

## Metaphorical Use of the Bible in the Beginning Part of Melville's *Typee*

Harumi Hirano\*

### Abstract

Melville's theological contexts in his first book, *Typee*, have not been duly discussed, since critics have considered the issue proper to his later books. The intent of this study is to show that Melville ingeniously insinuates Biblical episodes in the beginning part of the book so as to give the described incidents additional quality and depth which relate to the perspective of Ishmael in *Moby-Dick*. Here we also discuss the idea of the Covenant of God with man, the central doctrine of New England Puritan theology. This thesis concludes that the narrator's flight from the "arbitrary and violent" captain of the ship signifies Melville's metaphorical assertion that the narrator annuls the covenant with orthodox Puritan God.

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In his book "about the semantics of cultural forms" for the students of anthropology, Edmund Leach reminds them of the grave importance of verbal categories in one's realizing and interpreting the outside world. What does one do to shape an internal perception of the continuous sequence of the visual outside world in which adjacent elements are not perceptibly different from each other? One makes it possible by cutting the continuum into recognizable parts and giving each of them a name to distinguish from each other. Since a name is basically a symbol, the man-made world is a symbolically ordered construct. "Meaning depends upon contrast," Leach affirms. Hence comes the principle of boundaries. When symbols are used to distinguish one set of category of things having some property or attribute in common from another set, "artificial boundaries" are being created. "Boundaries... are," Leach says, "ambiguous in implication and a source of

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\* 北見工業大学教授 Professor, Kitami Institute of Technology

conflict and anxiety." Boundaries as such may be not only time but also space. Crossing the boundaries usually involves rituals.<sup>1</sup>

If simply put forth, Herman Melville's first work *Typee* is solely concerned with the segmentation of social space and ritual time. Melville's first book is a narrative by a young man of his experience in a Marquesas Island. The narrator, just like Melville, tells his experience from his recollection after he returns to his country. The outline of the plot is very simple: the narrator's escape from a whaler, followed by his sojourn in a Typee valley and his escape from there to another whaler. He traverses the boundaries between two worlds: western world and Polynesian world. The contrast of these worlds furnishes the theme of the book. The procedure of separation is the center of the drama, where Melville signifies not only the physical and sociological transitions of the narrator but also his philosophical relocation. Melville intends to offer not so much his real-life experiences and what in later years is considered anthropological information, as a ritual transition, which the three phase structure in the rites of passage originally advocated by A. van Gennep might be helpful to explain.

Christian mythology plays an important role when the narrator parts himself from his present civilized world in order to enter into an unfamiliar primordial world. The interval preparation would determine the content of the next stage. Although he is the one concerned, he is not responsible for the explication of both worlds. When the transcription of the real world is nothing less than a symbolically ordered man made world as Leach says, a fictitious world is twice symbolically ordered one arbitrarily constructed by the author. What matters is its underlying principle: the immorality of unchristian Christian world and the superior morality of pagan people. Since the striking feature of the book is the romantic enhancements of the happy life in the Typee Valley, which the narrator later compares to "the garden of Paradise,"<sup>2</sup> mythological composition of the book needs to be studied.

The intent of this thesis is to try to surface the assigned mythological contexts in the book which are submerged under the apparent story in terms of their ritualistic significance in passing through the boundary

<sup>1</sup> Edmond Leach, *Culture and Communication: the logic by which symbols are connected* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 33-34.

<sup>2</sup> Herman Melville, *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life*, eds. Harrison Hayward, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston: Northwestern University and The Newberry Library, 1968), 49. Subsequent references to this edition appear in the text.

between the two cultural forms. The contexts are latent because *Typee* was published as a genuine record of his personal experience. Melville properly restrained himself from flying freely into Romance. It may be worth while to see how he, as a novice writer, used his ingenuity to pursue his first task. Particularly the beginning part of the book is examined here in the hope that this study relates the book thematically and artistically in some way to his later great book, *Moby Dick*.

Theological contexts in *Typee*, however, have not been duly noticed. The reason of indifference can be partly attributed to an understanding that *Typee* is "a tale of exotic adventure, revealing little of the complexity of his later works."<sup>3</sup> Later masterpieces such as *Moby Dick* overshadow the first more or less "autobiographical journal," making it seem, if not a real personal record, an romantic story told by an inexperienced writer and, therefore, less serious in his allusions to theological theme. Critics seem to agree that Melville's grappling with theological problems augments and becomes conspicuous in his later novels.

