville claims that he “never happened to meet with” Porter’s narrative (*Typee* 5); however, there is strong proof that he did have access to this book.\(^5\) Charles Anderson explains why Melville had limited sources to help in his

\(^5\) Charles Anderson draws attention to Melville’s recounting of Porter’s raid into the Typee valley: “One proof of Melville’s first-hand acquaintance with Porter’s *Journal* is the very accuracy of his account of the invasion of Typee Valley […]. Although in Melville’s version Porter’s two invasions of Typee Valley are condensed into one, with some few minor inaccuracies, there can be little doubt that he had really read
Marquesan narrative:

For one reason and another, the Marquesas Islands have been far less frequented by white men than other Pacific archipelagoes; prior to 1846 there were very few indeed who had established long residences there, and fewer still who had written of their experiences. Melville was not exaggerating, therefore, when he declared: “all that we know about them is from a few general narratives”—not more than a dozen [...]. (118)

While Melville does admit to using sources, he does not directly cite them in Typee; rather, he borrows from these texts to help direct his narrative. Nevertheless, in the British and American audiences, demand arose for the verifications of Melville’s words; in fact, there was “widespread British skepticism about the veracity of the author of Typee and [the readers] continued to want ‘documentary evidences’ of the book’s authenticity” (Roper 326). Melville’s views are slightly undermined by not providing any other support.

When sitting down to write Omoo, Melville was aware of these criticisms of Typee. Therefore, as Cluff notes, he corrected his mistake by “consciously citing external authorities to support his opinion.” Cluff goes on to say, “[w]ith Typee, he was no doubt overconfident that he would be taken at his word. Had it not been for the ‘political’ ramifications of the content of Typee for the evangelists, he most likely would have been believed” (167). Redoubling his efforts against missionary activity, Melville references numerous outside sources. It becomes apparent, as Stephan de Paul puts it, that in both Typee and Omoo, the narrators “use the facts and authority of Western culture for deliberate and distinct effects” (52). Melville’s first-hand observations are supplemented

Porter’s Journal. Otherwise, it is difficult to see where he could have got this information, for none of the other secondary accounts of Porter’s activities in the Marquesas are so specific as his. One further proof of this indebtedness, all but convincing in itself, is the fact that they both frequently use the same rather crude orthography for Polynesian names; this is especially true of the unique spelling of the word Typee, [...]. And Porter’s account certainly adds to their reputation for ferocity, which Melville was deliberately building up for the sake of suspense against the occasion of his own more friendly meeting with them later” (96-98).
with carefully chosen selections from similar narratives in order to support his views of the missionaries’ activities.

Melville relies heavily on his readers to believe the narrator of Typee, and claiming that his intentions are sincere seems to be enough justification for Melville not to include any external citations. However, Melville claims “the right to advert to what may be considered a culpable omission” by leaving out certain details of the narrative (xii). This absence works against the validity of the narrative and creates a blemish on his honest account. In reference to the missionary comments, Milton R. Stern sees this clause as creating more suspicions than explanations: “[...] if, as the ‘Preface’ says, much detail has been deleted, the questions of what has been retained, and why, remain” (34). Stern argues that this statement, followed by Melville alleging that he holds “no feeling of animosity” toward the missionary activity, actually raises the question of what the commentary on the missionaries was attempting to show. Stern questions the legitimacy of Melville’s claim, because, in both Typee and Omoo,

there is charge after charge against the inhumanities of “that glorious cause” of militant or coercive religion, with some animus reserved for the glory of the cause itself. [...] Like any craftsman, Melville did select which of the “unavoidable” facts he would avoid. [...] Those “unwarrantable digressions” [concerning the missionary activity] prove themselves to be an integral part of the book’s theme of human behavior in contrasting civilizations. (34)

Indeed, Melville’s preface contains a message that is not backed up by the words of his narrator. While he claims to be free of any bias toward the missionary activities, the actual text works against this statement, showing that Melville did view the work of the

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6 Melville’s request to his readers sounds very similar to Ellis’ introduction to Stewart’s Residence, wherein Ellis states: “[...] I am convinced that those [events] recorded in Mr. Stewart’s volume, with others already before the public, will be sufficient to remove whatever erroneous impressions may have thereby been made from any minds open to conviction and influenced in reference to missionary efforts, only by the simple declarations of honest truth” (xxiii).
missionaries with some animosity, although perhaps not personal. As a surrogate spokesman for the natives, Melville cannot paint an objective picture of the cultural changes. Melville sides with the Polynesians because of his belief that the missionaries are destroying the natives’ natural culture, which in turn is gradually killing the natives.

In order to expose how the missionaries are bringing the natives to a cultural death, Melville’s narrators must show that the natives would be better off if they were “to remain the happy and innocent heathens” (*Typee* 267). In stating that “[o]ne suspects the ‘Preface’ of being a good liar” (34), Stern points out that the narrators are deviating from the “Preface’s” supposedly neutral standpoint on the issue of missionary activity; they are actually contrasting the cultures in a manner which draws negative attention to the missionaries.

Contrasting civilizations is exactly what Melville is doing, and he builds the relationships on multiple levels. Three specific comparisons exist in *Typee* and *Omoo* which will be developed in this thesis. With Melville’s first work, the contrast can be seen between the uncomplicated life of the natives, as existing in the untouched Typee Valley, and the complex systems of Euro-American societies. The Edenic world of the Typee natives has led Anderson to believe that *Typee* “is a whole-hearted defense of the Noble Savage and a eulogy of his happy life, his external beauty, and his inward purity of heart. Virtually the whole book is written in the romantic literary tradition inaugurated by Rousseau a century before” (178). In *Omoo*, Melville’s narrator contrasts the

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7 This thesis will avoid the discussion revolving around the idea of the “Noble Savage” defined by Rousseau. Rousseau views the savage as being “deprived of every sort of enlightenment”; therefore, “[h]is desires do not go beyond his physical needs. The only goods he knows in the universe are nourishment, a woman and rest; the only evils he fears are pain and hunger” (126). Melville, while touching on Rousseau’s theory, presents the Polynesians in *Typee* and *Omoo* as having a much greater complexity within their culture. It can be strongly argued that Melville would not agree with the majority of Rousseau’s description of the savage—at least in reference to the South Pacific islanders.
natives' ambivalence in adopting the new religious beliefs with the missionaries’ claims of having successfully converted the pagans to Christianity. Finally, contrasting the two books allows for certain similarities to become clear through a “before and after” view of the infiltration of Euro-American culture. In a close examination of these two texts, Melville’s overall message will become clear: it is far better for the natives to remain unchanged.

It is important to notice that Melville acknowledges a distinction between the missionaries and the political aim of the colonization process. While he gives an account of Porter’s destructive raid into the Typee Valley and brief descriptions of the political activities of the French and their attempts to claim islands for their country, Melville’s primary focus is arguably on the influence of the missionaries. The consequences of conversion and acculturation are joined as Melville’s narrators expose the cultural and political ramifications of the missionaries’ activities. Johanna Kardux argues that by “[a]tacking Western imperialism in Polynesia and exposing missionary societies as instruments of the imperialist aspirations of competing Western nations, Tommo’s account of his adventures ideologically positions itself in the tradition of anti-colonialist discourse” (279). However, because of Melville’s focus on the missionaries’ efforts to convert the natives, and the intense reaction the missionary societies had to the publication of Typee and Omoo, it would seem that Kardux is incorrect in labeling the missionary involvement as a political “instrument”; instead, Melville believes that it is the missionaries who have directed many aspects of the acculturation process—making both Typee and Omoo specifically anti-missionary discourses.

This thesis builds on the work of previous scholars; however, it specifically
expands on Melville’s references to both the natural habits of the Polynesians and the changes occurring through missionary activities. It delves into Melville’s underlying view of both religious dogmatism and the cultural domination of Europe and America. Rather than supporting the missionary efforts, Melville expresses revulsion at their belief that they hold the keys to raising the “savage” to proper “civilized” living. While there has been some research on Melville’s missionary references, there is no extensive work connecting *Typee* and *Omoo* to demonstrate how Melville contrasts the natives’ natural environment with the natives’ living condition after their conversion. This thesis explores to a larger extent Melville’s belief in the cultural independence of the Polynesians.
Chapter One: *Typee*: The Freedoms of the Savage

When the narrator of *Typee* reveals his destination as the Marquesas, he proceeds to paint a vivid picture of pagan activities: “What strange visions of outlandish things does the very name spirit up! Naked houris—cannibal banquets—groves of cocoa-nut—coral reef—tattooed chiefs—and bamboo temples; [...] savage woodlands guarded by horrible idols—*heathenish rites and human sacrifices*” (4). Melville places special emphasis on the rites and sacrifices in order to draw attention to the “otherness” of the natives and to help build drama in his narrative. The narrator then gives a brief history of the islands, but not before mentioning how the missionaries have been unable to tame the wildness of the islands: “The missionaries, sent on a heavenly errand, had sailed by their lovely shores, and have abandoned [the natives] to their idols of wood and stone” (4). It is important to notice how quickly the narrator brings the efforts of the missionaries to the forefront of his thoughts: the first chapter of *Typee* helps to establish the juxtaposition of the natives’ customs within the Typee Valley and the missionaries’ civilizing and conversion efforts on other islands.

Even though they believe they are responding to a higher calling, the missionaries abandoned their efforts to convert the Marquesan natives; because of the lack of missionary activity, the natives, particularly the Typee, remain in their pre-colonial state. This seclusion creates the key component behind the narrator’s ability to contrast the Typee Valley and the Euro-American colonization efforts. David Williams, in “Peeping Tommo: *Typee* as Satire,” notices that the narrator “sets out to expose in novelistic fashion the social evils of [Euro-American] civilization”; Tommo’s tone makes it clear that “he laments the corruption of innocence by the harbingers of civilization” (40). This
corruption will be the grounds on which Melville directs his narrator to undermine the supposition that the missionary efforts are beneficial. *Typee*, therefore, becomes an important narrative relating Melville’s perspective concerning Westerners’ civilizing efforts on the natives of the South Pacific.

There is dissimilarity between the civilized world of the missionaries, and the “primitive,” original mode of living which the Marquesan natives retain. After Melville left the Typee Valley, he spent time in the Tahitian and Sandwich Islands. While in the Sandwich Islands, Melville witnessed the results of the acculturation process of the natives. In *Typee*, Melville contrasts what he perceives as the prelapsarian state of the Typee natives with the “civilized” Hawaiian natives who are living now in what he considers a postlapsarian condition. With the dividing lines of the two worlds established, the narrator elaborates on his perspective, and it will become clear that while the missionaries seek “to free divine souls from natural barbarity,” he, in contrast, follows Rousseau, who “wanted to preserve an Edenic spiritual purity from the disease of civilization” (Alberti 331). As the novel unfolds, the narrator sides with the primitive state of the natives against the supposed advancements of the Western world.

The first relation of missionary efforts in the Marquesas is given with comic flair as the narrator shows the misconceptions the missionaries hold concerning the natives’ nature:

A short time before my visit to the Marquesas, a somewhat amusing incident took place in connection with these efforts, which I cannot avoid relating.

An intrepid missionary, undaunted by the ill-success that had attended all previous endeavors to conciliate the savages, and believing much in the efficacy of female influence, introduced among them his young and beautiful wife, the first white woman who had ever visited their shores. The islanders at first gazed in mute admiration at so unusual a prodigy, and seemed inclined to regard it as some new divinity. But after a short time, becoming familiar with its charming
aspect, and jealous of the folds which encircled its form, they sought to pierce the sacred veil of calico in which it was enshrined, and in the gratification of their curiosity so far overstepped the limits of good breeding, as deeply to offend the lady's sense of decorum. Her sex once ascertained, their idolatry was changed into contempt and there was no end to the contumely showered upon her by the savages, who were exasperated at the deception which they conceived had been practiced upon them. To the horror of her affectionate spouse, she was stripped of her garments, and given to understand that she could no longer carry on her deceits with impunity. The gentle dame was not sufficiently evangelical to endure this, and, fearful of further improprieties, she forced her husband to relinquish his undertaking, and together they returned to Tahiti. (Typee 6-7)

The retelling of the tale of the female missionary who is physically attacked by the natives in an effort to discover true divine attributes not only reveals the potential violence of their nature, but also shows the superior attitude held by the missionaries. Throughout both Typee and Omoo, such historical data regarding missionary activity in the Polynesian Islands is selectively chosen. In some cases, Melville's knowledge is word-of-mouth, heard while traveling on the whaling ships. According to Charles Anderson, “[w]hat Melville’s source of information was is not known, unless he learned the story from the natives themselves” (88). The narrator’s story of missionaries abandoning the pagans to their idols is linked to an incident considered to have been a driving factor sending the last missionaries from the island: a possible attempted rape of one of the female missionaries.¹ However, such an occurrence is not recorded in the missionaries’ diaries, probably because the event “so outraged their sense of propriety that they merely observed that the Americans ‘relinquished the undertaking in the course of the following year’ because of ‘the turbulent, licentious, and dishonest conduct of the

¹ This story may be referring to the 1833 mission effort to the Marquesas Islands which was a disastrous undertaking on the part of American Mission in the Sandwich Islands. The group consisted of three married couples, who “were all relative newcomers to the Pacific. The Armstrongs and Alexanders, all in their early 20s, had voyaged out to Hawaii as newlyweds in 1832. [...] Benjamin and Mary Parker [...] were the least experienced in both married life and the particular trials living among the Polynesians held for them” (Wallace 272). It was these inexperienced missionaries who were deposited on the banks of Nukuhiwa whom Melville had heard about while in the Pacific.
natives’ [quoted in Ellis’ History]” (Anderson 87-88). The humor given to the story is for a specific purpose: to undermine the presumed positive influence of the missionary activities. Because the “missionaries [...] recoiled in horror from what seemed to them a detestable licentiousness,” Melville’s narrator “ridicules such pious abhorrence” (Herbert, Force par. 6); he challenges their credibility first by making them look undedicated, and then by giving them the appearance of presuming a superior position over the natives.

