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**Writing Indigenous Identity in Herman Melville and Joseph Conrad's Polynesian and
Malay Archipelago Novels**

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College of the City University of New York

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Writing Indigenous Identity in Herman Melville and Joseph Conrad's Polynesian and Malay Archipelago Novels

Introduction

Today it's common to write across cultures. Examples of writers portraying another culture, gender, age group, or species—you name it—abound today. A Western male author is able to write a book about a geisha girl that's a best-seller, and a female author can write a story about a love affair between two male cattle herders that becomes a film hit. When Herman Melville in 1845 wrote *Typee* about an effervescent Marquesan Island native and her tribesmen and, 50 years later in 1895, Joseph Conrad wrote *Almayer's Folly* about a half-Sulu, half-white Malay woman in a disintegrating house on a Borneo river, writing across cultures was considered remarkable. Even today, because everything is scrutinized for its political appropriateness, possible plagiarism, or believability, writing across cultures can be tricky. David Bradley, in his article "Race, Reader, and Moby-Dick," discusses some challenges and solutions. Using terms from Billy Page's "Our Crowd" song, he says a writer trying to convey to the audience a Character Crowd different from the author's and the audience's Birth Crowd can't skip background that wouldn't be needed if the writer, audience, and Character Crowd were the same Birth Crowd. If all parties are the same Crowd, one can get right to it and tell the story. It gets harder, Bradley says, when the audience is the same as the Character Crowd, but the author isn't. When the text depicts confrontation between Character Crowds or Birth and Character Crowds, it's more problematic.¹ Melville and Conrad, as will be shown in this paper, skillfully navigated the obstacles described by Bradley. The authors introduced their Birth Crowd audience to unfamiliar Character Crowds. They also depicted confrontations between Character Crowds and between Birth and Character Crowds. This paper will show how the authors shared a

vision—one Conrad would never admit to and Melville would have been amused to see—regardless of their different subjects and historical frameworks. Most important, it will show they went way beyond previous writing of indigenous people, endowing native inhabitants of the Malay and Polynesian archipelagoes with rich characterization and featuring them in key roles.

First, it's helpful in setting up a discussion of the authors' indigenous portrayals to mention the initial reaction to Melville's *Typee* and *Omoo* and Conrad's Malay Trilogy, which consists of *Almayer's Folly*, *An Outcast of the Islands*, and *The Rescue*. Melville's *Typee* was (and is still) valued for its descriptions of natives and the way they lived. One critic noted "Borneo, a tract hitherto untouched by the novelist, had now been annexed by Mr. Joseph Conrad."² However, the books, perhaps because they were so innovative, did receive their share of criticism.

A few critics felt Conrad's portrayal of Malay indigenous in his stories and in the Malay Trilogy had its limitations. A local British administrator and novelist, Hugh Clifford, wrote that Conrad showed "complete ignorance of Malays and their habits. Mr. Conrad's Malays are only creatures of Mr. Conrad, very vividly described, and powerfully drawn, but not Malays."³ Conrad admitted as much. He never claimed to use real people except as initial triggers, and always extolled the power of imagination. He wrote in his second preface to his *Personal Record* in regard to Clifford:

...after saying many things that ought to have made me blush to the roots of my hair with outraged modesty, he ended by telling me ... that as a matter of fact I didn't know anything about Malays. I was perfectly aware of this. I have never pretended to any such knowledge.⁴

Regardless of the criticism of a few, when *Almayer's Folly* came out four years after Melville died, the controversy over Conrad's Character Crowds and their confrontations was

mild. His audience knew he'd travelled widely for a living, and it may have been known he worked on a boat that made trips up and down the Borneo River where two of the novels are set. Further, he was a ship officer who spoke three languages. Speculation about how a common sailor in his early 20s could write a book as erudite and as detailed as *Typee* didn't arise in his case.

The criticism Conrad received was paltry compared to the reaction to Melville's native portrayal. As John Bryant relates in his introduction to *Typee*, Melville had to sanitize what was considered indecorous about native attire or lack of it, sexual freedom, and the fact that most women had at least two husbands. Further, Melville's digressions on how the natives' self-government and lack of discord contrasted with the U.S. and his stories, such as that of a missionary woman screaming at natives to pull her carriage up a hill, outraged conservative U.S. society, especially clergy. In addition, what Melville claimed was autobiographical was only believed—and sales soared—when his shipmate, Toby Greene, emerged in Buffalo and said they had been captured by cannibals.⁵ In addition, both Melville and Conrad were accused of “annexing” in a much less flattering meaning of the term; namely, heavy borrowing by Melville from books by South Sea explorers, chaplains, and others.

Melville, unlike Conrad, freely acknowledges most sources in the *Typee* text. After a description of the Peruvian Mendanna's visit in 1595, he says, in his role as a built-in supplementary to his own narrative,

Cook, in his repeated circumnavigations of the globe, barely touched at their shores, and all that we know about them is from a few general narratives. ... Porter's *Journal of the Cruise of the U.S. frigate Essex*, in the Pacific, during the late war," is said to contain some interesting particulars concerning the islanders. ... Stewart, the chaplain of the American sloop of war *Vincennes*, has likewise devoted a portion of his book ... to the same subject. ... Ellis, in his *Polynesian*

Researches, gives some interesting accounts made by the Tahiti mission to establish a branch. (Ty, 6)

Conrad, compared to Melville, a more straightforward, purposeful writer,⁶ content to leave ethnological background to anthropologists, never interrupts his narrative to acknowledge sources. Conrad likely learned from or borrowed from William Marsden, Sir Thomas Raffles, and A. R. Wallace, the authors of the *History of Sumatra* (1783), the *History of Java* (1816), and *The Malay Archipelago* (1873), respectively, as well as from locally set novels and ship-captain journals. It's to be expected that both would dip into the textual tradition of their day, but it's been shown that Sir Hugh Clifford and others wrote scenes and plots that reappear in Conrad's Malay Trilogy, and writings of the "country captain" Sir James Brooke and his widow Margaret were heavily used to create Captain Tom Lingard. Tom Lingard was named after and partially based on a real William Lingard the real Charles Olmeijer (aka Kaspar Almayer) worked with for 17 years.⁷ In fact, Conrad wrote *Victory* and some short stories and finished *The Rescue* 20 years after his first writings when a country captain on a visit to England told Conrad he and others were honored and delighted Conrad remembered "the few surviving old hands" like him.⁸ Melville was said to have Charles Stewart's *A Visit to the South Seas, in the U.S. Ship Vincennes, During the Years 1829 and 1830* (1831) open on his desk as he wrote *Typee* and *Omoo*, paraphrasing or lifting paragraphs and pages at a time.⁹ Conrad kept Alfred Russell Wallace's *The Malay Archipelago* (1869) on his bedside table.¹⁰

It's ironic that Melville was lambasted for saying his life with the Typees was authentic and then forced to remove anything offensive or risqué, when his story was largely true, while Conrad's fabricated native portrayals—and the veracity of his stories—were largely uncontested. Regardless of the controversy or lack of it in the reception of the books, it's important to be

aware that Melville's natives were real people he encountered, though no one knew how much was true but Toby and Melville himself, whereas Conrad's native characters, it can be reasonably concluded, were created from his imagination. It should be noted that the Marquesan canoe-girl Faraway in *Typee* almost certainly never knew she was immortalized in a book. It's doubtful if Nina, a protagonist in *Almayer's Folly* or Aissa, a protagonist in *An Outcast of the Islands* knew—they were figments of imagination, at most women glimpsed in a Singapore crowd. Whether the portrayals are real or imagined, and regardless of copious borrowings, the books broke barriers. Prior to and in Melville's time, Irving, Hawthorne, Poe, and others were writing about mysterious, exotic, and/or faraway places, and in Conrad's fin de siècle, Stevenson, Wilde, Stoker, Hardy, and James were scouring literal back alleys or plumbing the depths of the psyche, but Melville and Conrad went further. They weren't writing about fantasy lands like Poe or the Alhambra like Irving. They weren't talking about alleys and psyches in London, Oxford, and British provinces like Wilde and Hardy. That Melville and Conrad gave indigenous people pivotal roles in the first place at the time they lived is, to use a suitably scientific term, phenomenal. The authors' portrayal of native people in five books—*Typee* and *Omoo* and the Malay Trilogy—is worth exploring in the same spirit as the early sea-faring adventurers. The section that follows sets forth general reasons the authors warrant a closer look: (1) there's less written about Malaysia and Polynesia; (2) the areas were less U.S. and British than French or Dutch; (3) the authors used and subverted scientific tradition; and (4) the authors are more similar than one would think. Melville and Conrad did indeed in a literary sense “annex” areas unfamiliar to their readers and did so through a unique perspective and technique. This background section—and the text analysis that follows it—attempts to show how the authors'

handling of their respective literary, political, and scientific traditions, as well as their prophetic visions, prove they can show any audience any Crowd.

Less Written About the Malay and Polynesians Archipelagos than Western Locales

It's the object of this section to highlight a textual tradition that contrasts with the authors' originality but also influences them.

There still is little written about the Polynesian islands of Nukuheva, Tahiti, and Imeeo and the Malay Archipelago (Conrad's scope extends from Singapore to Bali, with the center in Borneo). Western exploration of the Malay area didn't begin till Marco Polo, and most of the archipelago and South Sea literature was produced by scientists, explorers, island administrators, and country captains. The brief recap that follows emphasizes the portrayal of indigenous people in this body of writing.

It should be noted that Robert Hampson, in *Cross-Cultural Encounters in Joseph Conrad's Malay Fiction*, in describing the textual tradition of Conrad, goes back far enough, so that the studies and accounts he describes would have become a part of the "Enlightenment" thought to which Melville was exposed.

Western writing about Malaysia and the South Seas for Conrad or Melville to draw on was not substantial. Cook's, Porter's, Ellis's, and Stewart's writings are, admitted by Melville himself, to have been liberally used in *Typee* and *Omoo*. Melville weaves sources in and out of his narrative, sometimes surreptitiously. He also uses them with a morbid twist of humor. *Typee* tension is heightened, albeit somewhat ironically, when Tommo, certain the Typees do in fact eat people and save their heads, suddenly remembers Cook was a probable victim of the cannibals

(Ty, 234). Melville goes back and forth with recent and past events in Polynesia and enriches his story with tales of natives and their encounters with foreigners in Nukuheva and elsewhere.