Nathalia Wright in her remarkable book, *Melville's Use of the Bible*, offers interesting statistical data. She notices "a correspondence between the most ambitious expressions of Melville's genius and his use of the Bible." According to her the number of the use increases as Melville advances as a writer. The number in *Typee* is the smallest; only a dozen appear, while 100 in *Mardi*, 250 in *Moby-Dick* and 600 in *Clarel*. If *Clarel* is excluded from the list because of its distinctive theme, and if the length of each volume is taken in consideration in order to make proportional estimate, *Moby-Dick*, she says, comes first in the order and last on the list is *Typee*.<sup>4</sup>

One of the reasons of the smallest number of the use of the Bible might be his artistic restraint of the direct references to it at the beginning of his career. Surviving draft pages give some suggestions. Fortunately sixteen leaves of draft stage have been found; they are from the chapters, 12, 13, and 14. Studying the alterations from these draft pages to the first edition, Hershel Parker notes among others the deletion of Biblical references. The deletion, for example, of a part of a sentence including "like the heavenly visitants of Lot of old" can be ascribed, Parker says, to unfavorable

<sup>3</sup> Richard Dean Smith, *Melville's Complaint: Doctors and Medicine in the Art of Herman Melville* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Nathalia Wright, *Melville's use of the Bible* (1949; rpt., New York: Octagon Books, 1980), 8-9.

reception of any Biblical comparison and the danger that the comparison “would irresistibly remind some readers of the way the men of the city of Sodom had treated their heavenly visitors.”<sup>5</sup>

Lawrance Thompson is among the first to explore Melville’s argument over the relation of God and Man in his works. He suggests three distinct phases of Melville’s artistic development in his early books: the first phase is reflected in *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847), in which is revealed Melville’s belief in the fundamentals of his Calvinistic beliefs. The second phase is reflected in *Mardi* (1849). Here a more artistically sophisticated Melville shows growing skepticism within himself that counterattacks his ingrained faith. Then Christian and Platonic concepts are also adopted to protect him. The third phase is reflected in *Redburn* (1849) and *White-Jacket* (1850). Thomson says that during this period Melville glorified Rousseau’s concept of man-centered man and ridiculed the Calvinistic concept of God-centered man.<sup>6</sup> As Thompson admits, the presentation of Melville’s artistic and thematic development in these three phases is too simplified and leads to the misunderstanding of each work, especially the first book, which is more complicated and more comprehensive than his summary suggests.

James Baird is another early critic to point out Melville’s concern with Christian symbology in his first book. The premise of his discussion, however, is based upon the failure of Christian symbology in its fulfillment of giving a new life. He asserts that artists find it necessary to return to a primitive past when cultural exhaustion of symbology is acknowledged.<sup>7</sup> His discussion focuses on the study of primitivism in relation to its new function as religious symbols, and not on Christian symbology.

Is *Typee* all but unrelated with Melville’s later grave philosophical concern? It is also a common understanding that the narrator as an archetype of a quester-hero prefigures those in Melville’s later books. But discussions have not yet been given to the concerns in *Typee* that might be related to and will be developed in his later works. Melville’s use of metaphors also needs inquiry, because he was and he needed to be as Faith Pullin said “the conscious craftsman,”<sup>8</sup> in order to write fiction under the

<sup>5</sup> Hershel Parker, *Herman Melville: A Biography Volume 1, 1819-1951* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 368.

<sup>6</sup> Lawrance Thompson, *Melville’s Quarrel with God* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 44.

<sup>7</sup> James Baird, *Ishmael: A Study of the Symbolic Mode in Primitivism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1956) 19.

<sup>8</sup> Faith Pullin, “Melville’s *Typee*,” ed., Faith Pullin, *New Perspective on Melville* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1978), 1.

insisting pretext of writing facts.

### **Latent Biblical Allusions**

Any reader who is familiar with Melville's later love of using ironies or metaphors would stop and wonder what he means by the opening sentence, "Six months at sea! Yes, reader, as I live, six months out of sight of land." The reader would also remember that Melville's narrators are imbued with compulsive aspiration to seek the true meaning of the world and its relation to the reality they face. Their narratives are often loaded with two purposes: to tell the present ongoing actions in order for the reader to form a concrete image of the events, and to suggest inarticulately the symbolical construct which induces each reader to form his own additional implication. If, for example, George Ripley found *Typee* agreeable due to its literary style which he thought well expressed Melville's "immediate inspiration of personal experiences,"<sup>9</sup> it is because Ripley acknowledged in *Typee* some transcendental aspiration, although Melville was not altogether content with this philosophy.<sup>10</sup>

When read side by side with those journals which were published in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, and which Melville had access to and made use of, the book strikes the reader as intentional in subsuming a theological thematic in terms of the way it relies on Christian mythology. The opening paragraph evinces his craftsmanship. It might be helpful to compare this with its counterpart in another sea book. Melville's versatile literary style is obvious when juxtaposed with the beginning part of Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast*.<sup>11</sup> Melville read the book after he came back from his first voyage and seems to have been induced to go to sea

<sup>9</sup> *Melville Log*, 303.