This incident helps Melville establish a theme which runs through Typee: the dichotomy between Euro-American civilized living and the natives’ traditional existence; it is also an example of how “resistance is figured through divestiture, and the (would-be) colonized rout the (would-be) colonizers” (Goudie 226). Furthermore, it shows that the natives are aware of the missionaries’ superior attitude over them.

Upon landing in Nukuhiva in 1833, the missionary Mary Parker commented upon the “depravity” of the islanders: looking around, she “saw the natives, naked, rude and disgusting to every feeling. Their little filthy huts bespeak their poverty and degration, and their vacant looks tell their poverty of mind” (qtd. in Wallace 272). Parker’s tone further reveals her assumed advanced position relative to that of the Marquesan natives: “What a savage people [...] their looks strike terror. I cover my face to keep away the sight. Can they be human? Did humanity ever sink so below the brute? [...] For what do we make our abode with them? No light shines on the path” (qtd. in Dening 176). The missionaries’ Euro-American standards make it hard for them to enter the Marquesas

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2 Since it is not known where Melville received this information, Anderson suggests that this event may be related to another attempt at establishing a missionary base in the Marquesas in 1834: “The London Missionary Society, however, unwilling to abandon the Marquesans to their heathendom, continued its efforts in the lower group. [...] two missionaries, Messrs. Stallworthy and Rodgerson, arrived at Santa Christina to carry on the work which had been prosecuted so feebly by the Tahitian teachers. [...] Mr. Rodgerson’s wife, apparently, was subjected to insults similar to those which had driven the American missionaries from Nukahiva, and it is quite possible that Melville’s anecdote refers to this occasion rather than to the former experience” (88-89).
without viewing the natives as savages, with no place in the world outside their own “naked, rude, and disgusting” lifestyle. This circumstance leads Lee Wallace to comment: “[u]nable to allow any continuity between themselves and the Marquesan women, the American mission wives experience only repulsion and disgust, not the compassion assumed to be at the core of their vocation” (285-86). Returning to the fiasco of the female missionary’s clothing, the narrator’s ironic comment that she is “not sufficiently evangelical” to endure being placed on the same level as the Marquesan women reveals his opinion that there is an inherent injustice to the missionary view that natives are subhuman.

After the narrator descends into the Typee Valley and assigns himself the name Tom (which the language of the Typee converts to Tommo), he begins his philosophizing about the destruction of the native lifestyle occurring throughout the Pacific Islands. As Zan Dale Robinson argues in “A Semiotic and Psychoanalytic Interpretation of Herman Melville’s Fiction,” *Typee* is a confrontation between “good and evil in which [Melville] depicted the ruination of primitive life by the intrusion of Western civilization” (2). Tommo’s thoughts counterbalance the views of such missionaries as Mary Parker; he does not see the natives living in a disgusting state until they have been converted to the standards which the colonizers and missionaries bring with them across the ocean. When comparing the Polynesian heathen with the Fuegians of South America, Tommo’s voice exemplifies what Robinson calls the “sense of dread and mystery whenever he demonstrated how evil inscrutably manifested itself” (2):

The naked wretch who shivers beneath the bleak skies, and starves among the inhospitable wilds of Tierra-del-Fuego, might indeed be made happier by civilization, for it would alleviate his physical wants. But the voluptuous Indian, with every desire supplied, whom Providence has bountifully provided with all
the sources of pure and natural enjoyment, and from whom are removed so many of the ills and pains of life—what has he to desire at the hands of Civilization? She may “cultivate his mind,”—may “elevate his thoughts,”—these I believe are the established phrases—but will he be the happier? Let the once smiling and populous Hawaiian islands, with their now diseased, starving, and dying natives, answer the question. The missionaries may seek to disguise the matter as they will, but the facts are incontrovertible; and the devoutest Christian who visits that group with an unbiased mind, must go away mournfully asking—“Are these, alas! the fruits of twenty-five years of enlightenment?” (Typee 180-81)

When assimilated into the Euro-American standards, the heathens in some sense may conform to a “civilized” standard of life, as measured by an external culture, but they are no longer capable of providing for themselves. Tommo depicts the presumed advancements of the converted Polynesians as an unwilling “participation in a cultural system” which becomes “a kind of captivity, delineating cultural assimilation as imprisonment” within a foreign system (Colatrella 90); and as Herbert states, this internment brings about “the realization that the Polynesians [are] being destroyed by the multiform pressure of white Western culture” (Force par. 20). This cultural confinement is something that Tommo dreads for the Typee, and he bemoans the day when they will be decimated like the inhabitants of the Hawaiian Islands.

If the savages must be brought into a “civilized” state of living, Tommo desires them to be brought there without being utterly destroyed. The simple manner of living enjoyed by the Typee leads Tommo to believe, in Herbert’s words, that “civilized man has departed more widely from his innate moral sense, into arbitrary forms and requirements of behavior” (167). The Typee Valley, free from almost any influence from outsiders, has been able to retain its original sense of ease, and Tommo comes to believe that the Typee have a right to their own methods and culture. This opinion mirrors Melville’s own experience: while “[a]mong the Typees—in an ironic similitude of the
internal conversion the missionaries sought for the natives, both in cause and resulting
vision—Melville underwent [a] profound and fundamental psychological transformation
[...]. Consequently, he learned to see and think of culture and civilization in new, even
revolutionary ways" (Cluff 65). Holding an alternate view of culture and civilization
brings Tommo to believe that the conversion processes which the missionaries are using
result in an undesirable outcome: “Let the savages be civilized, but civilize them with
benefits, and not with evils; and let heathenism be destroyed, but not by destroying the
heathen. [...] Civilization is gradually sweeping from the earth the lingering vestiges of
Paganism, and at the same time the shrinking forms of its unhappy worshippers” (Typee
288). As of yet, the Typee Valley is free from this destruction; however, it will not be
long before the invaders permanently enter their world.

The Hawaiian Islanders, Tommo argues, no longer possess the freedoms and
happiness they once had; they have become shackled by the vices of the external world
now penetrating deep into the essence of their living. Joyce Sparer Adler, in “Melville’s
Typee and Omoo: of ‘Civilized’ War on ‘Savage’ Peace,” shows that in Typee, “[t]he
peaceful primitive life of the Typees is a vantage point from which to look more sharply
at the destructive aspects of nineteenth-century civilization,” allowing Tommo to praise
their life by contrasting it with the presumed advancements of his own culture (97). With
the natural resources provided by the islands they inhabit, the Typee are not in need of
development to make them happier. Not yet infiltrated by foreign inhabitants, they are
free from the diseases which Melville so strongly emphasizes as a primary downfall of
the Tahitian and Sandwich Islands:

[...] the continual happiness, which so far as I was able to judge appeared to
prevail in the valley, sprang principally from that all-pervading sensation which
Rousseau has told us he at one time experienced, the mere buoyant sense of a healthful physical existence. And indeed in this particular the Typees had ample reason to felicitate themselves, for sickness was almost unknown. (*Typee* 185)

Charles Stewart’s narrative, in *A Residence in the Sandwich Islands* (1839), paints a very different view of the natives’ condition following colonization: “It is quite sickly among the natives at present. Two chief women died on Sunday; one here, and one at Waikiki; and from the daily wailing heard in various directions, it is probable there are many deaths among the common people” (225). Stewart also claims that, “[l]ike most other diseases,” the introduction of their afflictions “is attributed, by the natives, to foreigners” (119). Tommo laments the arrival of the colonizers because “no sooner are the images overturned, the temples demolished, and the idolaters converted into *nominal* Christians, than disease, vice, and premature death make their appearance” (288). For Tommo, the introduction of Christianity precedes the destructive forces of civilization. As traditional Polynesian lifestyle is replaced by the Euro-American views of proper human conduct, the native is left vulnerable and needy.

Another source which Melville references in writing his commentary on the Sandwich Islands is Otto Von Kotzebue’s *A New Voyage Round The World in The Years 1823-1826* (1830). Kotzebue also gives an account of the sickness that was wiping out many of the natives of the islands: “An epidemic disease prevailed this year throughout the Sandwich Islands. It produced a great mortality, death generally following the attack within a few days. In Hanaruro I saw many corpses daily carried to their burial; but nowhere is recovery from serious illness so improbable as here” (423). While Melville’s stay in the Typee Valley was much shorter than his other island adventures, he was still greatly impressed by the absence of illness among the natives. He has Tommo report that
“During the whole period of my stay I saw but one invalid among them; and on their smooth clear skins you observed no blemish or mark of disease” (185). Indeed, as Rousseau so clearly explains: “When one thinks about the stout constitutions of the savages, at least those whom we have not ruined with our strong liquors; when one becomes aware of the fact that they know almost no illnesses but wounds and old age, one is strongly inclined to believe that someone could easily write the history of human maladies by following the history of civil societies” (122). Freedom from Western diseases physically exemplifies the Typee natives’ independence from Euro-American influence. They are not visibly blemished in any aspect of their lives relating to an outside cause; thus, Tommo refers to their valley as a sort of Edenic retreat from the encroaching exterior world.

Tommo’s contrast between the Typee Valley and the other Polynesian locales which have already succumbed to the advancements of civilization continues with the Nukuhiva natives. Having spent some time among the natives of Nukuhiva before abandoning his ship and on a return visit three years later, Tommo believes that even the smallest of interactions between the natives and foreigners impacts them negatively:

I had observed that even the little intercourse Europeans had carried on with the Nukuheva natives had not failed to leave its traces amongst them. One of the most dreadful curses under which humanity labours had commenced its havocks, and betrayed, as it ever does among the South Sea islanders, the most aggravated symptoms. From this, as from all other foreign inflictions, the yet uncontaminated tenants of the Typee Valley were wholly exempt; and long may they continue so. (267)

Here, Tommo’s narrative reaches the critical point of calling Western interaction something akin to pollution.

In one sense, this passage almost traps Tommo in a hypocritical statement
because he himself has now infiltrated into the Typee Valley, bringing with him his own cultural values and comparisons. Mitchell Breitwieser, in “False Sympathy in Melville’s Typee,” sees this bias occurring because “[t]he root of colonialism is so deep that even an apparent rebel may turn out to be an assistant” (397). However, Cassuto believes the narrator is able to separate himself from his Western roots: “Tommo compares his own ways with theirs in an unusually fair-minded way for his time. Unlike the repressed missionaries to the Marquesan Islands […], Tommo is consciously fascinated by the Typees’ uninhibited nakedness, and intellectually curious about their unusual taboos. He seeks to understand rather than dismiss the customs of the islanders” (171-72). In his effort to explore Polynesian cultures, Tommo pays close attention to the cultural differences not just of the Typee, but also those with whom he contrasts them. Therefore, Tommo is able to observe that the Nukuhiva natives have already been influenced by their interaction through both the missionary efforts and the harbor landings of whaling ships.

The simplicity Tommo admires in the Typee lifestyle leads him to praise the lack of societal standards considered essential by his own culture. Through the voice of his narrator, “Melville described the society and the daily life of the Typees as a version of paradise. He was especially taken by the absence of labor, money, and guilt, seeing that habits he thought were natural to mankind when he grew up in America were, in fact, culturally determined and baneful” (Ziff 5). These absences lead him to realize that “savagery was a term applicable to the Europeans’ colonial and missionary activities in the Pacific rather than to the people they practiced upon” (Ziff 5). By redirecting the issue from civilizing the so-called savage to that of highlighting the destruction of their
life, Tommo is able to proclaim:

Better will it be for them for ever to remain the happy and innocent heathens and barbarians that they now are, than, like the wretched inhabitants of the Sandwich Islands, to enjoy the mere name of Christians without experiencing any of the vital operations of true religion, whilst, at the same time, they are made the victims of the worst vices and evils of civilized life. (267)

Here is the primary thrust of Melville’s quarrel with the missionaries. While attempting to convert the savage, the missionaries have either neglected to provide sufficient direction for the natives to live a Christ-like existence, or they have simply Christianized the natives in order to proudly proclaim the abolition of paganism. This argument makes it clear why “Melville’s perception was uncomfortable for those who saw Christian civilization as naturally good and heathen savagery as naturally evil” (Denning 148).

Rowe argues that Melville’s narrator thus “lays bare the imperialistic motives behind the introduction of Christianity to non-Western cultures, the savagery it causes rather than eliminates” (83). The Typee are in a state of innocence which allows them to remain outside the confines of the colonizers’ rigid morals. Tommo’s narration attempts to show that it is actually “[g]oodness and peace [which] are original to human nature. Hatred and aggression signify a depravity, a fall”: as Adler argues, the Typee have not “yet had Christianity forced upon them. In this they are still fortunate, for the imposition of Christianity upon ‘pagan’ peoples is a death-dealing process […]” (99). Melville is concerned for both the survival of the natives and their culture. Milton Stern correctly explains Melville’s apprehension:

The primitive world is the elemental, unartificial world of the child, and is the only world which can embrace what for Melville is the childlike ideal of Christ. Thus Melville sees the missionary as a paradox, for not only does the missionary not represent Christ and not suffer the little children to come unto him, but he tries to destroy those very childlike qualities which are the beauty of the barbarian. (21)
This paradox ultimately unfolds into Melville’s desire for the native to remain in his primitive state. It is obvious from his first-hand observations in the Sandwich Islands that the missionary efforts have destroyed any semblance of the “happy and innocent heathens” by indoctrinating them with fundamental Christian beliefs and a culture differing substantially from that which the natives have been forced to abandon. Their conversion has only introduced the vices which pervade the Euro-American society.