Melville took his portrayal further than South Sea writers before him. Like them, Melville in *Typee* spends pages on physical descriptions. This may be because much of his portrayal of Faraway and others are through their expressions and actions and basic communication, such as:

“Ki-Ki, nuee, nuee, ah! Moee moee mourtakee” (eat plenty, ah! Sleep very good).
(Ty, 88)

Rudimentary as Tommo’s verbal interaction is with the natives, he lives their lives with them. Melville devotes a chapter to a day in the life of the Typees. This would seem to go much further than early sea-faring or scientific studies of natives in his time. Melville took it and ran with what there was.

Marsden, Raffles, and Wallace have already been mentioned as authors of the *History of Sumatra* (1783), the *History of Java* (1816), and *The Malay Archipelago* (1873). The evolution of native references in these histories is briefly recapped by Robert Hampson and has bearing on Conrad’s and Melville’s portrayal. Marsden wrote much about vegetation but very little about the local inhabitants, saying they lived at the base of a river and seemed to be degenerating from the climate and Dutch oppression. Raffles learned Malay and mingled with Bali and Java chiefs. He felt company residents protected natives from oppression of chiefs and protected chiefs from chiefs. He collected artifacts and installed land rent and villages. He saw natives as homogenous with only superficial differences and thought the Arab and Bugis fair traders, though he condemned Sulu piracy. He thought all the native groups were industrious and spoke of the importance of economic frame of mind. He considered natives insecure and oppressed (by the

Dutch and by their own chiefs). He included 10 color plates depicting the native as either noble savage or subhuman. He named a Javanese prince. Wallace's descriptions of women and children hiding or running don't address the significance of the hiding and running and, more important, there's no interaction between him and the natives (except perhaps that he intimidates them). He predicted that native women would move from working outdoors to working indoors. He finds things troubling, suggesting that barbaric Europeans were taking over to destroy a happy social state, and he is in direct opposition to the free trade of Raffles. He called all free traders savages. His depiction of natives are realistic illustrations of them going through daily routines.¹¹

Conrad adopts these authors' observational approach and expands upon it. He describes especially Nina and Aissa in *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*, but his descriptions, compared to those of Melville, are relatively brief in the Malay Trilogy, perhaps because of the influence of Henry James and the French writers. He goes much further than the writers of the histories by explaining the significance of an action and gives the reader many sign posts. We observe natives in another dimension—inside their minds, something Melville had yet to accomplish at the time he wrote his first novels.

Melville and Conrad's portrayals stand in sharp relief next to those of their predecessors. One could say they are cinematographic in comparison, whether those predecessors were explorers, scientists, country captains, administrators, or local journalists and chroniclers. Both authors accepted and subverted prior portrayals. The stage was set for Melville's very discursive, polemical-more-than-ethnological work and Conrad's modern, psychologically deep novels set in complex social and political contexts. It was open season for both Melville and Conrad's books, and they resonate for that reason.

Less U.S. and British than Dutch and French

That the books' locales were visited and annexed by French and Dutch more than British and especially more than Americans is another reason these authors' writing are worth examining. It must be pointed out that the British did have a presence in both Malaysia and Polynesia prior to the authors' book publications. The British Lingard is central to and country captains haunt Conrad's Malay Trilogy. British and even Americans make appearances in Tahiti and Imeeo in Melville's books. However, British and American presence doesn't feature as strongly as that of other nationalities in the histories of each locale. There was opportunity for two authors of their caliber, in their respective eras, to portray the indigenous people partially from the point of view of the immanent or ongoing oppression by foreigners, as well as European and native attempts to commingle. Because the oppressors in both authors' books were mainly Dutch and French, there was less interest in and literature about those parts of the world by the U.S. and England. However, the British were eventually given Singapore and the Malay Peninsula when the Dutch were given the Malay Archipelago in 1824 and, because Borneo was left alone, the British did control a few Borneo ports. (The U.S. was soon to have a presence in the Philippines.) Further, Conrad's depiction of the complex foreign scramble and the even more complex scramble between very multicultural indigenous warring chiefs, and these chiefs and the country captains, lent dimension, set the initial problematic situations, and drove plots. What follows summarizes part of the scramble:

Conrad's experience of the archipelago and his fiction about the Archipelago are largely within the historical and political frame of what Christopher GoGwilt calls the scramble for SE Asia, which brought the Malaysian Peninsula and parts of Borneo under firm British rule between 1874 and 1896 which saw the

consolidating Dutch rule in the Dutch East Indies and which witnessed the emergence of the New Imperialism of the United States in the Philippines.¹²

Hampson amplifies the above quote by saying that the Dutch ruled roughly between the 16th and 19th centuries, not territorially but through designated sphere and through contracts, and patrols and policing. Foreigners within their spheres had to settle with permission from Batavia. In addition, the Berau River where two novels are set was inhabited by Bugis who paid tribute to Sulu or Taosug.¹³

To illustrate Conrad's multiculturalism, here's a quick sketch of key players in the trilogy. Almayer in *Almayer's Folly* is Dutch, but the Dutch patrols see him as an enemy, working for the gun-running British Captain Lingard. Nina is half-Sulu and resents her adoptive white father for killing her mother's pirate family and shunning her mother. Nina leaves with Dain, himself a potentate-entrepreneur from Bali. In *An Outcast*, after Willems falls for the half-Arab Aissa, he's persuaded to let the Arab Abdullah into the river, removing Lingard's and Almayer's power. In *The Rescue*, Captain Tom Lingard tries to help Dyaks and enlists ally Bugis tribes to do so but is defeated by Dyak enemies when distracted by a British woman. Arabs team up with the Lanun and Bugis and win the day. The coalescence of a diverse cast of characters is suggested in Jorgenson's letter to Lingard:

Hassim attended the council held every evening in the shed outside Belarab's stockade. That holy man Ningrat was for looting that vessel. Hassim reproved him saying that the vessel was probably sent by you because no white men were known to come inside the shoals. ... There was a hullabaloo. The followers of Tengga were ready to interfere, and you know how it is between Tengga and Belarab. ... Next day, which was Friday, Ningrat after reading the prayers in the mosque talked to people outside. He bleated and capered like an old goat, prophesying misfortune, ruin, and exterminations if these whites were allowed to get away. (Re, 172)

The multicultural identities in *The Rescue* are sometimes baffling. Hassim (and his sister Immada) are Dyaks. It's never clear who Belarab and Tengga are, except the former has also

being ousted from his island by rival tribes and is considered Lingard's ally to help Hassim. Tenggara has recently entered the river area where Belarab resides and is an enemy to Belarab and Lingard. Nevertheless, the heterogeneity and the reference to the building tension intrigues and alarms, even if related by Jorgenson in an entertaining fashion. While not as droll as some of Melville's *Omoo* native characters, Conrad's characters, whether Arab, Lanun, Dyak, Sulu, Bugis, or Portuguese, are richly drawn, sometimes with a comical touch. Yet the Jorgenson letter has very ominous overtones. It shows that many would back Tenggara against Lingard. Minor characters, like the never-before-mentioned holy man, are rallying the local natives to destroy Lingard's ship, the *Emma*, thereby making it impossible to save Hassim and Immada.

Conrad, who believed the explaining was up to the historians and anthropologists, proceeds to tell his story mainly through the actions of the indigenous. The reader has to fit the pieces of this panoramic war between native factions together and is fed details. In all the Malay Trilogy novels, especially *The Rescue*, this reader wished Conrad would have been more like Melville, who, with his wide references to historical events and local anecdotes, served as his own built-in guide to reading *Typee* and *Omoo*. Whether the excessive commentary overwhelms the narrative, as it does in *Typee*, or supports the narrative, as it does in *Omoo*, one doesn't need a guide book to know the islands Tommo visits and their history, let alone the surrounding islands often referred to. Melville, like Conrad, likes to tell the truth and, to use writing teachers' favorite piece of advice, "show not tell" what he wants to say about the natives and their oppression. But he also does plenty of "telling." He likes information for itself. In *Typee*, Melville lets the reader know what has happened (in 1842, real time) in the historical framework of his novel just before he pulls into the Nukuheva Bay on the *Dolly*.

That beauty was lost to me then, and I saw nothing but the tri-color flag of France trailing over the stern of six vessels whose black hulls and bristling broadsides proclaimed their warlike character. There they were, floating in that lovely bay, the green eminences of the shore looking down so tranquilly upon them, as if rebuking the sternness of their aspect. To my eye nothing could be more out of keeping than the presence of those vessels; but we soon learnt what brought them there. The whole group of islands had just been taken possession of by Rear Admiral Du Petit Thouars, in the name of the invincible French nation. (Ty, 12)

Examples of scenes where he depicts the conflict are numerous. One such scene injects Melville's often jocular attitude. A native king and queen, heavily tattooed, he in a military uniform and she loosely attired in scarlet and yellow, come aboard Tommo's (Tom's) ship to meet French officers:

She singled out from their number an old *salt*, whose bare arms and feet, and exposed breast were covered with as many inscriptions as the lid of an Egyptian sarcophagus ... [T] royal lady, eager to display the hieroglyphics on her own sweet form, bent forward for a moment, and turning sharply around, threw up the skirts of her mantle, and revealed a sight from which the aghast Frenchmen precipitately, and tumbling into their boat, fled the scene of so shocking a catastrophe. (Ty, 8)

The above scene is much more than an example of Melville's humor. It shows how a ludicrous scene can at the same time emphasize the awkwardness of cross-culture encounters. The fact that the European seaman and the native are equally covered with tattoos, his appearing as intricate as hers, could be an opportunity for two cultures to bond. The queen thinks so, and she tries her best to. What she considers an effort to communicate is considered catastrophic. To set up this scene, Melville tells the reader that the French slaughtered 150 at Whitihoo, "but let that pass." (Ty, 7). The wrap-around-the-face tattooing of the king becomes a fear of Tommo's later. The French threat in Melville, as the Dutch threat in Conrad, reinforce other more fast-encroaching threats— like cannibalism.

Despite, on the one hand, an author whose efforts to educate the reader actually divert attention from the story and, on the other hand, an author who sails through his story and assumes all readers are former country captains, the five novels are captivating because diverse characters are featured in narratives, and only one or a handful of British or U.S. citizens appear in the bulk of the narration (let alone a Polish-born character).