<sup>10</sup> Melville wrote to Ever Duyckinck in his letter of March 3, 1849, "Nay, I do not oscillate in Emerson's rainbow but prefer rather to hang myself in mine own halter than swing in any other man's swing." (*Melville Log*, 292) See Perry Miller, *Nature's Nation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1974), 194. Miller affirms that Melville characters represent the fundamental premises of romantic writers which are "precisely those of transcendentalism."

<sup>11</sup> The book was published in 1840. When the original copyright expired in 1868, Dana issued a revised edition from which he excluded the opening and concluding chapters of the original issue. As for the revision see John Seelye, "Introduction" to Richard Henry Dana, Jr., *Two Years Before the Mast: A Personal Narrative*, (Harmondsworth: Signet Classic, 2000), xiv-xvi. Signet Classic restores those chapters as appendix. Since original first chapter corresponds rightly to the "Preface" in *Typee* in its application, the opening chapter of 1868 version is appropriate for comparison.

again.<sup>12</sup> He found in Dana an example of authorship to follow when he came back to his hometown after four years roving in the Pacific and had nothing to do except to write about his adventure. As to the publisher he also wanted to follow in Dana's footsteps. He asked, at first, the Harpers because they had successfully published *Two Years Before the Mast*. Melville was confident that his work would stand comparison with Dana's. A Harvard undergraduate and son of a wealthy father, Dana is not roundabout in his narrative written in an easy, plain style.

The fourteenth of August was the day fixed upon for the sailing of the brig *Pilgrim*, on her voyage from Boston, Round Cape Horn, to the western coast of North America. As she was to get under way early in the afternoon, I made my appearance on board at twelve o'clock, in full sea rig, with my chest, containing an outfit for a two or three years' voyage, which I had undertaken from a determination to cure, if possible, by an entire change of life, and by a long absence from books, with a plenty of hard work, plain food, and open air, a weakness of the eyes, which had obliged me to give up my studies, and which no medical aid seemed likely to remedy. <sup>13</sup>

"Facts" or "true character" escapes absolute definition. Yet the above passage is composed with basic elements of information that do not allow the reader any speculative reading. *Two Years* claims a record of events and personal activities like a personal diary which offers frankness. Dana also says, "it is written out from a journal which I kept at the time, and from notes which I made of most of the events as they happened."<sup>14</sup> The fact is that he had to resort to his memory in writing the book because he lost his journal after he came back to Boston. But it does not matter. The plain report-like style is his own art of writing reflecting his conscious view of life. Even if, as Wright Morris says about *Two Years*, "there is something more than facts in Dana,"<sup>15</sup> the style Dana adopts serves his purpose of

<sup>12</sup> See Melville's letter to Dana, May 1, 1850. He wrote, "those strange, congenial feelings, with which after my first voyage, I for the first time read 'Two Yeats Before the Mast'." Also see Sealts, 20-21 as for his second voyage.

<sup>13</sup> Dana, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Dana, 372.

<sup>15</sup> Wright Morris, "Afterward," Dana, *Two Years Before the Mast*, 399.

publishing the book "to give an accurate and authentic narrative of" the life and experiences of a common seaman before the mast.

On the other hand, Melville calls for speculation. At the same time, he deprives the reader, as much as possible, of his speculating about the geography and accurate date and time. He conducts the reader to a "once upon a time" world by taking him right into the scene of the drama. A whaler appears from nowhere.

Six months at sea! Yes, reader, as I live, six months out of sight of land; cruising after the sperm-whale beneath the scorching sun of the Line, and tossed on the billows of the wide-rolling Pacific—the sky above, the sea around, and nothing else! Weeks and weeks ago our fresh provisions were all exhausted. There is not a sweet potatoe left; not a single yam. Those glorious bunches of bananas which once decorated our stern and quarter-deck have, alas, disappeared and the delicious oranges which hung suspended from our top and stays—they, too, are gone!

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Oh! for a refreshing glimpse of one blade of grass—for a snuff at the fragrance of a handful of the loamy earth! Is there nothing fresh around us? Is there no green thing to be seen? Yes, the inside of our bulwarks is painted green; but what a vile and sickly hue it is, as if nothing bearing even the semblance of verdure could flourish this weary way from land. Even the bark that once clung to the wood we use for fuels has been gnawed off and devoured by the captain's pig; and so long ago, too, that the pig himself has in turn been devoured. (*Typee* 3-4)

Melville is most distinctive in his treatment of this ambiguous state in which he puts his narrator. None of the proper details about the ship is afforded; where her home port is or when and where she anchored last time. His artistic intent to write a book with a thematic construct directs him to compose the beginning part in a way to serve his purpose. He pictures a scene which looks realistic and seems to have been written "under the immediate inspiration of personal experiences." But the described episode, when viewed from the thematic context of the book, soon loses its absolute reality, gaining the place of relativity. Consequently it is a different notion that is provided, that carries the episode into the sphere of abstract idea,

which projects the scene in a new dimension of cognizance.