One of these flaws frequently referred to by Melville is the converted Polynesian culture’s new-found greed for Euro-American possessions. The element of greed is something which he develops to a greater extent in *Omoo*. However in *Typee*, Tommo focuses on the natives’ lack of that unhealthy desire for monetary goods. Despite the so-called benefits the missionaries have brought to the natives, they have also instilled in the natives an extreme drive for foreign possessions. The extent of the vices prevalent in the Sandwich Islands can be ascertained in Stewart’s *Residence*:

> When a strange ship arrives, and the officers complain of the extravagance of the harbor-fees, this impost is immediately declared to be exacted by the advice of the missionaries: the high prices of articles of refreshment in the market, is assigned to the same cause; though we ourselves are now living almost exclusively on sea biscuit, salt beef and pork, brought from America, two or three years old, and scarce ever taste a banana or melon, because we do not feel at liberty to purchase fresh provisions and vegetables—much less fruit—at the price demanded by the chiefs. (125-26)

The corruption of greed negatively affects the natives to such an extent that they are willing to blame their extortion practices on the missionaries. While the natives may have converted to Christianity, they have not shown the fruits of their “salvation” because their actions speak loudly against Christian conversion.

The contrast between the sophistication of the civilized islands and the innocent
nature of the Typee is further emphasized by Tommo’s realization that in the Typee Valley, they are free from the influences which create greed. Tommo discovers that

[t]here were none of those thousand sources of irritation that the ingenuity of civilized man has created to mar his own felicity. There were no foreclosures of mortgages, no protested notes, no bills payable, no debts of honour in Typee; [...] no beggars; no debtors’ prisons; no proud and hard-hearted nabobs in Typee; or to sum up all in one word—no Money! ‘That root of all evil’ was not to be found in the valley. (183-84)

The Typee give freely to Tommo all that they have to offer; food, clothing, and shelter are all provided for him without the slightest expectation of recompense. Practices revolving around the exchange of money are nonexistent in Typee, and its absence creates a vitality to their system which exists in only a few other places outside the Typee Valley. Tommo believes that the greed of the natives, if they were truly converted, would diminish if the missionaries were properly performing the true purpose of their mission.

The primary cultural foundation which Tommo praises in the Typee natives is their simple system of self governing. He believes that “the influence exerted over the people of the valley by their chiefs was mild in the extreme; and as to any general rule or standard of conduct by which the commonality were governed in their intercourse with each other, so far as my observation extended, I should be almost tempted to say, that none existed on the island, except, indeed, the mysterious ‘Taboo’ be considered as such” (293). Yet the system of the taboo pervades the natives’ governing system to a much greater extent than Tommo grasps. As a fictional character, Tommo may not be able to understand the Typee restrictions, but Melville does realize how important the system of taboo is for the Polynesians’ existence. As James Baird notes, in *Ishmael: A Study of the Symbolic Mode in Primitivism*, Melville is able to perceive “with unusual intuition that
*tabu* was the indispensable symbol of mind and life” for the islanders (153). However, the colonizers cannot establish a hierarchal order of power based on such an undefined system; likewise, the missionaries are not able to incorporate their religious doctrines into a pagan system of belief. Nevertheless, Tommo claims that since “there were no legal provisions whatever for the well-being and conservation of society,” the Typee are still able to live “with a harmony and smoothness unparalleled […] in the most select, refined, and pious associations of mortals in Christendom. […] They seemed to be governed by that sort of tacit common-sense law, which, say what they will of the inborn lawlessness of the human race, has its precepts graven on every breast” (293-94). By suggesting the existence of a civilized pagan, Tommo undermines the missionaries’ justification for removing the so-called barbarous traits of the natives. He testifies to the fact that the natives can coexist in harmony, even to the extent of pious Christians, and therefore professes that their system need not be altered by Euro-American standards.

Larzer Ziff has expounded on the view which Melville’s narrator has taken. Since the Typee are governed by this “common-sense law,” Ziff sees Tommo as agreeing with the theories of Thomas Paine:

To view savagery as inherently lawless is really to view democracy as ultimately unworkable. Undemocratic forms of authority require the doctrine of natural depravity, as Paine perceived when he asserted that “the palaces of kings are built on the ruins of the bowers of paradise.” If American civilization has gone wrong, so wrong as to disinherit the young such as Melville, it has done so by allowing adverse experiences to detach its social system from its foundation on a belief in the inborn goodness of all men. […] Manifestly, [Melville] is referring to a political government among the islanders which can be lax because harmony arises from the possession of common virtues. (7-8)

Yet, the missionaries, among others, believe the natives’ system needs a Christianized form of rule in order to bring about their civilizing. Charles Stewart observed a similar
phenomenon; he realized that the natives were able to live with each man acting as a "representative of his own rights, and the only law-giver, with liberty in all cases, promptly to wield the power of the executive, after having discharged, to his own satisfaction, the functions of the judge!" (qtd. in Anderson 130). However, to the Western mind, a system like this one cannot be left alone, because it can only lead "to lawless retribution and revenge"; thus, to Stewart, "the Hawaiian missionary monarchy—so odious to Melville—was far preferable" (Anderson 130). In another account, Richard Henry Dana refers to the Hawaiian missionary efforts as necessary to establish a system of law:

Doubtless the missionaries have largely influenced the legislation of the kingdom, and its police system; it is fortunate that they have done so. Influence of some kind was the law of the native development. Had not the missionaries and their friends among the foreign merchants and professional men been in the ascendancy, these Islands would have presented only the usual history of a handful of foreigners exacting everything from a people who denied their right to anything. (qtd. in Frear 41)

Dana believes that it is precisely because of the "harmony and smoothness" in which the natives live that they need an established system of government to rule over them in their new civilized environment. Yet the introduction of foreign power is exactly what Tommo fears for the Typee. He does not want to see them forced into some rigid form of unwanted jurisdiction which the missionaries would insist on them adopting.

The absence of a foreign power leads Melville's narrator to praise the natives and raise them in esteem above many who practice Christianity. Tommo's emphasis is on the actual conduct of the natives. He is not concerned with whether they bow their head in a Christian fashion; rather, it is their ability to civilly interact with each other that garners them such admiration. Tommo is confounded: "Are these the ferocious savages, the
blood-thirsty cannibals of whom I have heard such frightful tales!” (297). Realizing that they are cannibals, Tommo still questions if this practice means that their entire culture is completely depraved. In fact, Wai-chee Dimock has put forth in “Typee: Melville’s Critique of Community,” that cannibalism acts “[a]s an emblem of the perfect community, [it] reflects not only a primitive but also an advanced social state” (35). Dimock believes that the Typee appear as “[a] community eager to ‘incorporate’” their guests “literally, [and] bodily”; therefore, the Typee reach an “advanced” state because: “[h]ospitality effaces the identity of the host and seeks also to efface the guest by assimilation; cannibalism accomplishes the same on a physical level” (35). While still fearing the natives’ propensity towards cannibalism, Tommo cannot allow this practice to become justification for completely destroying their entire culture.

One of the fundamental reasons the missionaries have attempted to civilize the pagans is to end the deplorable practice of cannibalism. Tommo claims that the Typee should not be judged by just their cannibalistic habits; rather, a shift in focus should occur, and they should be praised for their civility toward one another. Dimock agrees, stating that the “Typee are not exactly like America, to be sure, but only because [their culture] is more refined, more advanced, only because it is already in possession of the ‘social order’ America is still striving after” (36). In fact, Tommo believes the Typee “deal more kindly with each other, and are more humane, than many who study essays on virtue and benevolence, and who repeat every night that beautiful prayer breathed first by the lips of the divine and gentle Jesus” (297). The narrator’s view is radically different from the missionary perspective on pagans and savages. Tommo commends the humanity of the natives; in his view “the Typees suddenly appear neither exotic nor
primitive. They are rather models of Christian charity, 'unparalleled' perhaps, but hardly unsanctified" (Dimock 36). In Tommo’s eyes, the Typee have proven themselves more respectable through their actions than those professing the faith of the missionaries.

Tommo’s praise of the natives’ civility radically contrasts with his opinion of the natives’ status in the Sandwich Islands. He laments that the simple lifestyle of the Typee Valley will soon be destroyed, as in Hawaii, with the missionaries’ civilizing efforts: “Ill-fated people! I shudder when I think of the changes a few years will produce in their paradisiacal abode” (Typee 287). Tommo’s most powerful attack on the missionaries’ work in the South Pacific comes in this bitterly satiric account of the destruction of the Hawaiian natives:

Behold the glorious result! The abominations of Paganism have given way to the pure rites of the Christian worship,—the ignorant savage has been supplanted by the refined European! Look at Honolulu, the metropolis of the Sandwich Islands!—A community of disinterested merchants, and devoted self-exiled heralds of the Cross, located on the very spot that twenty years ago was defiled by the presence of idolatry. What a subject for an eloquent Bible-meeting orator! Nor has such an opportunity for a display of missionary rhetoric been allowed to pass by unimproved!—But when these philanthropists send us such glowing accounts of one half of their labours, why does their modesty restrain them from publishing the other half of the good they have wrought?—Not until I visited Honolulu was I aware of the fact that the small remnant of the natives had been civilized into draught-horses; and evangelized into beasts of burden. But so it is. They have been literally broken into the traces, and are harnessed to the vehicles of their spiritual instructors like so many dumb brutes! (289)

The natives must now carry the burden of “civilized living” which brings them no rewards. Instead, they are reduced to mere animals, laden with constraints which are dehumanizing and murderous; “[t]he Polynesian is told to work for next to nothing; the alternative is to starve” (Adler 99). While Tommo raises the natives to a higher level than most Christians would allow, the missionaries lower the natives’ status to that of “beasts of burden.” By describing the natives as draught horses, Tommo shows how the
natives have actually become a type of commodity to the colonizers of the Sandwich Islands. Tommo "feels special resentment toward the missionaries who, pretending to exercise Christian sympathy for the victims of power, are actually rendering the islands pliable by shaming them out of indigenous cultural traditions" (Breitwieser 403). Inevitable as the colonization of the islands may be, Tommo cannot justify the abuses which civilization has brought on the natives.

In one of the famous claims concerning the primitiveness of the Typee, Tommo illuminates how his perspective differs from that of the missionary. He believes that "[t]he penalty of the Fall presses very lightly upon the valley of Typee" (287); therefore, he sees no reason why they must be subjected to the position of work horses by the introduction of foreign cultures. As Alberti observes, "Tommo consistently wants to see Typee life as formless, existing outside the 'civilized' regimes [...]" which are held within the Euro-American conceptions of man's duties (338). In his visits through the islands, "Melville saw an analogous perverse logic at work in the subjugation which the establishment of permanent colonies imposed upon the islanders. Enjoying a plentiful natural supply of food, the islander in his pristine condition obviously confounded the Calvinistic belief that fallen man was cursed to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow" (Herbert, Force par. 23). The Typee live within a world where hard labor is not essential to survival. Tommo views the valley as "an unspoiled Eden: a primal paradise that will reveal its marvelous secrets if man will lay aside his civilized pretensions and enter into the spirit of the savage" (Herbert 169). Yet, it cannot continue; when the Euro-American civilizations force their expectations upon the simple world of the native, this state of Edenic bliss changes into the fallen state of civilization.
Tommo's application of the Biblical Fall to the Typee Valley further intensifies his belief that the natives do not require civilizing. The need to exert themselves in order to provide nourishment appears to be minimal, as Tommo relates: "I scarcely saw any piece of work performed there which caused the sweat to stand upon a single brow. As for digging and delving for a livelihood, the thing is altogether unknown" (287). Nature, not the doctrines of civilization, provides adequately for the Typee; Tommo recalls how he has seen "Kory-Kory hie him away, armed with a long pole, with which, standing on the ground, he knocked down the fruit from the topmost boughs of the trees, and brought them home in his basket of cocoa-nut leaves" (295-96). The Typee reside in a land which boasts food enough to enable the savages to live in the abundance nature so willingly provides. Melville creates a vivid contrast between the living conditions of those who have been subjugated under the foreign colonizers and those who are still free. Ultimately, Herbert claims, "What Melville sees in the interaction between the missionaries and islanders in the South Seas is a process where the grand abstractions espoused by the missionaries produce a distortion of native life that justifies and facilitates a system of economic oppression whose results appear to vindicate the abstractions that sponsor them" (174). For Tommo, the Fall does not occur for the islanders until the intervention of the missionaries. This paradox creates in Tommo's mind the impression that the natives are not benefited by their conversion.

With a voice of dismay, Tommo expresses his belief that "[t]here is something decidedly wrong in the practical operations of the Sandwich Island Missions" (Typee 291). The natives, peaceful and content before the advent of Western civilization into their culture, find themselves involved in vices much worse than those which the
missionaries claim to be removing. Herbert observes that “the natives are crushed into apparent conformity with the dictates of missionary theory. The spiritual ascendancy enforced by their self-styled benefactors initiates a process which reduces the native population into a labor force for the support of what rapidly becomes a bitter material oppression, and the doctrine of the Fall is invoked to interpret and justify the results of the process” (Force par. 23). This process actually reduces the native to a subhuman being, expressly confined to the missionary perspective on a proper Christian mode of living. Now the converted Polynesians of the Sandwich Islands have been reduced below the level of human existence—a condition which denies to them any of the benefits of their usurped culture—and they are no longer free to live the simple Edenic life which the Typee still enjoy.
Chapter Two: *Omoo*: The Unconvincing Mission

The public reception of *Typee* encouraged Herman Melville to write the next section of his journeys through the South Pacific. The result, however, is a very different type of South Seas novel. Set in the Tahitian Islands, *Omoo* contains no element of suspense; the cannibals have been converted, the freedoms of the beautiful Fayaway have been replaced by strict morals, and more "civilized" customs have been substituted for almost all the activities in which the natives once participated. In *Omoo*, Melville uses an unnamed narrator whose adventures are not as detailed as Tommo's were in *Typee*; furthermore, *Omoo* differs in that the "proportion of sober truthfulness [...] is doubtless greater than in *Typee*" (Arvin 83). The narrator spends a greater amount of time critiquing the supposed advancements brought about by the missionaries and colonizers. Looking at the current religious and societal position of the Tahitians, the narrator asserts that the natives are in worse condition then when they were considered "savages."