Used Scientific Textual Tradition but Turned It Upside-Down

Marsden, Raffles, and Wallace's limited descriptions of natives were mentioned earlier in the discussion of pre-existing literary works. William Marsden and his associate James Banks's scientific studies are relevant to the history of Polynesia writing, as well as that of the Malay Archipelago. Science and commerce were addressed as one entity in the Royal Society in London, and adventurers made speeches there before they set out. James Banks, connected to everyone in government, science, and sea-faring, accompanied Cook to Polynesia and even ran naked covered in coal at a native mourning party.¹⁴ Melville joins in rituals and festivals but also spends every waking and sleeping moment with the island participants, unconsciously pioneering observation and participant-observation methods. (In modern times, this could be compared with ashrams, colonial villages, husky excursions, George Plimpton, TV traveling cuisine tasters, etc.)

Conrad, though channeling the native characters and not having lived with them in actuality, teams up white and native characters on a mutual life trajectory. Unlike Melville, he doesn't list former visitors who wrote about their experiences, but he does evoke former and absent country captains. There's no history of island hogs, goats, and breadfruit trees. He might dwell on the lights and sounds of the river at the opening of *Almayer's Folly*, but it's to set the tone. His focus is on his characters, the indigenous as well as the European. This sets him apart

from predecessors who didn't represent the native point of view, let alone jump into their minds. Others were writing stories, but his short stories and novels are more nuanced and richer and have withstood the test of time. Andrea White points out this change in "Conrad and Imperialism," saying the following:

Rather than the native's reputed moral inferiority, it is European civilization that Nina condemns for its narrowness, moral emptiness, racial exclusivity, and lack of vigour ... In *An Outcast*, Aissa will think similarly of Willem's people. ... Here the native, usually silenced by the colonial discourse of the day, disturbs the monologic telling of "them" and us." (189)

Inasmuch as anthropology and biology didn't yet exist in Marsden's time, Darwin was published after Melville's major works, and systems of classification were being refined—Linnaeus first and Mendel much later—the study of race was rudimentary. It was thought important to study it to understand mankind and destiny. The world population was broken down into sets of races, which changed depending on who was categorizing. Samuel Otter, in his "Race" in *Typee* and *White Jacket*," speaks of James Knox and the importance of studying race via the anatomy.

Nineteenth-century ethnology in America and Europe magnified the overdetermined attractions of the human body. ... "Race," declared the Scottish anatomist Robert Knox in 1850, "is everything: literature, science, art—in a word, civilization depends on it." ... Melville gets inside the head of antebellum ethnology. He criticizes the obsession with defining, ranking, and separating human types and analyzes how it composes its objects. He attempts to acknowledge other forms of knowledge and contact. (15)

The quote shows that ethnology, the close study of the human body, was a major school of thought in the U.S. Presumably Melville was familiar with the ethnology studies. Otter cites travelers to the Marquesas' ethnological interest in the natives.

Krusenstern, Langsdorff, Porter, Charles S. Stewart, (1831), Frederick Debell Bennett (1840), and Melville himself praised the light color, symmetrical proportions, and “European” features of the Islanders. According to Langsdorff, his companion Counselor Tilesius ... was so impressed by the form of one native that he measured every part of the man and forwarded his results to the famous ethnologist Johann Blumenbach. Several travelers compared male Marquesan bodies to classical sculptures ... (18)

This image is often evoked in *Typee*, where male members of the tribe, from Tommo’s perspective, give one the feeling of seated, standing, or moving Greek statues. It will be shown in more detail in the analysis below that Melville “praises” proportions and describes natives as if wandering through a museum of classical art. Throughout *Typee* and *Omoo*, Melville uses and spoofs ethnology and scientific classifications, using words like “specimen” and “observation” and often placing himself in the role of the observed. As in all of his work, he worked with and against established sources.

Similar Lives Affected Their Work

The authors had similar backgrounds, and their themes and techniques reflect this.

The texts and not the authors are what always should be examined, but restlessness and a sense of loss and disconnection permeate Melville and Conrad’s work. It’s difficult in the case of these two writers to completely separate their lives from their texts when analyzing their individual texts and in comparing their portrayal of natives. They wouldn’t have run into the indigenous they portrayed had they not been sea-faring, adventurous men. What attracted this writer to both men was their leaving to work on ships at an early age as she did. Melville and Conrad’s reasons for going to sea in the first place weren’t very different from each other.

A closer examination of their early experiences confirms their similar frame of mind. Conrad’s Polish parents had died through hardships related to their exile by Russians and their

efforts fighting for something they believed in. Melville's father tried time and again to save his New York City import business and ultimately died trying one more time to recoup losses. Both authors came from distinguished families that had seen better times. Both moved often as children. And while Conrad's Polish childhood would seem worse, Melville's more subtle degradation in New York and Massachusetts, forever moving into less respectable homes, must have taken its toll.¹⁵

Characters in their works are searching for home—or something that can fill its place. In *Almayer's Folly*, Almayer muses throughout on life with Nina to Paris. Nina wants a culture she can relate to. In *Typee*, Marheyo often indicates he understands Tommo's homesickness. A passage in *Typee* about Tommo's sidekick Toby encapsulates this sense of isolation and searching in all five books discussed in this paper:

Toby, like myself, had evidently moved in a different sphere of life. And his conversation at times betrayed this, although he was anxious to conceal it. He was one of that class of rovers you sometimes meet at sea, who never reveal their origin, never allude to home, and go rambling over the world as if pursued by some mysterious fate they cannot possibly elude. (Ty, 32)

The above would seem to apply to Conrad, who'd left Poland and his family, more than to Melville, who had family all over New England. Yet Conrad was proud to be a British citizen and considered England home. It's true, however, that both Melville and Conrad, once they went to sea, had in a sense untethered themselves from the culture they knew and become curious about other cultures.

Themes Favored by Authors Are Reflected in Native Portrayal

Leon P. Seltzer says in *The Vision of Conrad and Melville* that the sea fits in with their existentialist and nihilistic views because it's unforgiving and relentless like life. He isn't

concerned “with what makes Melville Melville or Conrad Conrad but with all that meaningfully relates the two writers” and says

The thematic correspondences are perhaps the more apparent and include such prevailing concerns in both writers as the problem of egoism, self-delusion, and betrayal; the universality of evil; the inevitability of failure; the perils of isolation and withdrawal; the need for peace and the urge toward suicide; the danger of truth and the need of illusions; the hindrances to accurate perception; the confrontation with a hostile or indifferent world; and the dilemma of moral conduct. (xxiii)

The themes listed above are touched on in *Typee* and *Omoo*, especially in Melville’s continual juxtaposition of happy Typees and unhappy Westerners and in the state of the Tahiti and Imeeo natives as a result of Western influence. In rendering indigenous identity in their texts, the authors’ mutually bleak outlooks can cast a shadow over the sunniest scene. The darkness may disperse momentarily, but the respite is brief. Conrad’s ennoblement of his protagonists is grand but short-lived. In *Almayer’s Folly*, Nina makes a courageous choice, but her future independence as one of Dain’s wives is questionable. As for Aissa in *An Outcast*, a joyous moment of bonding will forever be her undoing.

It’s relevant to add that regarding the sea, Conrad hated that people obsessed with the sea association between him and Melville and didn’t want to be known as a writer of ocean tales anyway. He thought not one iota of *Moby-Dick* was sincere, and got zero out of *Typee*. He declined to write the introduction to *Billy Budd*.¹⁶

Similar Techniques Used by Authors Are Reflected in Native Portrayal

Differences in writing style are obvious. Each has a unique, even legendary style: Conrad tried to write in the style of his French and English contemporaries and concentrate on the story, though he may switch narrators and go back and forth in time to get the story across. Melville

repeatedly drifts off into long digressions on palm trees or Western hypocrisy or a story that happened in another island years before to make points. Their styles could be distinguished if their two texts were placed side by side. Regardless, Seltzer supports his contention that the writers have kindred spirits not only in theme but also in technique.

We find such narrative devices as multiple perspectives and the signal choice and handling of the narrator. And we encounter a whole host of other techniques similarly designed to create and maintain a suitable detachment from the subject—both at the writer's end, and, as a consequence, the reader's also ... The more pointed of these distancing devices would probably include such devices as controlled ambiguity, highly intellectualized rhetoric, formal and informal digressions, the deliberate fragmentation or discontinuance of episode, the open ending, and the sustained use of tonal irony ... (xxiii)

The distancing techniques above are indeed used by both authors but in different ways. For example, Conrad points out ambiguities by enacting them, such as the equally primitive money grabbing of natives and Europeans, whereas Melville will spell ambiguities out in case the reader didn't see it, such as describing the beauty and grace of the native women with their flowers and tunics and then contrasting it with the fancy attire and jewelry of Westerners.

Conrad didn't care for Melville's propagandizing and philosophizing and, as mentioned above, said as much. A closer look at the texts, however, will spotlight theme and technique similarities and show how they are used to write indigenous identity.

I. Writing Indigenous Identity in Two Melville Novels

Two characteristics of Melville's writing of indigenous identity in *Typee* and *Omoo* deserve scrutiny. The first is the scientific quality of the narratives. The second is the deceptive quality of the narrative in *Typee* versus the authentic quality in *Omoo*.

Melville's captivity forces him to assume the role of lab technician or, more appropriately, field worker. He's a captive, a prisoner, and a runaway for the duration of the two sequential tales of adventure situated on the Polynesian islands of Nukuheva, Tahiti, and Imeeo. Tommo, more or less reenacting Melville's actual adventures as a deserter of the *Acushnet (Dolly)*, is a captive audience. But even in *Omoa*, the recording narrator, hereafter referred to as "the narrator,"¹⁷ is a runaway sailor in an alien land striking out on his own. He is a receptive if not a captive audience.

In *Typee*, Tommo is literally a captive of the Typees, confined to a hut with an extended family and escorted when he leaves the hut. In *Omoa*, the narrator is placed in stocks at night with other *Julia* mutineers in Tahiti, is guarded by natives and ogled by natives, and has daytime freedom to enter their community and interact with them. Though relatively free once transported to Imeeo to dig potatoes, he's still confined to the island and wary of being recaptured. Though the natives are companions he works, hunts, and often shares huts with, he is always an observant audience. Though the narrator's situation differs in the novels, and the narrator himself seems a more carefree personality in *Omoa*, what doesn't differ is the intensity and vividness of his recording of his "observation" and "participant-observation."