Careful reading in retrospect leads the reader to a Biblical piece of scenery. Suggested here is the ironical transformation of Noah's ark. The emphasis is not the common feature of the state of isolation on waters but the ontological contrariety. The word "Pacific" serves to indicate not so much a real location as a sign of a vast expanse of waters. The life for Noah and his family in their ark inaugurated with the Lord's command and they were remembered during the months of perseverance on the waters with no sign of land in view. Concomitant with the promise of life and the future proliferation of Noah's family and pairs of some living animals was the extinction of all other living things. Noah's fate was assured by the blessing words of God and the establishment of covenant. On the other hand, the present ship seems to have had some living animals on board but they were kept alive not to propagate but to be "devoured." The sole purpose of the ship is to pursue and kill a single kind of sea animal. There would be no blessing promised them. The crew can only long for getting to dry earth.

It is interesting to note that Melville selected Genesis for his first novel. The narrator's adventure then is not a mere romantic journey into a faraway land but an implied moral quest on the part of the writer. The direction of the adventure is not in accord with the passing of worldly time, but the adventurer goes in the other direction so that he can trace back to man's original state of being. The episode of Noah and his ark renders the story a sign of setting sail.

Another binary opposition then is superimposed on the contrast of blessed Noah and his arc, and the destitute circumstances of the present ship: the island and the sea. This is the realistic level and more urgent and substantial. Narrator's longing for getting to an island leads to the contrast of the abundance of food on land and the lack of it on the ship. What Melville connotes is a more complex opposition: promising island where savage cannibals inhabit and the desolate ship with a group of civilized men on board.

Melville produces in the first part of the book a picture which is in fact a symbolic implication of what is going to be explicated as the story develops, since this part was probably written after the main body of the following chapters had been formed.<sup>16</sup> The picture predicts that the distinctive

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<sup>16</sup> Leon Howard, *Herman Melville: A Biography* (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1951), 94.

feature popularly acknowledged about the islanders and the shipmates may be a dubious notion: island people are ferocious savages while the sailors are civilized westerners. To the present narrator the island is synonymous with everything that appeals favorably to his senses: the green of natural vegetation which is refreshing to the eye, the smell of a fertile soil of clay, and above all food obtained directly from nature. However, he soon knows the fear of cannibalism resides from the beginning. In fact it is well-known among the sailors that the islanders in this area are notorious for this practice. Especially Typees are said to be fond of eating human flesh. One of the reasons, a major one as well, why the westerners have called the South Sea islanders savages was the practice of cannibalism. Captain David Porter, most concerned about the actual state of affairs, made close observation of the Taheehs about their treatment of the dead bodies of their enemy tribe. He knew that reality would affect his view of them. Melville makes use of the fear of cannibalism as the forceful source of suspense in the book.

The only way to acquire fresh food for the crew is to snatch it from those they call cannibals. Through the gabby narrator is revealed the shattered morphology of food supply on the ship. There needs a mock-humorous ritual for the captain to direct the course of the ship to an island. Melville suggests by this the cannibalistic state of affairs in the ship's society, making a jest about monotheistic Christianity. A cock bearing the name of Peter is going to be offered as the sacrifice.

...his days of mourning will be few; for Mingo, our black cook, told me yesterday that the word had at last gone forth, and poor Pedro's fate was sealed. His attenuated body will be laid out upon the captain's table next Sunday, and long before night will be buried with all the usual ceremonies beneath that worthy individual's vest. Who would believe that there could be any one so cruel as to long for the decapitation of the luckless Pedro; yet the sailors pray every minute, selfish fellows, that the miserable fowl may be brought to his end. They say the captain will never point the ship for the land so long as he has in anticipation a mess of fresh meat. This unhappy bird can alone furnish it; and when he is once devoured, the captain will come to his senses. I wish thee no harm, Peter; but as thou art doomed, sooner or later, to meet the fate of all thy race; and if putting a period to thy existence is to be the signal for our

deliverance, why—truth to speak—I wish thy throat cut this very moment: for, oh! how I wish to see the living earth again! (*Typee* 4)