*Omoo* is a disjointed narrative which jumps from one scene to another in an attempt to expand on various aspects of the current Tahitian culture. The picaresque qualities led D. H. Lawrence to conclude that "*Omoo* is a curious book. It has no unity, no purpose, no anything, and yet it is one of the most real, actual books ever written about the South Seas" (208). Lawrence's praise is not unfounded; Melville's second book contains a vast amount of information concerning the civilizing processes which occurred in Tahiti during the sixty years prior to his visit. One of the reasons for the disjointed events could be related to the success of *Typee*; as Edwin Eigner has noted in "The Romantic Unity of Melville's *Omoo*," the "narrator has adventures, but they are not compelling; and when he spends more time describing what he sees than what he does,
we suspect Melville is merely trying to fill up a book in order that he may cash in on the popularity won by *Typee*" (95-96). However, Eigner believes that “[w]e should be cautious of making such a judgment” (96). Foregoing the element of suspense, in *Omoo* Melville focuses on the living conditions of the Tahitian natives; his efforts can be seen as an attempt “to stand by his graver insights and set about to write a new novel of South Sea adventure, where he renewed his attack on the missions” (Herbert 189). As a result, there is a much greater emphasis on the missionary activity.

Because the missionaries are well established in the Tahitian Islands, Melville believes their work among the natives provides an excellent yardstick to measure the evangelizers’ success: “Indeed, it may now be asserted that the experiment of Christianizing the Tahitians, and improving their social condition by the introduction of foreign customs, has been fully tried. The present generation have grown up under the auspices of their religious instructors” (*Omoo* 186). Continuing where *Typee* ended, *Omoo* takes place, claims Alberti, “in an indigenous Pacific culture even more devoured by the absolutist social fictions of Euro-American colonialists than the *Typee*” (344). The narrator attempts to find signs of true Christian faith among the Tahitians and evidence of the “advanced” living conditions which the missionaries claim have existed. Yet, he does not find much to support this claim. The current position appears to be worse for the natives; rather than improving their living conditions, they are decreasing in number and being subjugated under the influence of the Westerners. Melville’s critique of the conversion of the natives in *Omoo* is even viewed by Anderson as a type of “propagandist document” showing that the natives have actually been destroyed by the introduction of civilization (309).
After landing in Tahiti, the narrator begins a quest for true native converts to the Christian faith. In all except one case, the quest is unsuccessful; Melville places great emphasis on this task, not because he "believed nor disbelieved in God" but rather because he "believed in faith" (Mizruchi 93). In undertaking this quest, Melville’s narrator attempts to discover the true state of the natives’ spiritual position; instead, what he discovers is the hypocrisy of the natives and missionaries. The quest theme is common in many of Melville’s works. As Milton Stern notes, “Melville takes as a central character the individual who makes a philosophical voyage, which is symbolized by a physical journey. The spiritual voyage is a search for the primitivist’s paradisiac world” (10). Since the missionary and colonizing efforts have persisted for so long in Tahiti, the paradisiacal world which the narrator might wish to discover has long since vanished. Now, within the “civilized” Tahiti, he must adjust his search in the altered world which the missionary has created. Stephen de Paul has remarked, in “The Documentary Fiction of Melville’s Omoo: The Crossed Grammars of Acculturation,” that this quest is no easy undertaking. Omoo’s narrator has wandered into a world where the “mutation of both European and Polynesian social structures presented certain challenges to the young writer seeking to make sense out of the busy, jumbled cultural landscape Tahiti had become” (51-52). The influx of Western influence continually reduces the

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1 The narrator’s experience on the outer island of Imeeo brings him and Long Ghost into contact with Po-Po, who the narrator concludes is a pillar of the church. Performing regular devotions and prayers, Po-Po and his wife Arfretee, seemingly shock the narrator with their true faith: “After becoming familiarized with the almost utter destitution of anything like practical piety upon these islands, what I observed in our host’s house astonished me much. But whatever others might have been, Po-Po was, in truth, a Christian: The only one, Arfretee excepted, whom I personally knew to be such, among all the natives of Polynesia” (Omoo 275).

2 Stephen de Paul also argues that since Tahiti was so jumbled, Melville’s narration must also be jumbled, or in another sense, picaresque: “Indeed, the fact that the narrator of Omoo goes unnamed signifies the diluting of cultural identity associated with the upheavals of acculturation. The boundaries formerly
Tahitian culture so that the result is the loss of a greater part of the natives' previous freedom. The distinctive boundaries between Christian beliefs and the natives' original culture become unclear; however, the narrator would argue that there would be obvious signs of faith if the missionary claims are founded on any truth.

In his quest, the narrator moves through the book critiquing aspects of the Tahitians' life as it now exists. The result is that "Omoo analyzes cultural development by thematizing issues associated with criminal justice [...], topics of naval discipline [...], and practices endorsed by moral reformers (rehabilitation, philanthropy, work, temperance, education)" (Colatrella 100). Much emphasis is given to topics of moral reform; this issue allows Melville's narrator to expand sections of the narrative in an effort to find out the true spiritual state of the natives. In his exploration, the narrator discovers that many natives have learned how to mislead the missionaries and present themselves as nominal Christians. He becomes interested in what de Paul calls "the visibility of the assimilation of Western culture into the Polynesian world [...]" (61). Melville's opinion is supported by other visitors to Tahiti; Jeremiah Reynolds, for instance believed that the missionaries' claims were questionable: "When we consider the length of time permanent instructors have been located on the island, we cannot but feel that the harvest has not been in proportion to the labors of the husbandman" (qtd. in Strauss 160). Furthermore, the visible attributes which de Paul mentions are a cover for the insincerity many of the natives show toward the Christian belief, and, as the narrator comes to believe, these attributes are not a sign of real faith.

One of the fundamental problems which the narrator notices concerning the
Tahitians is the loss of control over their environment—not just the physical or political possession of the islands or their personal being, but also the ability to retain a sense of human value and worth in their own country. As Colatrella explains:

"...the "reformed" Polynesians are harmed by their interaction with authorities, suggesting the flawed nature of disciplinary reforms. Tahitians particularly suffer from denationalization as a result of interaction with Europeans and Americans. Missionaries introduce Protestantism and Roman Catholicism to sailors and natives, seeking to eliminate dissipative cultural rituals, and replacing traditional spiritual, social, political and legal systems and native languages of Polynesians with European models. [...] Living in a liminal state combining features of cultural systems, Tahitians and sailors seek freedom from unjust authority as they attempt to satisfy physical and spiritual needs. (100)"

This statement exemplifies how the natives in Tahiti (and as Colatrella would add, sailors such as Melville) found these imposed regulations suffocating to their freedoms. The narrator believes such extreme authority is unwarranted because of the natives’ simple nature; indeed, "[h]e deplores brutal, senseless, or excessive discipline as perversions of law and authority that deny human dignity [...]" (Kemper 426). In order to survive, the natives must find ways to break out of these restrictions by appearing to follow the missionaries’ laws when in their presence, but when in private resorting to their own choice of lifestyle. Indeed, the narrator laments this need as being something which destroys rather than benefits the natives:

"Doubtless, in thus denationalizing the Tahitians, as it were, the missionaries were prompted by a sincere desire for good; but the effect has been lamentable. Supplied with no amusements in place of those forbidden, the Tahitians, who require more recreation than other people, have sunk into a listlessness, or indulge in sensualities, a hundred times more pernicious than all the games ever celebrated in the Temple of Tanee. (185)"

It could be argued, then, that the denationalization of the natives, through removing their traditional activities, has left them without the desire to better themselves. Therefore, in his quest, the narrator is actually confronted with an insincerity created through the
introduction of doctrines which force the natives to behave according to standards of Euro-American civilization. The result is a paradox surrounding the positive influence of the missionaries: as Anderson notes, “[t]he very existence of such numerous, severe, and perpetually violated laws against licentiousness of all kinds was in itself, according to Melville, an index of the continual increase of immorality”; in a reaction to these laws, “the hypocrisy and discontent were aggravated by the fact that the missionaries, in the excess of their zeal to stamp out the last trace of heathenism, exercised no discretion in the application of their prohibitory laws” (255-56). Melville’s Tahitians are so restricted that nothing can replace those things now forbidden. They sit around listlessly from day to day, which results in some of them indulging in questionable activities. The narrator’s conclusion is that the missionaries’ original intentions may have been good, but the effects are lamentable.

As the narrator attempts to determine the outcome of the natives’ conversion, he finds the natives’ ambivalent nature very perplexing. He sees young native women who attend and participate in the religious functions of the church; yet, after leaving the sacred partaking of the Eucharist, they quickly become “guilty of some sad derelictions” (Omoo 179). To find an answer for this behavior, the narrator tries to determine what thoughts the young natives hold concerning the religion in which they allegedly believe; entering into a conversation with a young native woman of his acquaintance, he asks if she belongs to the church:

“Yes, me mickonaree,” was the reply. But the assertion was at once qualified by certain reservations; so curious, I cannot forbear their relation. “Mickonaree ena” (church member here), exclaimed she, laying her hand upon her mouth, and a strong emphasis on the adverb. In the same way, and with similar exclamations, she touched her eyes and hands. This done, her whole air
changed in an instant; and she gave me to understand, by unmistakable gestures, that in certain other respects she was not exactly a "mickonaree." (180)

The native’s acknowledgement of being a Christian in the head but not in the body is rather telling. It shows the extent of the double standards existing in some of the natives—especially the younger ones; the narrator believes they have become, or have always been, immune to the teaching of the missionaries. They go through the motions of being “A sad good Christian at the heart—” but they are clear in the fact that they are “[...] very heathen in the carnal part” (Omoo 180). Melville’s inclusion of this event purposefully disputes the missionaries’ claims to have had a positive influence on removing the heathens’ previous way of life. The removal of all human lusts is certainly not what Melville was expecting to find, but the overwhelming duplicity of certain natives is very clear: they are willing to profess the missionaries’ doctrines but not follow through with performing actions required by Christian faith. For Melville and the narrator, this insincerity creates a hole in the claims of the missionaries for the success of their evangelism.

Otto Von Kotzebue’s narrative is a valuable resource which Melville uses to support the claims of his narrator. Like the narrator, Kotzebue views the hypocrisy of the natives as linked directly to the work of the missionaries. Melville’s narrator quotes directly from Kotzebue’s *Voyage* to support his own claims. The complete paragraph which Melville references expounds on the missionary efforts:

> True, genuine Christianity, and a liberal government, might have soon given to this people, endowed by nature with the seeds of every social virtue, a rank among civilized nations. Under such a blessed influence, the arts and sciences would soon have taken root, the intellect of the people would have expanded,

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3 It is interesting to note that the converted natives refer to themselves as “mickonarees,” or missionaries, rather than Christians. This phrase suggests that the natives have simply adopted the terminology of the missionaries rather than realizing what it means to truly be Christians.
and a just estimation of all that is good, beautiful, and eternally true, would have refined their manners and ennobled their hearts. Europe would soon have admired, perhaps even envied Tahiti: but the religion taught by the Missionaries is not true Christianity, though it may possibly comprehend some of its doctrines, but half understood even by the teachers themselves. That it was established by force, is of itself an evidence against its Christian principle. A religion which consists in the eternal repetition of prescribed prayers, which forbids every innocent pleasure, and cramps or annihilates every mental power, is libel on the Divine Founder of Christianity, the benign Friend of human-kind. It is true, that the religion of the Missionaries has, with a great deal of evil, effected some good. It has abolished heathen superstitions, and an irrational worship, but it has introduced new errors in their stead. It has restrained the vices of theft and incontinence, but it has given birth to bigotry, hypocrisy, and a hatred and contempt of all other modes of faith, which was once foreign to the open and benevolent character of the Tahitian. It has put an end to avowed human sacrifices, but many more human beings have been actually sacrificed to it, than ever were to their heathen gods. (Kotzebue Vol. 1, 167-69)

The narrator’s search for true faith among the natives is challenging because, as Kotzebue relates, the religion which the natives receive only gives them the functions of Christianity without building up a solid foundation of faith. In actuality, the natives have abandoned their heathen rites only to become victims of religious war brought on by the very religion supposed to save them. War and sickness are the two primary causes which have wiped out the majority of the natives in Tahiti. The narrator only briefly mentions the destruction caused by these wars; however, as in Typee, he does give specific attention to the diseases which have greatly decreased the population.

The primary focus of the narrator, however, is not on war or sickness but on the restrictions imposed on the natives by the missionaries. One of the most disturbing developments is the advent of the religious police, or the “kannakippers”; they represent a “most outrageous extension of moral and social authority” on the part of the missionaries.