Melville's Polynesian indigenous portrayal is a magnified, all-encompassing depiction, as if he anticipated the emergence of the field of anthropology, and that's partially what makes his portrayal so interesting. Melville's books, especially *Typee*, reflect the painstaking, precise methods used in modern anthropological fieldwork. Of course the methods are inadvertently carried out, and of course Tommo is a forced participant and observer, and in *Omoa*, the observation and participant-observation is less, in a manner of speaking, a controlled experiment. Indigenous people he encounters are filtered through experiences on a journey akin to Lazarillo

de Tormes. Impressions of natives, from the queen to a local con artists, are mixed with impressions of American and British islanders. Natives are fellow travelers, hosts, or lenient guards, part of exploring, hunting, farming, and foraging experiences.

Two fundamental modern-day, anthropological techniques, not unlike those carried out by early South Sea and Malay scientists, sea-adventurers, and administrators, are set forth below:

Observational Methods

The observational method is viewed as the least invasive method where the anthropologist minimally integrates themselves into the society they are studying and gathers data through verbal communication while attempting to remain non-intrusive of the culture.

This group of methods focuses on community interaction through language. It usually entails many open-ended interviews with participants who are members of a group being studied. The researcher strives to learn as much as they can about the history of the community as well as the individuals within it in order to gain a full understanding of how their culture functions. Interviews can take place individually or with focus groups within the community based on age, status, gender, and other factors that contribute to differences within the community.

This type of research often strives to create an open dialogue, called a dialectic, in which information flows back and forth between researcher and subject. Think of this situation as a conversation between two people about homework or an upcoming exam. This dialectic poses a challenge to the objectivity of socially produced data. The challenge is dealt with through reflection on the inter-subjective creation of meaning. This leads anthropologists to value reflexive abilities in their ethnographic writing. Because many anthropologists also hope to help the communities they work with to make change on their own terms within the confines of their own culture, in some cases objectivity is abandoned in favor of community based activism and social change.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is a method for anthropological fieldwork, used to collect data such that the anthropologist must create an intimate relationship between themselves and the culture studied. This method requires that an anthropologist participate in a social event that is part of a specific culture. This includes, but is not limited to, observing members of a culture by taking notes, eating the food that is provided, and participating in festivities. The goal of participant observation is to be involved in the culture like a member of that society, all while observing and studying the culture. An example of participation observation would be if an anthropologist went

to a Native American Tribal gathering and took notes on the energy and traditions they were being shown. This anthropologist could participate in things like face painting or songs, and eat the food that the Natives eat. The information gathered in this observation is then recorded and reflected upon to gain further insight into the culture being studied. This observation method helps the anthropologist develop a deeper rapport with the people of the culture and can help others understand their culture further. This experience may result in the individuals opening up more to the anthropologist which allows them to understand more than an etic point of view of the culture.¹⁸

Examples of both methods abound in both books, though again, Melville and Tommo, and *Omoo*'s narrator are hardly out on a field work expedition. Further, there's a major discrepancy concerning the first method above, described as verbal exchange. In *Typee*, Tommo doesn't know the language and spends most of his time observing. The reader gets long descriptions of Mehevi and Faraway and others. However, he is, by choice or not, a subject for the natives to observe and often points this out and takes in everything about his captors he could, even if he can't understand things about them. The narrator in *Omoo* is ogled in his barracks, but takes advantage of the mutual observation and participant-observation at the barrack-prison and once freed. Two examples from *Typee* appear *as if* he'd applied these modern-day methods. His focus is as intense as a scientist's because of his sheer fascination. He later zeroes in with an even tighter focus to learn everything about the tribe so he can rescue himself. Even before Tommo gets to the Typees, he observes native girls swimming to ship and describes their preparation for what turns out to be something amounting to the most depraved and licentious behavior on all sides that he's ever seen:

All of them at length succeeded in getting up the ship's side, where they hung dripping with the brine and glowing with the bath, their jet-black tresses streaming over their shoulders and half enveloping their otherwise naked forms. There they hung, sparkling with savage vivacity, laughing gaily at one another, and chattering away with infinite glee. Nor were they idle the whole while, as each of them performed the simple offices of the toilet for the other. Their luxurious locks, wound up and twisted into the smallest possible compass, were freed from the briny element; the whole person carefully dried,

and from a little round shell that passed from hand to hand, anointed with a fragrant oil: their adornments were completed by passing a few loose fold of white tappa, in a modest cincture, around the waist. (Ty, 14–15)

This a clean break from the native observation recorded in Melville's time. This description, with its poetic overtones, and the enraptured viewpoint of a young seaman and author, enters another dimension. It leaves the writings of Marsden and Cook, Stewart, and Ellis and others in its wake, even though a few of the South Sea adventurers did sing praises of Marquesan statuesque beauty. Another key difference between the above description and earlier ones is the complete switch from rhapsody to furious condemnation, not of the girls or sailors per se, but of imperialism in general. After the description of the debauchery, Melville goes into the most dramatic rhetoric in the book regarding the "poor savages" and their "contaminating contact with the white man." (Ty, 15)

To scientists and to the general readership then and now, *Typee* and, to some extent, *Omoo*, could be described, among other things, as early examples of observation and participant-observation. This method of recording is reactive but becomes more proactive in the novels. Tommo has no choice in *Typee*. If he wishes to survive, he's to keep an open mind, take everything in, and do his best to communicate. He's invited to the taboo house, sharing meals, bathing and canoeing, and dressing like a native. He's participating not perfunctorily but actively to save himself and Toby and to create rapport. After his offer of tobacco is refused by Mehevi and he thinks about how other natives he met would have accepted it, Tommo takes a chance to find out if the tribe is who he fears they are and then to turn things in his favor:

I paused for a second, and I know not by what impulse it was that I answered "Typee." The piece of dusky statuary nodded in approval, and then murmured, "Mourtakee?" "Mourtakee," said I, without further hesitation—"Typee mourtakee."

What a transition! The dark figures around us leaped to their feet, clapped their hands in transport, and shouted again and again the talismanic syllables, the utterance of which appeared to have settled everything. (Ty, 71)

This is rare, though not unheard of, in verbal participation or participant-observation or anything in any autobiographical narratives up to that time.¹⁹ It certainly stands alone in the artistry with which the scene unfolds. It's made more poignant by Melville's many foreshadowing from hearsay, in his exchanges with Toby Greene on their travels, and in their slow discovery of the truth of their captors' identity.

In *Omoo*, the narrator studies natives and interacts with them. He wants to meet them, observe them, and interact with them. The *Typee* experience, of course, toughened him also and changed him more than any *Omoo* experience, but on the unchartered *Omoo* journey, he observes and participates. The narrator's interest in native island inhabitants is driven by his friendship, precarious as it was, and close proximity to the Typees. He formed bonds, and though little in *Omoo* refers back to that tribe, he's probably more anxious to form bonds than his fellow mutineers are, with the exception of the very experiential Long Ghost. The narrator is a commentator in all things biological and sociological, though those disciplines didn't exist yet, as he was in *Typee*. He is an unknowing but nevertheless avid supporter of the simple observation, verbal observation, and participant-observation methods. In Tahiti, the narrator as a prisoner barter belongings for food and trades food for food. In Imeeo, the narrator carries potatoes with natives. In both places, he expounds on such subjects as native industriousness or lack of it.

The second characteristic of Melville's indigenous writing in *Typee* and *Omoo* is the deceptive clarity of the native portrayal in *Typee* versus *Omoo*. Because these books are largely autobiographical and fact-based, Tommo's Typees appear genuine, if larger than life, and the

reader is aware of the tunnel-vision point of view. The narrator's field of vision, almost like that of a child's, necessarily consists of his native captors interacting with him and/or carrying him because of his lameness, and performing their daily routines right next to him. *Omoo*, related by a much more happy-go-lucky narrator, is even more fact-ridden because it's more panoramic, with even more true-to-life portrayals. Leo Seltzer says

If critics (as opposed to biographers) have had comparatively little to say about such Melville works as *Typee*, *Omoo*, *Redburn*, and *White Jacket*, it is because their basic designs have almost as much to do with the fluctuations of life as with the forms of art. Melville may at various points have "heightened" facts and even invented new episodes, but his ambition to communicate in tact his private experiences and his reflections over them make these books as much fact as fiction. Even in such an unquestionably artistic creation as *Moby-Dick*, the imaginative and rhetorical flights are tempered by a constant recourse to fact and autobiographical remembrance. (109)

The above quote also seems erroneous and counter-intuitive in a discussion especially of *Typee*, where the native depiction, as has been shown by the examples above, is factual but is hardly an unembellished account of a native tribe. Besides this, Melville does everything he can to portray his Character Crowd to his Birth Crowd audience: He uses an engaging narrator, resonant metaphors and symbols, educates the readers about the islands and contrasts the natives with Westerners and, as shown in passages above, crafts his portrayals in vivid descriptions and enactments and verbal and nonverbal exchanges. *Omoo* does the same but could be said to be the more fact-ridden and therefore lends itself to a more journalistic and travelogue quality than *Typee*. But there's a difference. *Typee* might be the clearest portrayal in individual descriptions and scenes, but it's not the most genuine if the whole book is taken into consideration. *Omoo* actually is a more honest overall native portrayal. *Typee* would seem packed with facts, but its commentary, jumping to other places and eras constantly, hides the narrative facts. *Typee* is told

in two versions. On the one hand, the narrative is always tempered with so much commentary, it's a double delivery, an adventure and personal essay, or polemical treatise at the same time.