Here again Biblical episodes are conjured up; the Last Supper and Peter's offense that follows. Again they are employed to accentuate the vulgarity of the present state on the ship. In reality, at the Last Supper table Jesus offered bread to his disciples saying, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then giving the cup to them he said, "Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."<sup>17</sup> When Jesus told them they would be offended because of him, Peter strongly refuted its probability, as far as he was concerned. But Jesus had to say to Peter, "this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice," a prediction which came true. The connotation of the Last Supper is a symbolically implied cannibalistic ritual in which Jesus offers himself to his disciples for their salvation. This is a consolidating ritual. On the other hand, the dedication of Peter, or Pedro (Melville uses both) on board the *Dolly*, is made to satisfy the appetite of only one person at the mock last supper on the ship. Yet Peter's sacrifice does not mean a matter of insignificance. His blood is shed for the sailors to be delivered from the state of deficiency and long wandering at sea under one absolute ruler, loosening them from forced solidarity. The over all implication is, by the ironical presentation of a cannibalistic state in the ship's society, that the acknowledged distinction between the enlightened civilized Christian society represented by the captain and the crew and supposed dark savage world tyrannized by the fear of cannibalism might no longer be valid. The conduct of these Christians is a far cry from the likely moral consequences of the Scripture.

As to the fate of poor Peter there is still further metaphorical purport in his tragic end. The reader of the next chapter might think in retrospect of the latent meaning that the sacrifice of Peter was requisite for the crew to enjoy, besides the acquisition of supply of fresh food, another advantage: their encounter with the female islanders. "The State of Affairs" (*Typee* 9) on board the *Dolly* soon after she advances into the bay will prove the teaching of original Peter an impediment to the liberal behavior of the crew. What happens there is nothing less than the open practice of prostitution. Melville performs, therefore, a hidden ritual with the sacrifice of Peter, for

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<sup>17</sup> St Matthew, 26:26-28.

real Peter says,

Dearly beloved, I beseech *you* as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may be *your* good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.<sup>18</sup>

What an irony Melville insinuates by the piece of flesh on the ship! The sailors “prey” the death of Peter, the last piece, so that the teaching of Peter will also be buried at the Last Supper “beneath that worthy individual’s vest.” After the ceremonial mourning the sailors are allowed to go to a new world as strangers free from the morals in the Bible. Both Peters, the cock and the original one, had to be eliminated for the sake of the physical needs and desires of the sailors as well as the captain.

### **Broken Covenant**

A typical Melville character comes into being with the narrator of *Typee* only after he decides to take flight from the ship. Until then he does not bear a name, nor is a provisional one hinted in the beginning part of the book. Most remarkably, his real name never appears nor is mentioned in the book. This presents a contrast with *Two Years Before the Mast*, in which a life-sized Dana bearing his name narrates his experience. This serves as an assuring intimation that the book is meant to be a true narrative. Poe’s completely fictitious narrator of adventure, Arthur Gordon Pym, begins with a vindication of his identity in the Preface.<sup>19</sup> The description of their characters is accompanied by actions. But Melville gives his first narrator little personality which can be formed by the interactions with other characters. Lacking these interactions the narrator hardly needs a name in the first several chapters.

The narrator begins to talk about himself as a character in chapter 4, when he says, “To use the concise, point-blank phrase of the sailors, I had made up my mind to ‘run away.’” From whom does he run away? What

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<sup>18</sup> the First Epistle General of Peter, 2:11-12.

<sup>19</sup> See “Narrative of A. Gordon Pym,” *Edgar Allan Poe: Poetry and Tales* (New York: Library Classics of the United States, Inc., 1984), 1007-08. The Preface is devoted to making up a likely excuse of the authenticity of the work. “Narrative” was published in 1838 but it is not clear whether Melville was acquainted with it before he wrote *Typee*. See also Sealts, 89.

Melville implies under the surface meaning can and should be understood in his theological context.

When I entered on board the Dolly, I signed as a matter of course the ship's articles, thereby voluntarily engaging and legally binding myself to serve in a certain capacity for the period of the voyage; and, special considerations apart, I was of course bound to fulfill the agreement. But in all contracts, if one party fail to perform his share of the compact, is not the other virtually absolved from his liability? Who is there who will not answer in the affirmative?

Having settled the principle, then, let me apply it to the particular case in question. In numberless instances had not only the implied but the specified conditions of the articles been violated on the part of the ship in which I served. The usage on board of her was tyrannical; the sick had been inhumanly neglected; the provisions had been doled out in scanty allowance; and her cruises were unreasonably protracted. The captain was the author of these abuses; it was in vain to think that he would either remedy them, or alter his conduct, which was arbitrary and violent in the extreme....