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4 Kotzebue records that the population was once estimated at being over eighty thousand and that at the time of his visit they had been reduced down to a mere eight thousand, resulting in a loss of nine-tenths of the population—at a minimum. He believes, however, that the main cause of this has been from religious wars between the natives which were started in an effort to force the unconverted natives into religious submission. (Vol. 1, 169).
(de Paul 63), and a sign of the shallow faith and ambivalence among the natives. The presence of these men causes much disruption in the daily lives of the natives. The very fact that the missionaries have formed such an institution epitomizes the insincerity of the whole religious establishment. These police represent another means by which the missionaries can suppress the natives and directly reduce them to a state of subjugation.

The narrator disparages the missionary efforts with the kannakippers because “hypocrisy in matters of religion, so apparent in all Polynesian converts, is most injudiciously nourished in Tahiti, by a zealous and, in many cases, a coercive superintendence over their spiritual well-being” (Omoo 180). The narrator is appalled by such extreme use of religious authority to suppress “heathen” tendencies. James Baird, in *Ishmael: A Study of the Symbolic Mode of Primitivism*, concludes that Melville is suspicious of the missionary work; for him

[…] the achievement of persuading an agreeable people […] to give up a traditional symbolism in answer to vague mumblings of peace, where peace and good will were already known, was an act of sacrilege, suspect in itself of “civilized” evil. This feat of persuasion was a virtual token of the symbolic impoverishment in which the zeal of the missions originated. (99)

The overpowering nature of the missionary zeal presents itself in many of the narrator’s observations. The presence of the kannakippers, acting as the physical embodiment of missionary persuasion, reveals the degree to which the natives are being subjugated by the power of the religious leaders.

Authoritative figures as they are, the kannakippers are a bane rather than a blessing for the natives. On Sundays they are seen “armed with a bamboo-cane, driving [their] herd to a spiritual pasture” (Kotzebue 204). While the use of the bamboo-cane may not be specifically designated by the missionaries, it is apparent through this
dehumanizing function that the people do not willingly come to church. The
kannakippers must herd the natives in like they are animals. This activity becomes a
perverse interpretation of the Shepherd looking after his flock. Instead of guiding their
sheep to the pasture, the religious police are referred to as “whippers-in” of the natives.
Representing the epitome of control over a religiously repressed culture, the kannakippers
are a negative force throughout the Tahitian Islands. Their presence reduces the natives
to mere animals and stands as a symbol of the hypocrisy in the island: “[t]his, indeed, is
the principal charge which Melville makes against the coercive superintendence of the
spiritual well-being of the natives” (Anderson 254). If true Christian faith, brought about
by actual conversion, were to exist among more of the Tahitians, the role of the
kannakippers would be needless.

One of the positive changes in the Tahitians is that they no longer practice the
heathen activities of warfare and cannibalism. Western ideas of civilization, brought by
the new inhabitants on the island, have engendered recognition that “the nationality of the
island, [and] its inhabitants are no longer deemed fit subjects for the atrocities practiced
upon mere savages” (Omoo 187). However, while the natives may be secure from
outside dangers, they must now face an internal decimation of their entire culture. As
Stephen de Paul notes:

The purpose of the missionary program of “denationalizing the Tahitians” was
moral improvement. The consequence, Melville notes, was the erosion of a
whole society […]. The disruption of the ritual life of Tahitian man followed
from this denationalizing imperative. […]. The sudden influx of foreign
nationals into native society to take up residence there as colonial citizens has
created an umbrella of imperial protection which covers—actually masks—the
changing realities of Tahiti while at once promoting a false sense of cultural
“homogeneity.” While this “new nationality” has removed any threat of further
atrocities against the native population, all visible signs point to the fact that the
price for this physical security has been the spiritual life of the old native
The religious wars which raged in the first part of the nineteenth century are one of the primary reasons for the abandonment of the pagan activities. The rivalries pertained to who would control the spiritual and political power over the commoners. Pomaree II was able to reestablish his family line by turning to and accepting the advice of missionaries who by this time had already spent twenty years in Tahiti (Campbell 75). Pomaree believed that accepting Christianity “seemed like a fair price in exchange for the military assistance of the Europeans” (de Paul 58). The eventual result was the introduction of the new national identity. Unfortunately, creating a new national identity for the Tahitians did not agree with their natural disposition toward simple island life.

One of the main reasons the narrator believes Christian faith does not abound in the Polynesians is because of the indolent nature of the natives, who are not as industrious as the Euro-American inhabitants of the island. William Dillingham, in An Artist in the Rigging: The Early Work of Herman Melville, sees industry as “the heart of Omoo” (88). As Tommo describes in Typee, the original state of the natives is one of peaceful docility, which does not require productivity in order to supply the necessities of life. The narrator of Omoo, aware of this disposition, believes that “there is, perhaps, no race upon earth less disposed by nature to the monitions of Christianity than the people of the South Seas” (176-77). Likewise, Dillingham says, “[f]or some of the laziness (and much of the vice) among Tahitians, the narrator blames European intruders, including missionaries, who made the natives give up their old ways for new ones that they could not assimilate” (88). Doctrines which the missionaries have been preaching for the last

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5 Pomaree was struggling to maintain political control in Tahiti; there were many uprisings against his position from other native tribes. Therefore, assistance received from the Europeans helped him overpower his enemies.
sixty years are seldom adhered to or applied by many of the natives. Furthermore, dedication to work requires a higher level of effort than the natives seem willing to exert. The colonizing endeavors meet with minimal success because, as the narrator would argue, the natives do not apply the religious lessons to their lives. The indolence existing in the Polynesians brings no benefits to the missionaries; likewise, the colonizers suffer since they are not capable of motivating the Tahitians for any extended period of time. Rather than becoming an “advanced” homogeneous civilization, the natives actually move in the opposite direction.

Numerous original Tahitian pastimes had been discarded in previous years and were not replaced by any alternates. The missionaries had strongly encouraged this abandonment, apparently believing that the suppression would help the natives advance toward a Western definition of civilized living:

Many pleasant, and, seemingly, innocent sports and pastimes, are likewise interdicted. In old times, there were several athletic games practiced, such as wrestling, foot-racing, throwing the javelin, and archery. In all these they greatly excelled; and, for some, splendid festivals were instituted. Among their everyday amusements were dancing, tossing the football, kite-flying, flute-playing, and singing traditional ballads; now, all punishable offences; though most of them have been so long in disuse that they are nearly forgotten. (Omoo 185)

In the removal of these activities, the narrator believes that the natives have lost essential elements for an enjoyable life. There appears to be no justification for the loss of these activities; instead, “[s]ticking to traditional cultural ways appears to be the means of thriving” (Colatrella 113). Yet the natives continue to move further away from their natural existence by being forced into Western social confines.

However, the claim concerning the removal of these sports is only partially correct. There were two primary reasons why these games were lost to the Tahitians as
pastimes. First, King Pomaree II banned any actions related to pagan practices; therefore, activities associated with pagan festivals were already prohibited by the ruling power in Tahiti. The other reason, as the narrator suggests, is related to missionaries, but also to the colonizing efforts on the island. In his defense of missionary activity in Hawaii, Walter Frear, author of *Anti-Missionary Criticism*, notes that the banned sports activities resulted from the societal advancements of the natives. Using missionary comments on the subject as his sources, Frear points out that the missionaries were not the direct cause of the suppression of these activities:

> [...] new interests had been substituted—horses and the white man’s conveniences, luxuries, and vices generally; [...] activities were largely absorbed, first, in war, in which incidentally the musket largely displaced the spear and sling, and then in supplying sandalwood, etc., to the whites, shipping as sailors, and engaging in other occupations. [...] Doubtless, also, the restrictions, under missionary influences, on gambling and licentiousness, the principal attractions of these sports, contributed indirectly. (14)

Regardless of the events leading to this loss, the natives were left with nothing to replace their traditional activities, furthering the denationalization process. The restrictions introduced greatly decreased the enjoyment of the natives’ living, as Captain F. W. Beechey describes in his *Narrative of a Voyage to the Pacific and Bering Straits* (1832). The converted natives, while they regarded the Bible with “proper respect,” felt that it was associated “with the suppression of their amusements, their dances, singing, and music, [so] they read it with much less good will than if a system had been introduced which would have tempered religion with cheerfulness, and have instilled happiness into society” (qtd. in Anderson 256). The Western civilizing brings with it only work for the Tahitians; it supplies no source of happiness.

As Melville’s narrator points out, the civilizers have not simply left the natives to
squander their energies; instead, they have attempted to tap into that energy as a source of labor: “It has been said that the only way to civilize a people is to form in them habits of industry” (*Omoo* 191). The industrious newcomers have attempted to establish weaving factories, sugar cane plantations, and agricultural farms. But these are all stemming from a Euro-American culture which has had a long history of workers who are accustomed to manual labor. Many of these ideas stemmed from the philosophy which the missionary societies had agreed upon; they wanted “a blend of religious and cultural instruction, believing that waged labor, Western marriage, and literacy were important factors in facilitating conversion to Christianity” (Samson 13). Nevertheless, the narrator believes that the natural inclinations of the natives have made the colonizers’ labor efforts fruitless: “The fact is, that the mechanical and agricultural employments of the civilized life require a kind of exertion altogether too steady and sustaining to agree with an indolent people like the Polynesians” (*Omoo* 193). Dillingham elaborates on this point further: “The narrator is appalled at missionaries not because he believes they are evil but because he thinks most of them are stupid. They should have known when to leave well enough alone. Instead they tried naively to give the islanders a new identity through work—for true Christianity is just as surely a form of work as physical labor” (89). The Reverend William Ellis, in *Narrative of a Tour through Hawaii* (1826), defines the missionaries’ belief that the natives must be converted in order to “advance” their civilization: “*Christianity Alone* supplies the most powerful motives and the most effective machinery for originating and accomplishing the processes of civilization” (qtd. in Strauss 157). However, the natives, unwilling or unable to adapt, are left under the imposing forces of missionary powers which, supposing to advance them, has actually
brought them to a point where they have nothing culturally valuable in which to invest their energies.

The narrator acknowledges the removal of the pagan systems of idolatry, but he states that it is not necessarily attributable to missionary activity. Rather, it stems from the “civilizing effects of a long and constant intercourse with whites of all nations” (*Omoo* 187). However, these “advancements” seem to benefit the foreigners rather than the Tahitians. Questioning the motives behind the conversion of the natives to Christianity, the narrator suggests that it was in order to remove the savage propensities they once held—thereby allowing for a safe environment to develop industries. Throughout *Omoo*, there is a close connection between the missionary efforts and the civilizing of the culture: “The missionaries regularly preached the virtues of ‘industry,’ knowing that trade could create a market for European goods in the islands and encourage the development of British social and labor practices” (Samson 29). There are few stronger motives behind bringing them to a state of Western existence. Again, one of the major setbacks of their so-called advancement arises from the natural state in which the natives once lived and how, by Western standards, they appear exceedingly indolent; therefore, they are deemed incapable of actively participating in any form of culturally different forms of commerce. The narrator supports this claim by drawing attention to the businesses established in the Hawaiian Islands:

[...:] every evidence of civilization among the South Sea Islands directly pertains to foreigners; though the fact of such evidence existing at all is usually urged as a proof of the elevated condition of the natives. Thus, at Honolulu, the capital of the Sandwich Islands, there are fine dwelling-houses, several hotels, and barbershops, ay, even billiard-rooms; but all these are owned and used, be it observed, by whites. There are tailors, and blacksmiths, and carpenters also; but not one of them is a native. (192-93)
Completely removed from the labor force, the native commoners have separated themselves from influencing any of the changes brought about in their new culture:

"[w]ithout a larger share in the power structure of society, workers by definition are not only those who are unable to sell anything except their labor, they are also those who are unable to fully represent themselves through the channels and institutions of the dominant culture" (Brantlinger 109). The Tahitians, under the well-established power of the missionaries, have abandoned themselves to their listless and indolent behavior, demonstrating that they are no longer in control of their environment.

Through this exclusion, the natives have gradually come under the rule of the "White man" who arrives with "a kind of Puritan superego," and "whose errand into the wilderness knows few boundaries and who will go to great lengths indeed to make his point(s)" (Said 295); in Melville’s view, the white man’s point is that the “civilized” native must be completely removed from his previous pagan state in order to be brought up in a proper Euro-American system. Melville rejects this belief. Unable to cope with the changes in their civilization, and forbidden to retain any element of their previous pagan practices, the natives, who are “[c]alculated for a [particular] state of nature, […] cannot otherwise long exist” (Omoo 193). The narrator has serious grounds for this concern. Coming to Tahiti and witnessing native life and its decimation since Cook’s visit, including the current unmotivated spirit of the Tahitians, Melville is not unfounded in this conclusion. As Anderson notes, Melville’s view is that “the Polynesian is no more suited in disposition and talent for Western civilization than he is qualified in attitude and spiritual endowment for the morals and dogmas of the Christian religion” (261). The alterations in both the religious and secular arenas are hindered by the natives’ original
disposition toward a more natural environment.