This is a misconception of *Typee* and of *Typee* versus *Omoo*. The commentary turns a horrifying captivity situation into a usually idyllic, occasionally ominous story. William P. Dillingham, in *An Artist in the Rigging: The Early Work of Herman Melville*, claims that minus the commentary, *Typee* would be a chiller. Tommo was enjoying himself very little. Dillingham goes on to say that Tommo's retrospective commentary, which frequently intrudes upon his narrative of despair, is marked by four moods: nostalgia, righteous anger, comfortable objectivity of descriptions of Typee life, and humorous recall. He calls attention to the difference between the authorship of *Omoo* and *Typee*, saying:

Whereas in *Typee*, Melville suggested the difference between Tommo's past and present states of mind by contrasting his previous feelings about *Typee* with those of the moment, no such distinction is noticeable in *Omoo*. The past and present are one. (80)

The above quote contradicts the often-expressed opinion of *Typee* that may be shared by many of its readership. The overall impression of the Typees and Tommo's reaction to them is one of an idyllic life and a place to be yearned for or somehow aspired to, regardless of the overhanging threat and escape. This sometimes garden-of-Eden indigenous portrayal, sprinkled with anecdotes and lamentations about the bitterness, hypocrisy, and imperialism of Westerners, is what stood in Melville's time and in ours as the truest portrayal. *Omoo*, actually, sticking to the present, has more straightforward representations of natives and everything else.

This may be true, but in both books, the portrayal of natives, whether prolonged or cursory, is influenced the narrator's personal situation and his overall sense of security and well-being. A closer look at a one or two of the indigenous people portrayed in *Typee* and *Omoo* will shed more light.

a. Idealized Identity in *Typee* (1845)

Melville's vivid, almost scientifically precise writing of indigenous and at the same time the retrospective refashioning of Melville's captivity are not mutually exclusive. It's true that if commentary were removed, all the layers of reflection about the United States and European life versus native life, from their differing landscapes to their differing wardrobes to their differing state of happiness, what would be left would be a horror story that ends in a traumatic escape. But even if the parts of the book that simply describe the narrative and basic notes on the natives were all that remained, one would still have a majestic image of the Typees. After putting down the book, with or without the added commentary, one is left with an image of the tribe as South Sea island versions of the Greek gods on Olympia.

They're tall, muscular, and lavishly tattooed men, dressed mainly in loin cloths, but sometimes in helmets and battle attire, and tunic-skirted, graceful, flower-ornamented women. From the point of view of a fascinated and bewildered young sailor, whose lame leg leaves him relatively immobile, the natives take on a godlike aspect. From the point of view of someone whose growing suspicions make him conscious of his captive status and a possibility of being sacrificed and consumed, the natives assume godlike powers. A close reading of one character will show how Melville achieves this unique perspective.

Kory-Kory, recently assigned by Mehevi, the chief of the group in Tommo's hut, to serve as Tommo's attendant, doesn't come across at first as particularly godlike, compared to other natives.

Kory-Kory, though the most devoted and best-natured serving man world, was alas! a hideous object to look upon. He was some twenty-five years of age, and about six feet in

height, robust and well made, and of the most extraordinary aspect. His head was carefully shaven, with the exception of two circular spots, about the size of a dollar, near the top of the cranium, where the hair, permitted to grow of an amazing length, was twisted up in two prominent knots that gave him the appearance of being decorated with a pair of horns. His beard, plucked out by the roots from every other part of his face, was suffered to droop in hairy pendants, two of which garnished his upper lip, and an equal number hung from the extremity of his chin. . . . [He] had seen fit to embellish his face with three broad longitudinal stripes of tattooing, which, like those country roads that go straight forward in defiance of all obstacles, crossed his nasal organ, descended to the hollow of his eyes, and even skirted the borders of his mouth Each completely spanned his physiognomy; one extending in a line with his eyes, another crossing his face in the vicinity of the nose, and a third sweeping along his lips from ear to ear reminded me of those unhappy whom I have sometimes observed gazing out sentimentally from behind the grated bars of a prison window; whilst the entire body of my savage valet, covered all over with representations of birds and fishes, and a variety of the most unaccountable-looking creatures, suggested to me the idea of a pictorial museum of natural history, or an illustrated copy of "Goldsmith's Animated Nature" (Ty, 83)

Yet the above passage does glorify Kory-Kory. He's six feet tall and muscular. His topknots could be thought of Nordic horned headgear or Zeus as a bull or with thunderbolts. A few pages before, Tommo sees similar tattoos on Mehevi and raves about them. Mehevi has a triangle of lines slanting over his lids to his ears and convening at his mouth. Could Mehevi's elaborate feather headdress, extra tassels and tunic material, and tooth jewelry make that much of a difference? Why is one hideous and one not? To this reader, Kory-Kory comes across just as statuesque as Mehevi. With the horned topknot, tattoo triangle, and hint of mustache and beard, he appears perhaps grander in light of modern-day popularity of male single and double topknots, the unshaven look, and tiny below-the-lip beards. The ugly reference may be a Melville attention-getter. He uses it often. (So does Conrad.) It doesn't seem to apply to a robust, six-foot man with the tattooing typical of his tribe. The overall description seems too similar to that of Marnoo and Mehevi to make Kory-Kory any less imposing a presence than they.

What is also striking about this description is its demonstration of the two Typees in the novel, Kory-Kory's description "intrudes" on what otherwise would be a more despairing

narrative. It's true that Melville is giving us a varied cast to make his narrative entertaining, portraying Mehevi, Kory-Kory, and Faraway one after the other. They may be purposely made to evoke Mars, Pan, and Diana the huntress. It may be a comic interlude after the description of the warrior Mehevi in full warrior attire. It may be a description of a homely, down-to-earth type between the two breath-taking beauties. Mehevi's sperm whale-tooth earrings resemble cornucopias (Ty, 78). He's a pagan god of war and of fertility. But Kory-Kory's description is too far to the other extreme. Kory-Kory is being made to resemble a costume party participant or a page of an illustration book. Verbs like "suffered to droop," "seen fit to embellish," metaphors like "country roads," "unaccountable-looking creatures," and "pictorial museum" echo the happy-go-lucky voice of the *Omoo* narrator, who at least sticks to the same voice. It's retrospective humor from the time of Melville's writing injected into a tense situation three years before.

The retrospective nostalgia also intrudes. The author wants to inject apologies in addition to the humor. The narrative has a disclaimer at the beginning about what a faithful attendant he is. Later on the same page Melville speaks directly from the present to the past to Kory-Kory:

Kory-Kory, I mean thee no harm in what I say in regard to thy outward adornings; but they were a little curious to my unaccustomed sight, and therefore I dilate upon them. But to underrate or forget thy faithful services is something I could never be guilty of, even in the giddiest moment of my life. (Ty, 83)²⁰

The disclaimers distill the actual Kory-Kory and Tommo's precarious situation. They are written as if to soften what might be taken as a disparaging description of the native. But the disclaimers also are saying that Kory-Kory never did a thing that wasn't warm and human and in Tommo's best interest, which was not the case. The tone and language of the description and the

internal and subsequent disclaimers have already resulted in making Tommo's suffering less than it was.

Kory-Kory's close attendance to Tommo are shown in a two key scenes:

He washed his fingers in a vessel of water, and then putting his hand into the dish and rolling the food into little balls, put them one after another into my mouth. All my remonstrances against this measure only provoked so great a clamor on his part, that I was obliged to acquiesce; and the operation of feeding being thus facilitated, the meal was quickly dispatched. ... "Ki-Ki, nuee, nuee, ah! Moee moee mourtakee" (eat plenty, ah! Sleep very good). (Ty, 88)

[Kory-Kory] appeared perfectly aghast with astonishment, and rushing toward me, poured out a torrent of words in eager deprecation of so limited an operation, enjoining me by unmistakable signs to immerse my whole body. To this I was forced to consent; and the honest fellow regarding me as a forward, inexperienced child, whom it was his duty to serve at the risk of offending, lifted me from the rock, and tenderly bathed my limbs. (Ty, 90)

These early scenes are ominous. Kory-Kory's warm heart shines through, but so does both Tommo's and Kory-Kory's situation. Tommo doesn't want to be fed. He is forced into consenting by Kory-Kory's repeated words. In much of *Typee*, not only are three years of reflection, discussion with family and editors, and reading thrown in, but narrative details are left unsaid. His feeder is a burly six-footer, who is not lame like Tommo. He could be muscling him into accepting the feeding as well as coaxing him. The reader also wonders why Toby is left to feed himself. In a scene where they think they are being sacrificed, Toby refers to the force-feeding as Tommo's being fattened for the feast. (Ty, 94) "Puarkee!" (pork) becomes a memorable word to Tommo when Kory-Kory assures them the remains aren't a baby's but a pig's, and later when Tommo sees human remains, and Kory-Kory assures him they're also pork. In the second passage, though Kory-Kory is called an honest fellow, Tommo refers to himself as an infant. In language that sounds right out of a Mafia interrogation or a rape case, Tommo says "I was forced to consent." Being carried, fed, and bathed by Kory-Kory adds both to Tommo's

feeling of helplessness and the image of the Typees as grown-ups or colossal beings going about their mysterious work and rituals while Tommo watches like a child or like a mere human watching gods. The two “puarkee” scenes involving a pig and human remains are separated by many chapters and many more fall between the cannibalism puarkee scene and Tommo’s escape.

If the initial description discussed in relation to Kory-Kory wasn’t disclaimed, the horns and beard in the initial description of Kory-Kory could be seen as symbols of the devil. The face looking out behind bars would more clearly a mirror Tommo’s situation. It could also represent Kory-Kory’s own imprisonment as a lackey and feeder of Tommo, always obedient to the chiefs who set rules and give orders. If the Kory-Kory scenes weren’t buried in digressions, this would make a horror story entitled “Puarkee.” The imposition of the present may have sold *Their Crowd to Our Crowd* (and fended off conservatives), but it obscured the narrative and the truthfulness. Kory-Kory is idealized because of the childlike position of Tommo. He’s idealized because Melville had three years to look at his experience with nostalgia, anger, humor, and descriptive objectivity. Nevertheless, Tommo’s perspective as the captive audience forces him, like a scientist in a lab, to examine—and participate. The Kory-Kory, portrayal, be it compulsory, overly elaborated, or incomplete, resonates.

b. Realistic Identity in *Omo* (1846)

In *Omo*, Melville does a very different kind of indigenous writing. The native portrayals and the narrative are authentic because there’s one story line. The past and the present don’t get in each other’s way. Digressions are tied to the immediate story. The narrative, largely consisting of natives run into in passing or natives the narrator and Long Ghost are guarded ogled by, hosted by, or attempted to be swindled by, is not compromised. The commentary doesn’t break

up and intrude on the narrative that is already fragmented. Notably, the native portrayals aren't devoid of the artistry so often absent from snapshots-of-my-life memoirs and journals. They're nuanced. The reader sees the indigenous people and hears them and often interacts with them through the narrator. The interactions with the natives are scenes from a play or mini-stories. Melville has a chance to see the effects of Western "contamination" he was dreading in *Typee*.