To whom could we apply for redress? We had left both law and equity on the other side of the Cape; and unfortunately, with a very few exceptions, our crew was composed of a parcel of dastardly and mean spirited wretches, divided among themselves, and only united in enduring without resistance the unmitigated tyranny of the captain. It would have been mere madness for any two or three of the number, unassisted by the rest, to attempt making a stand against his ill usage. They would only have called down upon themselves the particular vengeance of this "Lord of the Plank," and subjected their shipmates to additional hardship. (*Typee* 20-21)

The narrator's explanation of his right to run away is precisely in accord with the purport of Declaration of Independence.<sup>20</sup> He considers the organization of the ship's society parallel with that of a nation. He reasons

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas J. Scorza, "Tragedy in the State of Nature; Melville's *Typee*," *Interpretation*. 8. No. 1(Jan. 1979), 105-07

accordingly with the reader about the cause of his separation from the ship's society. He argues that the ship's society is based upon a social contract, by which alone the men are bound to the society, and the contract is one voluntarily made. The parties concerned in this particular agreement are the captain and the sailors. The contract rests, he seems to infer, upon the natural rights stated in the Declaration. Now he enumerates the instances that give clear evidence of the broken agreement. The men in the crew are in danger of their "life" because their welfare is utterly neglected. The prolonged cruises have already deprived them of their "liberty." How can a person who has suffered "under absolute despotism" of the captain such "a long train of abuses & usurpations" look for "happiness?" The members of the crew have the right to try to "alter or to abolish" the ill usage of the captain but they are too ill-organized and intimidated to put the aspiration into practice. The narrator, therefore, believes it is his natural right to "declare the causes which impel" him "to the separation" and "dissolve political bands which have connected" him to the ship.<sup>21</sup>

Under the surface of the Declaration of Independence lies another mythological context: the escape from "arbitrary and violent" God and his broken covenant with man. On the surface, Melville explicates convincingly the reason of his escape by applying exclusively the principle of democracy because of the readership who keeps it in mind "that Christian literature delights in representing life as a voyage and the world as a ship and God as the captain."<sup>22</sup> Melville should be careful not to let them suspect his latent context.

The references to covenant in his allusions are not consistent in their repercussions. The two Biblical episodes mentioned above, Noah's ark and the Last Supper, involve God's covenant with man. Both episodes are reflected in *Typee* in order to place particular emphasis on the immorality practiced in the ship's society in utter disregard of the covenants and their associating morality. In the third episode Melville suggests the impracticability of keeping the covenant for his narrator to be on his way to adventure. To be free from "God" is the latent and potential subject matter which will make its appearance in *Moby Dick*.

<sup>21</sup> Jay Fliegelman, Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, & the Culture of Performance (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 203.

<sup>22</sup> See Lawrence Thompson, 8-9. According to him the reader with even a small amount of skeptical thought might notice that Ishmael's attitude to his captain is allied to the Christian concept of submission and obedience and faith in the fitness of things.

The Puritan orthodoxy in New England, which was with Melville since his childhood to boyhood, needs to be viewed. According to Perry Miller, one of the most significant characteristics of New England Calvinism was its doctrine of covenant. Calvin himself hardly referred to the word and the sixteenth-century Protestantism avoids touching upon this.<sup>23</sup> The philosophy is the singularly expounded exegesis in the seventeenth-century Puritan divines in England and became a central theology in New England Puritans.<sup>24</sup>

John Preston, who was converted in 1611 by the sermon of his friend John Cotton, spent the whole his life revealing the doctrine of Covenant of Grace. His works, published posthumously, were edited by his close friends. One was Richard Sibbes, whose writings were then edited by John Davenport and Thomas Goodwin, who were also the editors of Preston's book. Through these writings the propounded doctrine of Covenant was expanded. By those people who were closely related to each other, Covenant eventually was molded into an indispensable central conception in the thought of New England theology or, as Miller puts, "all the theology reshaped in the light of this doctrine."<sup>25</sup>

What did the word Covenant mean to Preston and his close theologians? Miller says the word seemed to invoke to them a simple idea of "a bargain, a contract, a mutual agreement, a document binding upon both signatories, drawn up in the presence of witnesses and sealed by a notary public."<sup>26</sup> But this contract God makes with man is the very foundation, or the only reliable foundation, which man is built upon. The relationship between man and God is most naturally termed as creature and creator or as subject and lord. According to these scholars who established the doctrine of Covenant the relation of man to God is like "two partners in a business enterprise" who are bonded to each other with certain clearly stated agreements. This Covenant, or a contract, is the only hope man has in his relation to God. Whether one gets salvation or not, or whether one is delivered and exempt of misery or not, depends wholly upon the Covenant God makes with him.

The history of covenant with God had two stages. God entered into a compact with Adam as soon as God created him. God specified a

<sup>23</sup> Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*, 60.

<sup>24</sup> Perry Miler and Thomas H. Johnson, ed., *The Puritans: A Sourcebook of Their Writings* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 1:57-58. Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*, 58.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 59-60

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 60.

requirement as part of an agreement and if Adam fulfilled it God would reward him and his posterity with eternal life in Eden. This is the covenant of works. But Adam failed to perform his part of obligation, incurring, naturally, a due punishment. He was forced out of the Garden and destined to be mortal.