Unable to benefit from the foreign influence of the missionaries, the natives lose any meaningful existence. The missionaries have forbidden their traditional activities and attempted to replace these with the supposed benefits of Western means of living. Therefore, the natives are left with nothing to pursue unless it is related to the white man's culture. Furthermore, the absence of true Christian faith, the narrator would argue, can be seen in the natives' indolent nature. They are unwilling to adapt to the civilized conditions which the missionaries and colonizers have attempted to impose. Through Melville's narrative it can be seen that the "denationalization of the natives" has only lowered them "to a state of abject servility"; furthermore, "nominal Christianity leads to the unhealthy absence of constructive activity. The prospect of gaining a balanced freedom by overcoming difficulties in the world of work [...] seems an utter impossibility for the Polynesians" (Wenke 253). Melville is not opposed to the Polynesians performing some type of physical activities to benefit their lives; he is not against work—in fact, as seen from his intense focus on the absence of productive labor in the Tahitians, he is adamantly in favor of a strong work ethic. However, as Dillingham argues, he does not believe that the Euro-American perspective of labor need be directly applied to the natives:

The narrator does not hold the Tahitians responsible for their physical and spiritual indolence. He would not try to make them into anything other than what they are by nature—a happy, lazy, innocent people—because he assumes that such an attempt would be clearly futile. He is angered by those who refuse to recognize that fact. Blameless though they are, the Tahitians nevertheless disturb him. (89)

This disturbance arises from the disruption of cultural habits which at one time provided them with the right to be "happy, lazy, innocent people"; this change also shows a
reminiscence of the natives in the Typee valley. Now, without these preoccupations, what the narrator sees is a culture devoid of value, devoid of human purpose; the natives have lost their means to live in the primitive state they once existed in and they cannot willingly adapt to the constructs of an alternate culture which is completely alien.

The listlessness which the narrator sees in the Tahitians drives him to make his strongest argument against the work of the missionaries. Since the efforts to civilize the natives through industry have hopelessly failed, the narrator comes to the conclusion that if true Christian faith existed in them, advancements in their culture should have succeeded: “the Tahitians are less civilized now than formerly. True, their constitutional indolence is excessive; but surely, if the spirit of Christianity is among them, so unchristian a vice ought to be, at least, partially remedied. But the reverse is the fact” (191). The narrator’s quest for signs of true Christian faith in the natives, with the exception of Po-Po and Arfretee, ultimately ends in failure. The advent of the kannakippers, the continued “loose” sexual mores, and the obvious lack of motivation toward a “civilized” state of existence, represent arguments against the progress of missionary work. Instead of a plethora of instances to support the positive influences of Western activity and the foundation of true Christian faith, Omoo depicts Melville’s belief that the natives are heading toward destruction rather than moral and cultural advancement.
Chapter Three: Typee and Omoo: The Lost Connection with Nature

Typee and Omoo are able to stand as independent works treating Melville’s experience in the South Seas; however, they can be linked to show the contrast between the current Typee and Tahitian cultures. By examining the disparity between the two societies, the underlying argument against the missionaries becomes further illuminated. Comparing the primitive Typee with the Euro-American advancement in Tahiti reveals just how negatively Melville viewed the missionary efforts. Yet, joining the two novels does create the risk of making them appear as one narrative broken into separate books. This union is not one Melville would support. When writing to his publisher John Murray, Melville made it very clear that Omoo is an entirely separate narrative: “I think you will find it a fitting successor to ‘Typee’; inasmuch as the latter book delineates Polynesian Life in its primitive state—while the new work represents it, as affected by intercourse with the whites” (qtd. in Roper 330). Melville intended the two books to be separate in their discussion of Polynesian culture; in fact, Omoo contains only one passing reference to the narrator’s previous experience in the Marquesas Islands. Indeed, in combining the two narratives as one complete story, the brilliance of Typee’s narrative potentially becomes obscured by the loose structure of Omoo. Critical commentary has primarily focused upon Typee rather than Omoo, and Paul Witherington, in “The Art of Melville’s Typee,” argues against unifying the two books. He believes that “Typee has suffered by being placed with Omoo,” and particular reviewers who choose to link these books have sometimes done so by placing “them in a single ‘return to paradise’ category [suggesting] a thematic unity which ignores—if not damages—the artistic autonomy of Typee” (138). Witherington’s argument may be valid in relation to the artistic qualities
apparent in *Typee*, as opposed to the disjointed, picaresque mode of *Omoo*; nevertheless, both books still contain pertinent information regarding the situation of the Polynesians. This information appears much clearer when the books are presented together; ultimately, they show how the natives exist in their environment without external influence while the “civilized” natives are losing their grasp on the natural world within which they once existed.

By comparing and contrasting the societies which Melville’s narrators visit, the vast dichotomy between the current Polynesian cultures can begin to be explained. In one sense, *Omoo* clarifies and solidifies the statements which Tommo makes in *Typee* against the missionary activities in the South Pacific. The guiltlessness presented in the first narrative has been replaced with corruption in the second; *Omoo* exemplifies why Tommo views the primitive Typees as “essentially innocent”: they were free from the Euro-American cultivation, that “for the most part is but ‘pent-up wickedness’ which destroys man’s Eden” (Joswick 349). Tommo realizes that as Edenic as the Typee Valley may appear, he cannot remain in this blissful place because the natives’ simple culture so greatly differs from his own. Douglas Ivison has suggested that Tommo leaves the paradise of the valley because he knows that the missionaries and European colonizers will soon arrive and destroy everything which he has found to praise (126). However, by the time *Omoo’s* narrator arrives and becomes acquainted with the current standings of the Tahitians, he inevitably must consider their condition as much worse than that of the peaceful Typee. The narrator of *Omoo* cannot refrain from noticing these differences: “so recently from a primitive valley of the Marquesas, the aspect of most of the dwellings of the poorer Tahitians, and their general habits, seems anything but tidy; nor could I
avoid a comparison, immeasurably to the disadvantage of these partially civilized islanders” (192). Since the narrator does not elaborate on the specific comparisons made, it is justifiable then to examine certain sections in each book to help illuminate the changes wrought by missionary and colonizing activity.

Following upon the success of Typee, Omoo allows Melville to explore new aspects of Polynesian culture. Melville claims in the preface to Omoo that, “[t]he present narrative necessarily begins where ‘Typee’ concludes, but has no further connection with the latter work” (8). It seems, however, that regardless of whether Melville saw Omoo as an independent work, the context of its cultural setting in the South Pacific can hardly be separated from that of Typee. And, while condemnation of a Euro-American system of cultural manipulation is one of the primary thrusts of each book, “Omoo engages in a more subtle form of comparative cultural criticism than Typee, encouraging readers to compare benefits and constraints of American and Typee cultures” (Colatrella 99). The “advances” of the Tahitian civilization, when seen in opposition to the state of the Typee, allow Melville to focus “on how cultures change over time, noting how individuals move between cultures and how disciplinary innovations from one cultural system can be incorporated, not always for the better, within another” (Colatrella 99). The Typee and Tahitian natives represent groups living either in a traditional social culture or under the effects of an imposed modernity. De Paul argues that, “[t]he obscurities Tommo had to negotiate in Typee do not present themselves in Omoo. In his journey from the Marquesas to Tahiti, Melville moved from an ‘open’ society to a ‘stratified’ system built more solidly on political authority” (57). The differences which de Paul highlights provide Melville the opportunity to contrast the two cultures.
The Polynesian society in *Omoo* represents a progressing environment (not necessarily for the better) compared to that of the Typee Valley. In fact, Tahiti has become "international Tahiti—a bizarre hodgepodge of Polynesian, Yankee, and European usages and styles" (Abrams 48). Because the Tahitian culture is more stratified, the narrator in *Omoo* gains a greater sense of freedom than Tommo. During his stay in the secluded valley of the Typee, Tommo is restricted from traveling extensively, and anywhere he does go, he must be attended by his consort, Kory-Kory. While among the Typee, Tommo is not once permitted to trek to the ocean or travel beyond certain limits of the valley which, in all likelihood, Mehevi designated to Kory-Kory. However, on Tahiti, *Omoo*’s narrator, even though confined to the "Hotel de Calabooza," is able to escape the comically portrayed attempts at restraint and explore the village of Papeetee and the outer island of Imeeo, observing the condition of the natives. This freedom is a result of Melville’s narrator being able to assimilate himself into the Western culture which has been partially adopted in Tahiti. In the Typee Valley, however, Tommo is always conscious of the all pervading system of taboo because, unlike the natives, he cannot comprehend the dividing lines between what is permissible and what is forbidden. No longer governed by the systems of the taboo, Tahiti has become partially acculturated to the Euro-American systems with which the narrator is more familiar.

However, this familiarity only adds to Melville’s argument that the advent of foreign culture in the South Pacific benefits the Euro-American, rather than the native. Comfortably wandering about Papeetee, *Omoo*’s narrator recounts that at times he longs "for a dress-coat and beaver, that I might step up and pay my respects" to the ladies of Western society who are now living on the island (169). The narrator’s freedom and
familiarity with the changed culture illustrates how, as a foreigner in Tahiti, he feels more at ease than some of the natives who have always resided on the island. Also, the narrator is now released from the pervading fear of cannibalistic traits in the natives. On fine evenings, the Westerners take to strolling along the Broom Road in “a bevy of silk bonnets and parasols,” striking the narrator as “a band of pale, little white urchins—sickly exotics”; there are even “sedate, elderly gentlemen, with canes” walking about (169). Some of these people are identified as missionaries and their families. However, the natives, at the appearance of the finely dressed missionaries, “here and there, slink into their huts,” attempting to avoid contact (169); the very appearance of the missionaries dressed in their Western garb drives the natives away from, rather than toward, the missionaries. Although he does not state why this repulsion occurs (perhaps they fear some sort of reprimand), the narrator creates an implicit relation between the natives’ desire to avoid contact with the missionaries and the image of Western civilization presented by the missionaries and other foreigners on the island.

In contrast to these images of people in Western garb is Tommo’s experience with the scantily dressed natives of Typee Valley. The Typee are uninhibited in their nakedness and are not ashamed of their state when confronted by the Westerners who occasionally land upon their shores. The beautiful Fayaway is Tommo’s chosen representative for the natural dress of the primitive Typee. He describes her apparel, or in some cases the lack thereof, with erotic overtones:

Fayaway—I must avow the fact—for the most part clung to the primitive and summer garb of Eden. […] At other times, when rambling among the groves, or visiting at the houses of her acquaintances, she wore a tunic of white tappa, reaching from her waist to a little below the knees; and when exposed for any length of time to the sun, she invariably protected herself from its rays by a
floating mantle of the same material, loosely gathered about the person. (125-26)

It does not take long for Tommo to become accustomed to the dress of the natives. He continually praises their loveliness and even goes so far as to compare the natural beauty of the native women, dressed in their gala costumes, to elaborately dressed women of the European courts: “I should like to have seen a gallery of coronation beauties, at Westminster Abbey, confronted for a moment by this band of island girls; their stiffness, formality, and affectation, contrasted with the artless vivacity and unconcealed natural graces of these savage maidens. It would be the Venus de’ Medici placed beside a milliner’s doll” (237). Tommo is not alone in his praise of the Marquesas’ beauty. Captain David Porter also vividly describes the natives’ characteristics in *Journal of a Cruise Made to the Pacific Ocean* (1815): “We find them brave, generous, honest, and benevolent, acutely ingenious, and intelligent, and their beauty and regular proportions of their bodies correspond with the perfection of their minds” (qtd. in Strauss 153).

Enraptured by the natives’ natural qualities, Tommo emphasizes the females’ interest in arranging their hair, beautifying themselves, and adorning each other with flowers: in the Typee Valley “you might have seen a throng of young females, not filled with envyings of each other’s charms, nor displaying the ridiculous affectations of gentility, […] but free, inartificially happy, and unconstrained. There were some spots in that sunny vale where they would frequently resort to decorate themselves with garlands of flowers” (184). Exempt from the jealously which Melville sees in his culture, the natives reside in a world centered on natural appearances; in this setting, the natives are free of any imposed notions that they are immodestly dressed.

It is not until the missionaries arrive that this primitive existence changes from
Edenic to something which, considered in light of their Biblical beliefs, is akin to a depraved state of sinful existence. As Melville’s narrators relate, attempts have been made by the missionaries to clothe the natives by introducing attire to meet the Euro-American standards of decency. The missionaries are shocked at the nakedness of the natives, and hasten to impose Western clothing on them. By the time the narrator arrives in Tahiti, the missionary efforts have resulted in the natives wearing as much Western garb as possible, and often going to great lengths to acquire this clothing. Throughout Typee and Omoo, the foreign clothing worn by the natives is mentioned numerous times. At one point, Omoo’s narrator briefly gains a companion named Kooloo by providing him with a regatta shirt and other apparel in return for food. However, Kooloo quickly abandons the friendship after the gifts have been exhausted. The narrator humorously concludes that, even though a self-proclaimed “‘Mickonaree,’ [...] declaring his communion with the church” (160), Kooloo is nevertheless still “quite a man of the world” (161). Indeed, the narrator notices how the relationships which are established between the natives and sailors (such as himself) have turned into a sort of corrupted attempt to gain Western possessions from travelers. Finding the Tahitians’ intended friendships to be hypocritical, the narrator observes that “among a people like the Tahitians, vitiated as they are by sophisticating influences, this custom [of receiving ‘tayos’ or friends] has in most cases degenerated into a mere mercenary relation.” He goes on to say “it nevertheless had its origin in a fine, and in some instances, heroic sentiment, formerly entertained by their fathers” (158). A. N. Kaul, in The American Vision, notes that this particular scene highlights how the craving for possessions has led to a drastic alteration in the natives’ original disposition. Kaul emphasizes that “[t]he
breakdown of community values in Tahiti and their supercession by the values of civilization is evident in the degradation of human relationships, most notably in the corruption of the custom of *tayo* or selfless friendship” (237-38). The natives’ desire for clothing is part of the vice of greed which comes with civilization; and, as Tommo suggests, the Fall occurs with the introduction of Western culture.