In fact, in *Omoo* indigenous identity is often rendered through a contemplation of two things that also intrigued him during his time with the Typees: work and religion. A close look at Captain Bob encapsulates the wide gap between the Typees and the Tahitians.

Melville first lets the reader know what his narrator's perspective is in the Preface:

The title of the work—*Omoo*—is borrowed from the dialect of the Marquesan Islands, where, among other things, the word signifies a rover, or rather, a person wandering from one island to another like some of the natives, known among their countrymen as Taboo kannakers." (Om, 326)

This has an ironic twist. Tommo had been hoping the taboo Marnoo would help him, and that set things in motion for his escape. Perhaps it's a tribute to him and Karakoe, who was manning the getaway boat. At some point Tommo was told he was taboo, but he sure wasn't allowed to roam, and now he is relatively free but doesn't need to be a taboo kannaker to travel to natives' homes. A white man Zeke's "passport" does help immensely. But the narrator is not taboo with hunters of runaway sailors. When he and Long Ghost decide to linger in a lakeside town, they have to flee captors. Dillingham, in *An Artist in the Rigging*, goes so far to say *Omoo* is an escape novel, where the narrator grows by learning to escape from "pleasurable indolence" and "a destructive friendship" [Long Ghost] (Om, 81). One could add to this runaway sailor hunters and both native and European con artists. All of which keeps him vigilant. He's not captive-receptive but pursuer-receptive.

Melville doesn't say it, but though the book may be a sequel to *Typee*, it has little connection to it. Except for one sad reflection aboard the *Julia* about never seeing the Typees again (Om, 331), his definition of "omoo" in the Marquesan dialect appears to get the Typees out of his system.

In *Omoo*, religion comes much more into play. The narrator goes to Catholic services and also to Tahitian Christian services with an interpreter. In *Typee*, the only time he condemns the Typees, besides the obvious practice of cannibalism, is his passage about the degenerating state of their spiritual life, evident in crumbling wooden idols and natives using them like talking puppets or kicking them if they don't stand up right (Ty, 176, 178). In Tahiti the narrator attends church with an interpreter and sees it as a chance for young to show off clothes that had been his and a place for a minister to condemn the British administrators and the French ships that have come from Nukuheva. Po-Po in Imeeo he admires for saying grace and reading the Tahitian Bible to his family daily. He says Po-Po is the only true Christian in the area.

As far as work, in *Typee*, Tommo sees the lack of it but extols the native unanimity in everything they do and their hilarity and enthusiasm when involved in something together. As usual, the author has an ambiguous take. First he says:

In Tahiti, the people have nothing to do; and idleness, everywhere, is the parent of vice. (Om, 516)

He talks about attempts to introduce sugar cane and cotton industries and build housing and the subsequent lack of excitement and industry.

The fact is, that the mechanical and agricultural employments of civilized life, require a kind of exertion altogether too steady and sustained, to agree with an indolent people like the Polynesians. Calculated for a state of nature, in acclimate providentially adapted to it, they are unfit for any other. (Om, 517)

It's never clear if indolence is innate or a result of having native tools and activities taken away and modern tools and industries forced on them. Yet the narrator sees Po-Po and others in Imeeo far away from Pipette, Tahiti, with fields and orchards and a family support system, lead a happy, industrious life. The future is dismal in all the islands. *Omo* is a forecast of *Typee*.

Foreign intervention is at a later stage than Nukuheva. In *Typee*, it's just starting. The Tahiti queen Aimata, commonly called Pomaree Vahinee 1, fled to Imeeo. The appearance of her living room, where she sits in a recess eating fish and with her hands, sums up the cross-cultural disaster that caused her to flee and has perhaps forced her to be idle.

Superb writing desks of rose-wood, inlaid with silver and mother-of-pearl decanters and goblets of cut glass; embossed volumes of plates; gilded candelabras; sets of richly mounted sabres and fowling pieces; laced hats and sumptuous garments of all sorts, with numerous other matters of European manufacture, were strewn about among calabashes half-filled with "pooe," rolls of old tapa and matting, paddles and fish spears, and the ordinary furniture of a Tahitian dwelling. (Om, 640)

The above scene doesn't encourage the narrator and Long Ghost to again seek audience with the queen. They wanted to see if they could play the fiddle or serve food or tutor or do something for the queen as other Europeans were doing. It may have been this sight that triggered the narrator's departure from Imeeo on the *Leviathan*. He'd partaken in the unaltered state and caught glimpses of a very much altered state and may have thought his mind what being cannibalized by the lack of industriousness and moral dilapidation of the indigenous people.

A closer look at Captain Bob shows that Melville used the observation and participant-observation methods in *Typee* but much more cursorily. The introduction of Captain Bob is very different than that of Kory-Kory. It's given in snippets. In the courthouse, before Consul Wilson and his fellow British administrators, the narrator and his fellow mutineers take note of the heavyset, tall old Tahitian Wilson addresses. Little is said about the large Tahitian on the trek to

jail as the narrator takes in the enthralling landscape much like a tourist from a bus window.

Another soundbite characterization is released a little later, only after a comprehensive account of the open-air prison.

By this time, our guide had informed us that he went by the name of “*Capin Bob*” (Captain Bob); and a hearty old Bob he proved. It was just the name for him. From the first, so pleased were we with the old man, that we cheerfully acquiesced in his authority. (Om, 445)

This is very different from the long initial description of Kory-Kory. Regardless of the stocks that the prisoners are locked into at night and sometimes during the day, natives arrive to look and to trade. Natives are usually sketched out in a travel-letter-home style: as sidelong glances of fellow potato diggers and haulers or hunters up a tree at the sight of a wild boar or bullock. The narrator is a rover, except for his initial imprisonment. Native hosts, more often than not, are condensed biographies of the hosts and others. There are exceptions, like the picture of the queen mentioned earlier. An elderly native couple wrapped in tappa and asleep in a loving embrace makes a memorable tableau (Om, 581). Vivid scenes include the hunters with torches running and shouting, their prey hung high from cords extended between tall bamboo rods. (Om, 550)

Captain Bob represents the best of the Papeete entrepreneurs. He isn't someone who takes and then disappears. He objects to the prisoners' roaming but never does anything about it. He is not idle and immoral any more than Po-Po, though the produce of his fields is used for domestic consumption (his own), and hosts accustomed to feed anyone who approaches dread his arrival because he will eat up their provisions. (Om, 446–447) It's interesting that he's used in many ways as an example of typical Tahitians and sometimes as someone not on the take or idle as many in Papeete. The description of him as “round as a hogshead” is followed by the

comment “The enormous bulk of some of the Tahitians has been frequently spoken of by voyagers.” (Om, 440)

The double-edged quality of Kory-Kory’s careful attendance to Tommo is revealed in scenes, as well the words he uses to convince Tommo to eat, sleep, and bathe and later to impress upon him how wonderful the Typees’ life is compared to the Happars (or anyone else’s). Captain Bob is built up in tiny descriptions and references to something he’s doing in the background of a scene the rovers are part of. His vocabulary isn’t disclosed the same way it is in *Typee* in intimate feeding and bathing scenes. The narrator gives examples of how Captain Bob’s language is based on language of the crew he once worked with. Melville works this part of character revelation into the narrative. When asked how old he is, Captain Bob tells the narrator:

“Oh! Very olee—‘tousand’ ear—more—big man when Capin Tootee (Captain Cook) heavey in sight (In sea parlance, came into view). (Om, 447)

The first drawn-out description of Captain Bob gives him the aura of a Greek god, though more likely one portrayed in a Greek comedy than a tragedy. It’s reminiscent of the Kory-Kory description because the *Omoa* narrator, early morning in stocks in the open “Calabooza Beretanee,” observes his subject from a point of view not dissimilar to that of Tommo observing Kory-Kory.

We had been inmates of the Calabooza Beretanee about two weeks, when, one morning, Captain Bob, coming from the bath, in a state of utter nudity, brought into the building an armful of old tappa, and began to dress to go out.

The operation was quite simple. The tappa—of the coarsest kind—was in one long, heavy piece; and fastening one end to a column of Habiscus wood, supporting the calabooza, he went off a few paces, and putting the other about his waist, wound himself right up to the post. This unique costume, in rotundity something like a farthingale, added immensely to his large bulk; so much so, that he fairly waddled in his gait. But he was only adhering to the fashion of his fathers; for, in the olden time, the “Kihee,” or big

girdle, was quite the mode for both sexes. Bob, despising recent innovations, still clung to it. He was a gentleman of the old school—one of the last of the Kihees. (Om, 466).

In *Typee*, Tommo has similar “action” portraits (smoking, sailing, dancing), but this portrait, mixed with a demonstration of tappa winding, is the only lengthy portrait of Captain Bob. It’s very different from the Kory-Kory description, which could be taken from a painting or drawing. In fact, it’s a literary painting. The Captain Bob description is more like a video shot. Yet we can see and feel the coarseness of the tappa and whirl with Captain Bob to wrap ourselves. To borrow modern-day anthropological field terminology, the reader becomes a participant-observer. It’s a good example of using ethnological information creatively for characterization.

This description doesn’t have the ridicule quality embedded in word choice evident in the Kory-Kory passage. Melville could so easily have applied it here (and has before), comparing the naked body to any number of creatures in a natural history museum dioramas or illustration books. He sticks to a description of the winding of the tapa girdle. He does use “waddle,” but it’s an indication of the weight and thickness of the tapa as much as the subject’s bulk. Melville uses words that simply depict the action and person describes. It’s respectful, mentioning that Captain Bob respected his forefathers and their mode of dress.