The second covenant is made between Abraham and God. God appeared to Abram and, identifying himself as the Almighty God, enters into covenant with him. The seventeenth chapter of Genesis shows the stipulations and specifications that both sides of the parties should carry out to fulfill the covenant accordingly. The concept is the "mutual obligation," which was the basic thought upon which the New England Puritans interpreted traditional Calvinism. This is the covenant of grace, because this time a deed is not required, since the fallen man does not have the ability to decide and act on his own. He is required to have only a faith in Christ the mediator.<sup>27</sup>

The concept of the covenant between man and God justly parallels the contract of the narrator in *Typee* and the Lord of the Plank if it is understood that legal understanding is most important in considering the relations between man and God for New England theologians.<sup>28</sup> And the arbitrariness of God in orthodox New England Puritans should be remembered. God, according to the Synod in 1679, sways absolute sovereignty over men, who are in the utter depravity. All the things that happen in this world are ordained by providence. It is beyond human power to ward off the fall of man once God has decreed it so. The Covenant of grace, which New England leaders conceived for a slight possibility of liberation, does not mitigate "God's awful despotism."<sup>29</sup> This is the character of Godhead that the Dutch Reformed Church impressed upon Melville when he was a child. The church adhered to the doctrines of the Synod. Melville insinuates that the covenant with which God deals with man induces the narrator into a metaphysically fixed state just as he is physically bound to the present condition.

The heart of the matter is the problematic inner struggle in the minds of man in his relation with God; this is what Sacvan Bercovitch explains as the

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 61-62. Miller explains in the note the unconventional understanding of theology upon that of Calvin by saying that Calvin did not see such proposals in Biblical texts.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>29</sup> Perry Miller, *Nature's Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University press, 1974), 51-53.

“dilemma of Puritan identity.”<sup>30</sup> Being true to oneself necessarily turns out to be unfaithful to Divine will. Because of the fall of man, it is the self-denial that provides the way to regeneration. Self-love is incompatible with love of God. If one wants to please God, he should be untrue to himself. This is the theological conflict that formed the underlying cause which induces the narrator of *Typee* to flee from the ship.

The covenant of the visual world is in rapport with that of the invisible world for both the real and mythological adventures of the narrator. The covenants being no longer valid, only through the open rescission of these legal bindings can he be liberated and become a one, whose identity he does not know yet himself. The narrator’s escape from the Lord is a prerequisite for his characterization. Now, Melville assigns the narrator the task to crawl into an Eden-like valley, where he is to bear a new persona called Tommo.

### **From Tommo to Ishmael**

The narrator, who does not bear a name yet but in later chapter asks to be called Tommo, makes his appearance as a wonderer in the wilderness of sea longing for land. He is the prototype of Melville’s main characters, prefiguring all the Ishmael-like personalities that appear in subsequent books; the narrators of *Omoo*, *Mardi*, *Redburn*, *White Jacket*, and *Moby Dick*. The hero in *Moby Dick* is the only one who bears the name but these characters can be said to have a certain archetype: they are questers, and therefore wonderers or rovers. The narrator of *Typee* appears in the person of Ishmael when he says, “I am tormented with an everlasting itch for things remote. I love to sail forbidden seas, and land on barbarous coasts.”<sup>31</sup> Ishmael is not only the name of the character that bears the name but also, as Wright properly says, “the name of the common ancestor of them all.”<sup>32</sup> These first person narratives may reflect more or less the viewpoint of the author but Melville’s narrators are not identical with the author.

The name of Ishmael is mentioned in *Redburn* with a close affinity to the real Ishmael. Ishmael in the Bible is a son of Abraham and Hagar, the maid of his wife Sarah. After she gave birth to Isaac, Sarah wanted to cast out

<sup>30</sup> Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origin of the American Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 18.

<sup>31</sup> Herman Melville, *Moby Dick or, The Whale*, edited with an introduction and annotation by Charles Feidelson, Jr. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1985) *Moby Dick*, 30.

<sup>32</sup> Wright, 47.

Ishmael with his mother Hagar. Abraham, at her firm claim, drove away his first son with bread and a bottle of water. Ishmael "wandered in the wilderness of Beer-sheba"<sup>33</sup> where he suffered severe thirst. As a young boy of around fifteen years old, and fatherless, Wellingborough Redburn leaves his home to go to New York from where he sails to Liverpool as a "boy." While the *Highlander* passes through the Narrows, a doorway to outer sea, Redburn looks back on his happy days in New York where he used to live with his family. He was a son of a gentleman and was promised a prosperous future but his father's bankruptcy and death and their removal from the city left his family in an indigent state. On board the ship is a small sickly seaman named Jackson who is despotic to others without explicit reasons. He shows intense dislike for Redburn, causing other shipmates turn against him. Redburn says,

...so that at last I found myself a sort of Ishmael in the ship, without a single friend or companion; and I began to feel a hatred growing in me against the whole crew...<sup>34</sup>

Redburn is doubly excluded from the society: from his family due to the financial collapse of his father and from his shipmates with unfounded reasons. A solitary wanderer, as Tommo was after Toby left the Typee Valley, Redburn seeks his father in Liverpool.