In *Omoo*, the natives’ fall from their natural state is revealed in their strong propensity toward acquiring physical property, in contrast to the simple life of the Typee Valley; the islanders now “wear anything they can get; in some cases, awkwardly modifying the fashions of their fathers, so as to accord with their own altered views of what is becoming” (*Omoo* 184). The Tahitians' taste in clothing represents a rather amusing example of the changes arising from the acculturation process. Perhaps even more so, the apparel of the Tahitian women is affected. No longer do the women spend time decorating themselves with the flowers that abound on the islands. Instead they are restricted by laws established by missionaries in their attempts to quell the eroticism associated with native adornments. The narrator is troubled by this change:

[…] ridiculous as many of them now appear, in foreign habiliments, the Tahitians presented a far different appearance in the original national costume; which was graceful in the extreme, modest to all but the prudish, and peculiarly adapted to the climate. But the short kilts of dyed tappa, the tasselled maroes, and other articles formerly worn, are, at the present day, prohibited by law as indecorous. For what reason necklaces and garlands of flowers, among the women, are also forbidden, I never could learn; but, it is said, that they were associated, in some way, with a forgotten heathen observance. (*Omoo* 184-85)

Indeed, as W. Patrick Strauss notes in *Americans in Polynesia 1783-1842*, “[t]he life of the Tahitians as well as the other Society Islanders was vigorously regulated by a missionary-inspired code of laws that would have done honor to Moses” (39). Left without their pastimes, some women of Tahiti now participate in many of the vices which
the narrator deems perfidious in a supposedly Christianized society. Unaware of the origins of these bans, he continues to attribute these clothing restrictions to the introduction of Western principles of civilized living.

The removal of the traditional garb from everyday native activity and the introduction of foreign concepts of proper attire adds to the narrator’s belief that the natives are undergoing a cultural death at the hands of the missionaries. In countering this argument, Walter Frear admits that “the missionaries have been blamed much for being shocked at nudity and encouraging the use of clothes” (13-14). He goes on to describe how the missionaries “tried to teach the natives the healthful use of clothes” by introducing an alternative form of dress which “anticipated present-day freedom and simplicity as compared with Victorian prudery and unhygienic grotesqueness” (14). Regardless of the supposedly more healthful aspect of the new clothing, the native women were still being incorporated into a foreign system of civilized standards: “[t]he missionaries sought to establish and sustain” not only a sexual purity among the female natives, but also encouraged the natives “to cover nude bodies with decent clothing in Western style” (Grimshaw 29), which, in turn, further removed them from their own natural environment.

Another very important comparison between Typee and Omoo arises in the manner in which the natives participate in their religious practices. While with the Typee, Tommo is able to observe particular events which allow him to gain some insight into the Typee religion. However, he honestly relates that “[f]or my own part, I am free to confess my almost entire inability to gratify any curiosity that may be felt with regard to the theology of the valley.” The manner in which they worship their gods is
completely incomprehensible to Tommo, and he continues by saying "I doubt whether the inhabitants themselves could [understand the religion]" (251). In witnessing the religious activities of the Typee, Melville’s narrator separates himself from previous missionary and exploration writers whom he believes have misrepresented the religions of the Polynesians. Rather than attempt to come to an arrogant conclusion about their practices, the narrator

[...] quietly sets aside the discourse inspired by the missionaries who, fed with age-old interpretations of the Bible, commonly hover between some references to natural religion and some to devilish inspirations. Renouncing attempts to fathom the theology or faith of the islanders and thereby determine their ultimate meaning, [Tommo] can only describe some of their observances, their feasts, their ritual sites (those ruined and those in use), seek to figure out who regulates taboo and offer comparisons of civil institutions [...] (Despland 107)

Furthermore, instead of trying to share his particular thoughts on religion with the natives, Tommo decides to follow the Typee’s example: since “the islanders always maintained a discreet reserve, with regard to my [Tommo’s] own peculiar views on religion, I thought it would be excessively ill-bred in me to pry into theirs” (251). In making this decision, the “[r]eligious tolerance” of Tommo can be “seen as a quality of gentlemanliness, bring[ing] into ironic juxtaposition two conflicting aspects of nineteenth-century culture: religiosity and gentility” (Firebaugh 118). The narrator refrains from prying out of politeness, therefore placing himself in opposition to the evangelical efforts of the missionaries.

Nevertheless, while setting down his observations about the Typee Valley, Tommo inadvertently relates an interesting connection between the Typee forms of worship and that which Omoo’s narrator witnesses in the converted natives. Moa Artua is the little wooden god which the Typee priest Kolory uses to answer questions for the
natives. The chiefs gather together and perform a ceremony with Moa Artua which
Tommo very humorously relates. The priest sits with the god while the chiefs convene
around him and give encouraging responses to the methods of punishment which Kolory
uses to get a response from the doll. When the god finally does answer after being
berated by the priest, the reaction of the chiefs is very peculiar: “the priest holding Moa
Artua to his ear interprets to them what he pretends the god is confidentially
communicating to him. Some items of intelligence appear to tickle all present amazingly;
for one claps his hands in a rapture; another shouts with merriment; and a third leaps to
his feet and capers about like a madman” (Typee 259). With this scene, Melville’s
narrator is attempting to illustrate an aspect of the religious activity the Typee chiefs
apparently were accustomed to performing with an “apparent superficiality of emotion”
(Wallace 283).¹ For this reason, in Tommo’s relation “[…] all action is pictured as
spontaneous, no intellection. When Moa Artua is denuded in punishment, he is revealed
as nothing more or less than what we are led to believe he is—a piece of wood” (Stern
64). Nevertheless, the chiefs respond as if they have an undying faith in Kolory’s
relation of the deaf and mute god, and they jump about like they have just been struck by
a revelation.

As Tommo continues to observe the religious practices and give descriptions of
the sacred sanctuaries in the valley, he becomes convinced of the religious indifference of
the natives. He realizes “that the islanders in the Pacific have no fixed and definite ideas

¹ The Marquesas missionaries also noticed the questionable actions of the natives when performing the
rituals surrounding the burial of the Marquesan chief Haape. Richard Armstrong’s diary reveals his
impression concerning the “frenzy of outward display” shown by the naked native women dancing before
the body: “there is not the slightest appearance of grief to be seen in the countenances of the performers—
The whole performance in fact partakes more of the nature of a farse [sic] than any thing else” (qtd. in
Wallace 283).
whatever on the subject of religion" (261). One day, while wandering through the peaceful groves with Kory-Kory, Tommo comes across an ancient carving of a Typee god. Curious about its nature, he attempts to get a closer look only to have the idol nearly topple when Kory-Kory tries to prop it up. This scene is also presented in a comical tone, because, as Anderson notes "Melville, indeed, never treats the pure paganism of the Marquesans forthrightly and in sober earnest. Sometimes his high-sounding but irreverent fooling gives place to a half-serious effort to embellish the superstitious practices of these primitives with the trappings of romance" (175). Nevertheless, after Kory-Kory beats the statue into a state of submission, Tommo makes one of his most profound statements concerning the state of the Typee’s religious faith:

"In truth, I regard the Typees as a back-slidden generation. They are sunk in religious sloth, and require a spiritual revival. A long prosperity of breadfruit and cocoanuts has rendered them remiss in the performance of their higher obligations. The wood-rot malady is spreading among the idols—the fruit upon their altars is becoming offensive—the temples themselves need rethatching—the tattooed clergy are altogether too light-hearted and lazy—and their flocks are going astray. (263-64)

James Baird turns Tommo’s observation into a representation of the uncomplicated nature of the Typees: "A ‘back-slidden’ generation of heathens is a race of men liberated from the authority of simplex symbols” (102); furthermore, Baird claims that “[w]hat Melville saw here was an exhausted religious symbolism” (104). The Typee appear to be living without much conviction in the beliefs of their ancestors, and the symbolism which has been carried through these practices has been almost completely disregarded with the passing of time. This conclusion has led Milton Stern to comment that “Tommo, tongue in cheek, is assuming the attitude of the Christian missionary, and, of course, thus seems to blast those very aspects of Typee which have been found good” (62). Regardless of
whether Tommo is being sarcastic, he has noticed that the natives do not show the propensity toward true faith needed for their conversion.

The Typee chiefs' response to the words of Artua Moa resembles the effects of the missionary preaching have on the Tahitians. Relating a particular event in the Society Islands, the narrator of *Omoo* describes an incident where the natives responded in a rather peculiar manner to the preaching they heard:

[...] the natives, for special reasons, desired to commend themselves particularly to the favour of the missionaries. Accordingly, during divine service, many of them behaved in a manner, otherwise unaccountable, and precisely similar to their behavior as heathens. They pretended to be wrought up to madness by the preaching which they heard. They rolled their eyes; foamed at the mouth; fell down in fits; and so were carried home. Yet, strange to relate, all this was deemed the evidence of the power of the Most High; and, as such, was heralded abroad. (178)

The narrator even acknowledges that this reaction is akin to those of the heathens. It appears that the natives have simply switched their own gods for the Christian God in an attempt to win favor from the missionaries. James Baird believes that “[t]heir ‘fits’ are manifestations of a passionate interest which is assumed for the sake of conformity” (191). The madness brought on by the preaching resembles Tommo’s description of the Typee chiefs acting like madmen. In neither case does the narrator believe in the sincere conviction of the participants. The scene in *Omoo* illustrates the way in which the narrator “explores how a chaotic blend of values drawn from different social systems shapes individual, group, and national concerns in undesirable ways for individual and social moral development” (Colatrella 98). The questionable responses result from what Stephen de Paul calls “the grotesque and feigned effects of the native conversion to Christianity” (61). The natives seem to be more intent on the religious process rather than applying themselves to their beliefs. In addition, the “[g]rotesquery becomes a
visible ritual in and for itself. The public pretence of conversion turns ritual back on itself, thus rendering the mode of behavior more significant than the ideas that are supposed to be communicated through its enactment” (de Paul 61). The quest for signs of true Christian faith becomes impossible when the mode supersedes the ideas; by comparing these scenes in Typee and Omoo, Melville shows that the missionaries’ belief in so many sincere conversions is preposterously inflated.

The attempts of the missionaries to gather the natives into their fold is an example which the narrator of Omoo uses to show how the natives are not prone to adopt a foreign religion; Melville realizes that “[i]mpetus for religious change can come from within a culture, but on the islands this impetus usually comes across the beach” (Dening 170). The introduction of the new religion does not create real desire on the natives’ behalf to embrace the doctrines from foreign cultures:

The Tahitians can hardly ever be said to reflect: they are all impulse; and so, instead of expounding dogmas, the missionaries give them the large type, pleasing cuts, and short and easy lessons of the primer. Hence, anything like a permanent religious impression is seldom or never produced.

In fact, there is, perhaps, no race upon earth, less disposed, by nature, to the monitions of Christianity, than the people of the South Seas. And this assertion is made with full knowledge of what is called the “Great Revival at the Sandwich Islands,” about the year 1836; when several thousands were, in the course of a few weeks, admitted into the bosom of the Church. But this result was brought about by no sober moral convictions; as an almost instantaneous relapse into every kind of licentiousness soon after testified. (Omoo 176-77)

Here is a revival similar to that which Tommo calls for in his claim against the back-sliding Typee. The results of this Christian revival, however, are not successful, as stressed by Omoo’s narrator. The pagans who converted to Christianity in the “Great Revival” quickly resort back to their previous activities, showing no signs of Christian conviction. Because they appear to act only on an impulsive behavior, the natives
perform only the actions which the missionaries desire, instead of adopting the true beliefs of Christianity.

A further observation can be considered in Tommo's statement about the backsliding Typee. Tommo's reference to the dilapidated condition of the religious temples in the valley sounds very similar to the decaying of the original churches which the Tahitian natives built upon first being converted to Christianity. There were originally thirty-six churches which were “mere barns, tied together with thongs, which went to destruction in a very few years” (Omoo 170). The most impressive was the Royal Mission Chapel of Papoar which Pomaree II commissioned to be built. The natives came together bringing the supplies necessary to build the spacious building, and “[t]he materials thus prepared being afterward secured together by thongs, there was literally ‘neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron heard in the house while it was building’” (Omoo 171). The narrator praises the church as an example of the ability of the natives to provide their own natural setting in which to practice their new found religion.

One particular aspect about this structure garners extra praise from the narrator: “a considerable brook, after descending from the hills and watering the valley, was bridged over in three places, and swept clean through the chapel. Flowing waters! what an accompaniment to the songs of the sanctuary; mingling with them the praises and thanksgivings of the green solitudes inland” (171). The narrator places special emphasis on the connection between the manner of construction and the natural setting of the building. The relationship between the natives and the paradisiacal landscape around them is very important; it represents the life-giving properties which the natives at one time were still able to connect with, even in the early years of Christianity. At this time,
they were still in touch with their surroundings and not so far removed as when Melville arrived. Now, however, “the chapel of the Polynesian Solomon has long since been deserted. Its thousand rafters of habiscus have decayed, and fallen to the ground; and now, the stream murmurs over them in its bed” (Omoo 171). Like the temples in the Typee Valley, the original churches which the natives built seem to have been abandoned. The natives’ initial zeal for the religious practices of the missionaries exemplifies their impulse to create such a grand building, but, as the narrator stresses, signs of true conversion are questionable because of their failure to perform the necessary upkeep on the churches.

The new building constructed to missionary standards, which the narrator dubs the “Church of the Cocoanuts,” is a very different type of religious structure. It is a building which, while quite the achievement and symbol of missionary success, represents the natives’ further removal from their natural environment. The disparity between the Tahitian structure and the adoption to Western church worship can be gleaned from its description: “It is of moderate dimensions, boarded over, and painted white. It is furnished also with blinds, but no sashes; indeed, were it not for the rustic thatch, it would remind one of a plain chapel at home. The woodwork was all done by foreign carpenters, of whom there are always several about Papeetee” (171). Further details of the church can be found in Anderson’s work wherein he quotes Captain Fitzroy, of the HMS Beagle. Fitzroy’s report resounds with disappointment at seeing the natives congregate in a foreign building: “I was sorry to see the new church, a large wooden structure capable of holding six hundred people, […], in lieu of one formed completely in their own style. Instead of the circular end, an ugly gable terminates a high
box-shaped house, resembling a factory” (242). By describing the church as a factory, Fitzroy’s account exemplifies the narrator’s view that the missionaries simply produce nominal converts, but do not instill true conviction. Both Melville’s narrator and Fitzroy emphasize the removal of the natives’ natural representation in the construction of the church. The church building becomes a symbol of the Western dominance over the natives, and their lack of influence in the design seems to parallel the loss of control they once had over their environment and culture.