In addition, he’s giving a nod to the Typees he left recently. But *Omoo* doesn’t try to intertwine itself with *Typee*. Melville is thinking of the tribe, and his readership may be thinking of the tribe, so he gives it a nod. The life inside Pop-Po’s hut, with grace before meals and Bible readings, makes the reader think this is what he hopes happens to Mehevi’s family if things have to change, even though he wishes the simplicity of golden, olden times would continue. It’s odd that Melville says Bob’s girdle was worn in times past when he just spent time with men and women who favored this fashion. This would support the contention that *Omoo* is a story about

the present, one story where any references to the past are made because they enhance the continuing narrative and don't detract from it. If there are digressions, they usually appear between episodes in the saga of the two rovers. He can refer to a former relation with a native Poky to compare his honesty with the con artist Kooloo (Om, 480), but bringing up the Typees would take the reader too far from the current narrative. They are pushed into another era.

c. Reactive Portrayal: Natives as Touchstones in Melville

Melville has broadened his techniques for writing indigenous narrative in *Omoo*. He is talking about so many people and so many adventures that his writing of indigenous identity is done differently. The narrative moves fast and moves between islands, and at one point he says there's many other adventures I will skip for the moment. In addition, he is telling a coming-of-age story, where both bad and good characters help him evolve. Portraits, dialogue, and scenes with two or a 100 are used in *Typee*, as well, but all those devices are multiplied in *Omoo*. Natives aren't in the background, but they're spread out in geographical areas. They enter the narrative and leave it. Character might be shown in action in *Typee*, on the way to a battle or in a procession, but they are first revealed in still-life, from the first scene with the boy and girl through the portraits of everyone from Mehevi to Marnoo. *Omoo* doesn't lend itself to this kind of introductory pause, though it is used with to describe some of the key figures.

Melville never stops using first person. To him, natives are mirrors to society. They call attention to Western greed and pettiness and lack of happiness. They show that well-meaning Western missionary and civilizing endeavors mostly don't work. Natives are touchstones by which he reassess personal frames of references and his own worth. He seeks them out to study

and to try to communicate with. Conrad breaks with this tradition. The reader doesn't have to wonder, like Tommo, what the natives are thinking. Their minds will be entered.

II. Writing Identity in Three Conrad Novels

Throughout this paper, references have been made to Conrad's ability to explore thought processes of different individuals, whether European or indigenous. At the beginning, it was also mentioned that he was a more purposeful writer than Melville but used similar distancing elements like open endings, interruptions, and indeterminate protagonists and narrators. He also shared Conrad's bleak, skeptical outlook and favored themes of isolation and betrayal. On a quick second read of *Almayer's Folly* midway through this analysis—and a review of *An Outcast of the Islands* and *The Rescue*—the first thought that comes to my mind is not “multiple viewpoints” or jumps into minds.” It's one word. Cinematographic. That's not to say literary devices of shifting time frames, rotating points of view, multiple protagonists, and clear signposts weren't noticed. But this reader is a camera, pulling out to give a bird's-eye view of the Berau homes and their native occupants, the busy river traffic, both up the river to gold and down the river to possible blockades. Then the camera zooms in the lone white inhabitant. The following explores this aspect and concentrates on one native character from each story who propels or changes it in some way.

a. Empowered Identity in *Almayer's Folly* (1895)

Babalatchi in *Almayer's Folly* does more than propel or change the story; he serves as a connecting thread to the story and also between the inhabitants. This thread or connective tissue could be thought of as serpentine. Because he is Sulu and serves a Bugis Rajah but can likely speak to both to the Arab Abdullah and Almayer's Sulu wife in their languages, he's in a prime position to hear news and perhaps spread false news. Two main ways Conrad uses a

cinematographic effect is a busy street scene effect and a slow-motion indoor theatrical effect.

The following are excerpts from a passage:

Great was the curiosity in Sambir on the subject of the new trader. ... Babalatchi, who was always a third party at those meetings of potentate and trader, knew how to resist all attempts on the part of the curious to ascertain the subject of so many long talks. When questioned with languid courtesy by the grave Abdullah, he sought refuge in a vacant stare of his one eye, and in the affectation of extreme simplicity. ...

“I am only my master’s slave,” murmured Bablatchi, in a hesitating manner. ... Attentive eyes watches his movements. Jim Eng, descrying Bablatchi far away, would shake off the stupor of an habitual opium smoker and, tottering on to the middle of the road, would await the approach of that important person, ready with hospitable invitation. ... To Almayer’s great disgust, he was to be seen there at all times, strolling about in an abstracted kind of way on the veranda, skulking in the passages, or else popped around unexpected corners, always willing to engage Mrs. Almeyer in confidential conversation. (AF, 45–46)

This passage is interjected often with the plural third person, the voice of the (except for Almayer) native inhabitants. Then it moves to a close third voice with Babalatchi but shifts to Abdullah’s, the Chinaman’s, and Almayer’s point of views when individually they enter and exit the scene. It’s also told in a mock folktale style (“Great was the curiosity”). The language is loaded with clichés and platitudes (“around corners,” “skulking in alleys,” “strolling about”), but that adds to the leisurely pace of the story. This is page 46, but if we didn’t know anyone, it would introduce Babalatchi’s and Abdullah’s conniving, Eng’s ineffectiveness, Almayer’s crabbiness and distrust, and Babalatchi’s collusion with Mrs. Almayer. Conrad had used much artistry and inventiveness to show the reader the avarice and greed, as well as the desultory tropical atmosphere on the banks of the Berau. The reader gets a close-up and a panoramic view. It unfolds like a Brecht social-commentary play, along the lines of *The Good Woman of Setzuan*.

Excerpts midway into the second scene will be even closer up, with Dain, the Bali price-entrepreneur, who’s pursued by Dutch patrols, Babalatchi, and his boss, the Rajah Lakumba in Lakumba’s “throne room.”

Dain waited till the crash of thunder had died away in distant mutterings before he spoke again.

Are you dumb, O ruler of Sambir, or the son of a great rajah unworthy of your notice? I am come here to seek refuge and to warn you, and want to know what you intend doing.”

“You came here because of the white man’s daughter...”

Babalatchi glanced at his master “No man can escape his fate,” he murmured piously. Be merciful, Lakumba, he added, twitching the corner of the Rajah’s sarong warningly. Lakumba snatched away the skirt of the sarong angrily. (AF, 64)

Later Lakumba asks for a music box and plays Verdi. The scene shows who’s in power and the dynamic between Babalatchi and the Rajah. It also shows Bablatchi change into a pious stance. Primarily, it moves the saga between Dain, Nina, and Almayer along.

Besides the points of view that Conrad changes continually, he used a cinematographic or theatrical touch often to slow down the plot, speed it up, or emphasize a key moment. *Omoo* and *Typee* paint scenes too, but this has action and dialogue and fits right in to the story line. The dialogue has a foreign sound that lend believability, almost Biblical in his cadence. Conrad’s heroes, white or not, are not particularly heroic. Even minor characters are used to support one of the warring tribal sides or humiliate and destroy the white imperialist. Not only does Conrad jump into minds, he lets his audience of whatever ethnicity sit in on a council in which the white man, be he the patrol Dutch or Almayer, is maligned and plotted against. The rulers are empowered by this characterization and so is a slave, because the reader become whatever character is being portrayed and is not seeing the native from a distance or a part of a passing panorama.

b. Ennobled Identity in *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896)

Ruth Nadelhaft, in her article “Women as Moral and Political Alternatives in Conrad’s Early Novels,” says

[W]omen are, and always were, central to Conrad’s vision as a political and moral novelist. ... Women, frequently half-breeds, represent the clearest means of challenging and revealing western male insularity and domination. ... [They] limit white power, reveal native vitality, and project doom of European male domination. (MCR)

This is shown in all of the Malay Trilogy novels, but especially in *Nina* and *Aissa*. *Nina* stands up to *Almayer* and leaves him. *Aissa* confronts captain *Lingard* and asks if he knows who he as well as she knows who she is.

Like in many Shakespeare plays, these women, so central to the plot and to deflating and humiliating white European men, have doubles who also have decisions. Their decisions and the choices they make parody those of the protagonists. Conrad ennobles *Nina* and *Taminah* and *Aissa* and *Joanna*.

Conrad uses the doubling in many ways. For readers of *Almayer’s Folly*, she’s a repeat of Mrs. *Almayer*. She’s a despised wife half-caste, the boss *Hudig’s* daughter *Willems* is forced to marry just like *Almayer* was forced to marry *Tom Lingard’s* daughter. In *An Outcast*, *Willems’s* wife, the half-Portuguese *Joanna*, and the *De Souza* family in *Macassar* is reviled like the half-Arab *Aissa* and her father *Omar* are in *Sambir*. *Willems* curses his lot, saying

They were a numerous and unclean crowd ... he kept them at arm’s length. (4)

Joanna is the women *Nadelhaft* describes as “a sort of gallery—whistling, catcalling, weeping—to comment on the action and to insist that action goes on offstage as well.” (152). She’s vocal in her silence. *Joanna* just listens to *Willems*, standing

at the far end of the table, her hands resting on the edge, her frightened eyes watching his lips, without a sound, without a stir, hardly breathing, until he dismissed her with a contemptuous: “Go to bed, dummy.” (OI, 9)

She may never have arrived in Sambir after the disgraced Willems had to leave if not for the malicious Almayer’s urging. Just like Aissa shows extraordinary bravery in confronting Lingard. Joanna confronts Aissa when there’s a revolver at hand—and slaps her. This has to be the bravest slap in literature.

Look, cried Aissa. Look at the mother of your child. She is afraid. Why does she not go from before my face? Look at her. She is ugly.

Joanna seemed to understand the scornful tone of the words. As Aissa stepped back again nearer to the tree she let go her husband’s arm, rushed at her madly, slapped her face, then swerving round, darted at the child, who, unnoticed, had been wailing for some time, and, snatching him up, flew down to the waterside, sending shriek after shriek in an access of insane terror. (IO, 359)

Joanna’s confrontation is braver than Aissa’s with Lingard, because of the revolver and also because of her subservient behavior up to that point. Conrad has ennobled oppressed female natives. In *Almayer Folly*’s preface, he says some seem

To think that in those distant lands all joy is a yell and a war dance, all pathos is a howl and a ghastly grin of filed teeth, and that the solution of all problems is found in the barrel of a revolver or the point of an assegai. And yet it is not so. . . . [T]here is a bond between us and that humanity so far away. (AF, xxvii-xxviii)

Although the presence of howls and revolvers in the above scene doesn’t support Conrad’s contention that “it is not so” in distant lands, he writes indigenous identity well enough here and in all three books to show the “bond between us and that humanity so far away.”

c. Sanctified Identity in *The Rescue* (1920)

The Rescue, written much later than the other two novels, is actually the earliest chronologically. Tom Lingard and Mrs. Travers are protagonists, she serving to distract him

from helping Hassim and Immada, who are his friends, the Dyak Rajah of Wajo and his sister. Tengga represents a rival tribe, and Belarab is an exiled chief who was to help Lingard oust the tribes that have taken over his Hassim and Immada's territory.