Ishmael, in *Moby Dick*, does not desert the ship. He is more matured, experienced, and more expressive than his predecessors but not without obscurity. No longer a young boy, he possesses Tommo's Typee experience in the South Sea, the quest of the primary state of man, in the person of Queequeg and in their friendship. He is also a wanderer in the wilderness of the sea. But he knows better than running away from the ship. He tells the reader, before he finds the ship he wants to be a sailor of, that he well acknowledges the kind of working condition before the mast because this is not his first voyage. "What of it, if some old hunks of a sea-captain orders me to get a broom and sweep down the decks?" he asks himself and answers.

What does that indignity amount to, weighed, I mean, in the

<sup>33</sup> Genesis, 21:14

<sup>34</sup> *Redburn*, 62

scales of the New Testament? Do you think the archangel Gabriel thinks anything the less of me, because I promptly and respectfully obey that old hunks in that particular instance?<sup>35</sup>

He tries to compromise his sense of dignity by applying the circumstances that cause him to feel shame to generally accepted moral values. He shows himself a man of tolerance, a good Christian that knows the spirit of submission and obedience. But he does not stop here. His sense of resignation is followed by his substantial outlook on the human condition that may contradict the inferred spirit of what he has just said, inciting suspended judgment on what he has in mind.

Who aint a slave? Tell me that. Well, then, however the old sea-captains may order me about—however they may thump and punch me about, I have the satisfaction of knowing that it is all right; that everybody else is one way or other served in much the same way—either in a physical or metaphysical point of view, that is; and so the universal thump is passed round, and all hands should rub each other's shoulder-blades, and be content.<sup>36</sup>

Disobeying the captains would lead to nowhere, Ishmael insists, because, since everyone else is thumped and punched in the same way, anyone can be a substitute for anyone else. Ishmael suggests that he would not run away from the ship as his predecessor did, by applying the particular situation on the ships, in terms of the relationship between the autocratic captains and their crew, to the universal conditions of human beings. If human beings are all slaves physically and metaphysically in this world, they are equal in their acceptance of fate. The probability of revolt among these common people might be very slim; the shipmates of the *Dolly* are an evident proof. Readers will soon learn that only those heroes like Ahab would be at defiance with and cry out to Heaven against injustice.

Ishmael admits that he is a typical persona. But as a narrator he assures the reader he will well serve the role by asserting that he is satisfied with his knowing the state in which he is put, though not necessarily content with his being actually in it. Ishmael acquiesces to his lot to persevere with

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<sup>35</sup> *Moby Dick*, 28

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 28.

the work and life on board and to witness the tragic heroes, Ahab and Starbuck. A sea captain is the lord of the ship. Then who is the captain of this world that puts human beings in the state of slavery? This is where Ishmael stands with the narrator of *Typee* when he decides to run away from the ship and not to stay.

What is the point of Melville's implication of Biblical episodes in *Typee*? Melville envisaged the subject of the book as the narrator's journey to the beginning of time. Then evoking the world of Genesis would certainly furnish the drama with a grandiose context that a mere journey into a far island could not attain. The suggestion of an invisible mythological world makes the reader stop and wonder about the true intent of the novel, seemingly hidden under the present visible world.

It has been shown that Thompson made the most fatal misapprehension when he said that Melville was strongly attached to the Calvinistic religious heritage at the first stage and only in the later stage did he begin to hold skepticism about the Calvinistic concept of man and God. Melville was skeptical when he began his first book but only he was on his way to learn to acquire the art of molding his idea in a form of literature. The truth is that Melville never proved himself a traditionalist in any of his books.

It must be added, however, that the narrator's intimation of the broken covenant with the "arbitrary and violent" Lord does not necessarily lead to the dubious spiritual situation about a monotheistic frame of world view. His is within the issue of individual's freedom of theological understandings of one's image of God: how one is related to God, what the punishment is and what the reward is. It surely concerns Melville's "opinion" on Godhead which is reflected in the theological conflict in his time. But without doubt Melville hints at his ironical view towards the orthodox doctrine of God through the narrator, and, by setting him free from this oppressive swaying God, free from the "dilemma of Puritan identity," lets him go seek the true nature of man.