When the church is referred to as a structure that the narrator would expect to see in an American setting, it becomes the representation of a foreign culture which has dominated the simple Tahitians. Stephen de Paul views the “Church of the Cocoanuts” as the

[...] assimilation of Christianity into the native religion [which] assumes the form of a network of images which undermine the very purposes of the missions. [...] It requires little embellishment to become a ready metaphor for a Christianity which is itself culturally displaced. Melville’s metaphor is initially one of cultural assimilation. [...] Despite the authenticity of its European design [...] the church still exudes the air of a culture lost to the new religion. (62-63)

Losing their freedom to represent themselves even in their buildings of worship, the Tahitians are deracinated from their culture. The missionaries attempt to both indoctrinate and domesticate them with Western symbols of cultural advancement. No longer are the natives worshiping in a building of their own design. The missionaries have forced them further away from their natural environment—thereby leading them one step closer to a cultural death. With the removal of their traditional religion, buildings, and dress, the natives suffer an acculturation which completely removes them

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2 Fitzroy’s description of the church as resembling a factory contains an interesting connection to the labor in which the missionaries encourage the natives to engage. This connection assists in supporting Melville’s view that the advent of the Fall occurred with the missionaries and colonizers.
from anything related to their natural inclinations.

The natives of the Typee Valley still retain an uninhibited relationship with the natural world around them. Tommo constantly calls attention to the natives’ ability to live comfortably off the land and to enjoy the natural state of prelapsarian bliss. The Biblical Fall which the narrator of Omoo would suggest has now occurred for the Tahitians greatly contrasts with Tommo’s view of the Typee Valley. The Typee natives are able to live in the abundance of natural resources, “which God in his wisdom had ordained for the support of the indolent natives”; however, in the Tahitian and Hawaiian Islands, their food supply is “remorselessly seized upon and appropriated by the stranger, [being] devoured before the eyes of the starving inhabitants, or sent on board the numerous vessels which now touch at their shores” (Typee 288-89). Melville is arguing that the corruption of innocence by civilization leads to the loss of the natural resources once available to man before the Fall. The comparison becomes clearer as the connection is made in Typee and Omoo to the missionaries’ endeavors to convert and civilize the natives by driving them away from their natural tendencies. Lawrance Thompson writes in Melville’s Quarrel With God, that sometimes Melville implies that all missionary endeavors in the South Seas cannot help but be corrupting and degrading influences, because they attempt to superimpose “civilization” on innocence. At other times, he resolves the Calvin-Rousseau conflict by insisting that God has these primitive children in his especial care; that the Eden-like settings were divinely ordered to permit these noble savages to live in accordance with God’s plan. (47)

In this sense, Melville’s perspective on missionary activity is that it infringes upon the natural state of the natives with an inferior structure, a sort of foreign garment which the natives are incapable of removing after it has been imposed. It becomes clear that the colonizer and, more particularly, the missionary, has inaugurated into the natives’
environment the irreversible effects of modernity.

Melville has attempted to show throughout both books that the converted
Polynesians are further away from the connection with nature, and what has replaced this
relationship are the vices of civilized culture. The Edenic connection which Tommo
experiences is replaced by the fallen state which is magnified through the attempts of the
missionaries to forcefully remove the “sins” of the natives. Essentially,

Melville, by reversing the categorizations of the missionaries, for whom nature
represented all that was evil and civilization and Christianity all that was good,
thereby gives the lie to the perception of Tahiti as a diabolical wilderness and
asserts the possibility that what is truly sacred may be found in nature rather
than the Ten Commandments. (Samson 504)

By removing the connection to nature from the Tahitians’ lives, the missionaries have
made the natives dependent upon the vices of the Westerners. The Tahitians are no
longer able to reap the benefits that once “would seem expressively ordained by
Providence” (*Typee* 284). Now they must depend on the provisions and doctrines of the
missionaries and colonizers.

The removal of the natives’ natural environment signifies a deadly loss. For
Melville, the existence of the natives depends upon a close relationship with their
environment. The Typee are able to provide for themselves, while the Tahitian and
Hawaiian islanders exhibit the destruction which occurs when this natural, prelapsarian
world becomes forbidden to them:

Each work reverberates the other’s special theme and both merge into the one
they share. *Typee* predicts the race-extermination that civilization will soon
cause among the Typees; *Omoo* contains reminders of the peace and happiness
the Tahitians enjoyed before the coming of the white Christian invaders. Both
books show civilization and Christianity in the South Seas as the opposite, in
effect, of what they pretend to be. Civilization, presumably the ameliorator of
life brings death. Christianity, presumably the bearer of light, puts out the sun—
the culture—the Polynesians need to live. (Adler 96)
Adler's method of equating the sun with the culture aptly describes what Melville is attempting to do in both novels. The fallen state of man, which Melville has equated with the Western world, represents a separation from his natural state. Throughout the Polynesian islands, the natives are currently going through the process of leaving their paradisiacal world and entering into the "civilized" world of "advanced" man. For the natives, this transition is taking a great toll upon their culture and lives. Death and corruption are the results which both narrators foresee and witness through the loss of nature. For the natives, the sun is setting on the days of their cultural freedom. The missionaries, in an attempt to remove the natives' savage propensities, have actually destroyed their culture by attempting to replace it with Euro-American standards.
Conclusion: “But what matters all this?”

In 1908, Jack London, on a small schooner named the Snark, landed in the Marquesas Islands. London was thrilled to be finally on the island where Tommo had lived among the cannibals. Traveling into the valley and spending the day with the much deteriorated natives, London ends his impression of the Typee Valley in the following manner:

[...] we watched the moon rise over Typee. The air was like balm, faintly scented with the breath of flowers. It was a magic night, deathly still, without the slightest breeze to stir the foliage; and one caught one's breath and felt the pang that is almost hurt, so exquisite was the beauty of it. Faint and far could be heard the thin thunder of the surf upon the beach. There were no beds; and we drowsed and slept wherever we thought the floor softest. Near by, a woman panted and moaned in her sleep, and all about us the dying islanders coughed in the night. (Chapter X)

This description still captures the beautiful landscape which Melville saw while in the Marquesas; however, the powerful, vibrant natives Melville spent his time with are absent in London’s experience. Melville’s fear of the coming of the Euro-Americans into the Typee Valley shows itself to be fully justified. The peaceful, utopian world of the Typee, which Tommo knows cannot last, eventually follows the same path of modernity which the other Polynesian societies experience. It is the method through which this modernity comes to pass that Melville argues against. By focusing on the work of the missionaries in both the Hawaiian and Tahitian Islands, Melville has established his position against the indoctrination of the natives into the Euro-American standards of civilized Christian living. The cultural death which the natives undergo eventually leads to the destruction of everything to which they can relate.

*Typee* is Melville’s manifesto against the destruction of the primitive world by an advancing power. In this work, Melville is aware of the powerful message he is going to
send to his readers, and, therefore, his introduction contains a warning about the claims he brings against the missionaries in the South Pacific. Tommo goes to extreme lengths to praise the natural ability of the natives to live independently of what his own culture accepts as the foundation for any type of advancement. Holding a different perspective on the primitive world enables Tommo to be an “unbiased” observer of the natives’ mode of living. The effects of Christianity in the Sandwich Islands have shown him that the natives are better off remaining unconverted because they only hold the traits of nominal Christians without the moral benefit contained in the “vital operations of true religion” (Typee 267). The destruction of paganism gradually leads to the destruction of the natives, and Tommo laments that it is inevitable that the Typee must follow in the same path as other islanders who have now come under the dehumanizing advancements of “civilizing” forces. Typee becomes Melville’s proof that the Polynesians were once able to maintain a civilization of their own design; however, deemed “pagan” by the invading Euro-American, they face cultural annihilation from the institutions of Christianized society.

Stepping off the boat in Tahiti, Melville must have been stunned at the drastic changes which had taken place over the past sixty years of civilizing efforts and missionary work. Unable to refrain from drawing comparisons to the Typee Valley he has just left, Melville has the narrator of Omoo direct his attention to the natives’ proclaimed conversion to Christianity. However, the extreme affectation of Christianity reveals a major flaw in the missionaries’ methods: a failure to truly convert the natives. Therefore, Omoo becomes Melville’s attempt to show how the fruits of the missionary efforts are unconvincing, with the natives losing many of their cultural pastimes and
habits as a result. The narrator concludes that true faith in the natives is almost impossible because of their indulgence in the vices of Western civilization.

Acculturation has left the natives bereft of any meaningful existence; they live only to suffer under the advancement of the Euro-American world.

When placed together, *Typee* and *Omoo* offer a “before and after” perspective on the cultural changes of Polynesia. Melville avoids direct comparison between the Typee and Tahitian cultures; however, in relating similar events he demonstrates that the missionaries have falsely claimed praise for their civilizing efforts. It is the similar characteristics of the natives that helps us better understand how and why Melville presents their responses to the acculturation process. Furthermore, the innocence seen in the Typee Valley has clearly been lost on the converted islands, and Melville’s description of the Tahitians suggests that it is the knowledge of the Fall which brings this loss about. Ultimately, when the natives’ natural connection to the environment is superseded by Christian functions, they experience a distancing from their culture which, Melville argues, can only result in their death.

The purpose of this thesis has been to focus on Melville’s reasoning behind the claims he makes against the missionaries. Avoiding an anthropological approach concerning missionary efforts in the South Pacific, it has attempted, through a close analysis of the text, to focus solely on Melville’s personal views. Special attention can then be paid to the key passages in *Typee* and *Omoo* concerning the missionaries’ conversion efforts, revealing his view that ultimately the missionaries have brought the natives to a cultural death. The observations Melville made while in the South Pacific resulted in his conclusion that the natural primitive world of the natives was much more
suitable for their disposition; when removed from that world, the cultural destruction of the natives becomes Melville’s focus. It is inevitable that the process of modernity would come to the islands, but Melville’s argument emphasizes and critiques the processes which bring destruction rather than benefits. By drawing attention to the passages in both books concerning the missionaries, a connection between the prelapsarian and postlapsarian effect of acculturation is illuminated. The comparisons demonstrate why Melville opposes the missionary societies in their attempt to convert the natives. Melville believes that the missionaries’ claims are unfounded and over-inflated; having spent significant time in the Polynesian Islands, he believes that the signs of Christian faith should be more apparent and that the benefits of colonization should result in removing the natives from paganism rather than lowering them to mere beasts.

The discussion in this thesis by no measure exhausts the possibilities available in comparing *Typee* and *Omoo*. A further area of exploration is the particular words which Melville uses to describe scenes in each book. Such a study would help determine if Melville purposely set out to describe the missionary activities in Tahiti and the Sandwich Islands as similar to or even as polar opposites to the practices of the heathens. As an example, Tommo’s description of the Typee ritual grounds is as follows: “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” (my emphasis 132). When describing the “Church of the Cocoanuts” *Omoo*’s narrator presents the inside of the building as thus: “Little light being admitted, and everything being of a dark colour, there is an indefinable Indian aspect of duskiness throughout. A strange, woody smell, […] is
at once perceptible. It suggests the idea of *worm-eaten idols* packed away in some old lumber-room at hand" (my emphasis 172). Similarly, the description concerning the idolatrous altars reaching “to the height of twelve or fifteen feet” (*Typee* 132) ironically resembles the description of the pulpit in the Western church which is “preposterously lofty: indeed, a capital bird’s-eye view of the congregation ought to be had from its summit” (*Omoo* 172). There are numerous other examples in which Melville seems to be using similar words to compare the natives’ religious practices with the missionaries’.

Another area of interest would be Melville’s discussion in *Omoo* of the missionary efforts to encourage the natives to labor for their food. This focus on labor, coupled with Fitzroy’s description of “The Church of the Cocoanuts” as a factory, suggests a strong connection to Marxist theory, in which religion works as the “opium of the people.”¹ The missionaries’ attempts to convert the natives into useful members of society raises suspicions concerning the real motivations behind proselytizing there. A related issue can be looked at in *Typee*. Melville fears for the destruction of the natives, which is perhaps why he has Tommo flee the valley; however, is it inevitable that the “civilizing” of the Typee must occur, or are they capable of resisting the Western influence?

The island which Jack London came to visit was a far cry from the primitive world which Melville experienced. The Typee natives described by London sound very similar to the Hawaiian Islanders which Tommo describes in *Typee*. The dread in *Typee* which turns to regret in *Omoo* represents Melville’s conviction that instead of eradicating

¹ In the introduction to *Critique of Hegel’s ‘Philosophy of right,’* Karl Marx claims: “The wretchedness of religion is at once an expression of and a protest against real wretchedness. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people” (131).
paganism, the missionaries brought the seeds of destruction with them, removing the
natives from their natural environment and culture. Both books end with the narrators
escaping the islands and heading out to the open seas. The freedom offered through the
ocean appeals to Melville. Abandoning the Edenic Typee Valley partially because of his
dread of their acculturation, he must also depart from Tahiti because he regrets that the
missionaries have used Christian justifications to bring about the destruction of the
natives.
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