On some levels, this represents Conrad's most ambitious work for its geographical scope and multi-culturalism. The points of view jump much further, from white people stranded on a yacht to natives up a river where Lingard has hidden a boat he needs. There's a promising opening where Lingard praises his ship, a captain curses everyone, and Malay crew members in sarongs, a few in trousers, sit around a tray of rice. The helmsman and *serang* argue whether they've seen a ship.

"I saw a boat," [the helmsman] murmured with something of the tender obstinacy of a lover begging for a favor. "I saw a boat, O Haji Wasub! O Hajii Wasub!"

The *serang* had been twice a pilgrim, and was not insensible to the sound of his rightful title. There was a grim smile on his face.

"You saw a floating tree, O Sali," he said, ironically.

"I am Sali, and my eyes are better than the bewitched brass that thing that pulls out to a great length," said the pertinacious helmsman. "There was a boat." (Re, 16)

The above is from an outstanding opening chapter, "The Man and his Brig," about Lingard and his mostly native crew waiting to rescue the Dyaks. Soon after, most key scenes are those with white people on boats. The romance is between two white people. Natives are pushed to the background as they were in *Heart of Darkness*. This may be an indication of the huge recent success of the book *Chance*, a global bodice-ripper about a shipboard romantic triangle, which earned Conrad more money than he'd ever made but no one's heard of today. It's set in Europe, so there's few indigenous people. Maybe Conrad wanted another best-seller and catered to tastes. Maybe he's saluting the New Woman or Margaret Brooks the memoirist.

Hassim and Immada, for example, are pushed into the background. They're talked about in a letter from Lingard's ally Jorgenson (quoted earlier), they send messages through a servant, and they hide in mountains and on the beach. They serve as connectors but in a very different way than Babalatchi. Immada sees Mrs. Travers's eyes as evil and tries to warn Lingard. Mrs. Travers is entranced by Immada as if she were a child or doll. The royal brother and sister are sanctified when Jorgenson blows everyone up, including Tengga and the Illanuns, on the *Emma*. Just before that, the Dyaks ask their messenger Jaffir to give Lingard back a ring in a message of friendship and farewell. Jaffir, dying, talks to Lingard:

“Deliver your message, [Lingard] said in a gentle tone.

“The Rajah wished to hold your hand once more,” whispered Jaffir so faintly that Lingard had to guess the words rather than hear them. “I was to tell you,” he went on— and stopped suddenly.

“What were you to tell me?”

“To forget everything,” said Jaffir with a loud effort as if beginning a long speech. After that he said nothing more till Lingard murmured, “And the lady Immada?”

Jaffir collected all his strength. “She hoped no more,” he uttered, distinctly. “The order came to her while she mourned, veiled, apart. I didn't even see her face. ... We gave [the ring] to the white woman. (Re, 450).

That the ring, a token of his friendship with the Dyaks, was given by them to the white woman he betrayed them for is significant. Conrad forgot the indigenous characters of his imagination and conjured up the white female character Mrs. Travers instead. The gesture is symbolic in this third book in the Malay Trilogy, picked up where he left off 20 years after writing the first two trilogy books. The ring was a pledge to the Rajah and his sister to rescue them. In a literary sense, Conrad's the one who gave away the ring. He disengaged himself from his commitment of portraying indigenous people so prominently. They no longer own the story.

d. Imaginative Portrayal: Natives as Protagonists in Conrad

It seems odd *The Rescue* is the earliest set book, but maybe that's auspicious, though it's known it was written way later than *Almayer's* and *Outcast*—in 1920. At least in the trilogy time frame, the multicultural inhabitants will learn to live together in some places like Sambir, though it's not as successful for many business and most romantic relationships between Europeans and natives.

Nevertheless, it's Conrad's first book that has the fullest and richest indigenous writing. The world he creates on the shores of the Berau is beautifully and sensitively rendered, and worth the time spent with a book carried with him on several voyages including up the Congo River. The authors' first books are their best in their native portrayal.

Conclusion

Portraying a Character Crowd different from the author and audience's Birth Crowds is difficult, but Melville and Conrad found ways to do it.

An engaging narrator and audience education are two methods used by Melville. He used first person to give a scientific, close look at his native island inhabitants. The reader gets an intimate view of a subject and a sense of the personality through actions and through verbal communication. The fact that the communication is in another language and gestures or in broken English makes it more poignant. The reader is participating with the narrator in activities with indigenous people.

Conrad's used constantly changing points of view, so the reader can enter the minds of the multicultural population of the Malay Archipelago. He switches from one character's head to another's and back again in one paragraph of *Almayer's Folly*, so that in one chapter one can see what's happening to several characters at once: where they're going, what they're doing, and what they're thinking. The reader struggles with the native characters to make choices and shares their pain when the choice proves disastrous.

Both share certain techniques. Both time-travel to the past, the past of a character or a story from the past that pertains to local history. Both write with interruptions, so a story may be stopped and started again much later. Both insert rhetoric where needed. Both have equal-weight characters, or powerful minor players, so it's not always clear who's the protagonist, if any. Isolation, despair, and skepticism, in some cases nihilism, are shared by everyone from Kory-Kory to Nina. Betrayal is a major theme, and happens to or will probably happen to Taminah and Mrs. Almayer, among others.

The books could be looked at as mini-versions of the most famous books of the authors: *Moby-Dick* and *Heart of Darkness*. *Moby-Dick* is the same double story, the same use of devices like education and metaphor to communicate the Character Crowd. Ishmael's study of Queequeg's tattoos at the Sprouter Inn isn't that different from Tommo's study of Kory-Kory's. *Moby-Dick*'s use of the sea chest, the harpoon, the doubloon, and other symbols echoes *Typee* references to canoes, hats, spears, and calabashes, among other things. *Moby-Dick* is enlarged and more complex, but in its basic form, commentary intertwined with narrative, *Typee* is *Moby-Dick*. Melville boarded Polynesian, black, Native American, and others on the *Pequod*. In antebellum United States, certain scenes he depicts indicate a yearning for the past or a better

future. Melville has everyone in the crew squeeze hands on deck. The three harpooners the last to be seen on the masts, the Native American holding high his tomahawk.

Reading *Almayer's Folly* is like reading *Heart of Darkness*. The river's appearance is described throughout to set tone. Everyone seems to be looking at it, canoeing or swimming in it, or walking alongside it. Slaves are omnipresent, hidden when the Dutch arrive. Slaves work in all the houses, including Almayer's. In addition, everyone refers to themselves and others as slaves even when they aren't, especially Babalatchi and Mrs. Almayer. Maya Jasanoff, in *Dawn Watch*, writes:

Konrad had gone up the Congo River with Borneo on his mind ... The promise of untold wealth in the interior echoed the economy of the Congo Free State, where the richest supplies of ivory lay the farthest upriver. ... He also deepened the novel's portrayal of slavery, which persisted in both Congo and Borneo, even though it was officially forbidden. (216–217)

Heart of Darkness is so tightly constructed with constant signposts and recurrent themes and symbols and doubling that you can't say *Almayer's Folly* is a simpler model but essentially the same format as the later book the same way you can regarding *Typee* and *Moby-Dick*. But the slave, river, and treasure motifs reverberate, as does the sense of despair. Native characters are placed in the background in *Heart of Darkness* mainly to help create a sense of mystery, not to obscure them. But it's interesting to think what harsher critics of their portrayal would think if they saw the prominent role given to indigenous people in *Almayer's Folly*, his first novel.

After reading only *Typee* and *Heart of Darkness*, one would think Melville and Conrad had totally opposite approaches to their portrayals of natives. Melville seemed to be enthralled with natives, describing their bodies, their demeanor, articles of clothing, or ornaments. After a closer inspection, it would seem Melville does indeed deify and glorify the natives in *Typee*, and does try to communicate, but it's under duress and it's not as pleasant an interlude as one had

thought. True, Tommo wanted to meet island inhabitants in Nukuheva on leaves before he met the Typees. The narrator in *Omoa* wants to stay with natives and share feasts and meet the queen but only if he has one or two buddies along and can keep moving. It's true he wants to stay in one town, but the ship deserter police intervene, so it doesn't seem to be going to happen that he will remain with native inhabitants. Conrad seems to distance himself, portraying *Heart of Darkness* natives in crowds but not as individuals, hearing more than seeing them, working with a helmsman on a boat but not much other communication. But in *Almayer's Folly*, he makes them the most important town residents, with the white man the last of his ilk. Most amazing of all, Conrad becomes the natives, writing as he does in close third person, not in first person like Melville.

It can safely be said that all five books analyzed above, especially *Typee* and *Almayer's Folly*, demonstrate Nathaniel Hawthorne's contention that

In youth, men are apt to write more wisely than they know or feel; and the remainder of life may be not idly spent in realizing and convincing themselves of the wisdom which they uttered long ago.²¹

Notes

¹ David Bradley, in his article "Race, Reader, and Moby-Dick," says *Moby-Dick* is a master lesson for introducing Character Crowds, though Melville's efforts to communicate every way possible worked against him in the antebellum political climate of 1851. He says Melville conveyed his Character Crowd, particularly though the education motif, actual education of readers, narrator, beginning of story, and metaphor. His general theory about difficulty in portrayal is applied in this paper. Ramsey Lewis's instrumental and Dobie Gray's vocal rendition of "The In-Crowd" mocked high school in-crowds, but Bradley picks up its serious undertones.

² Arthur Waugh's criticism of *Almayer's Folly* is quoted in Robert Hampson's *Cross-Cultural Encounters in Joseph Conrad's Malay Fiction*. (2)

³ Hugh Clifford, quoted by Hampson. (5).

⁴ An excerpt from the second preface (1919) to *A Personal Record* is quoted in *Joseph Conrad on Fiction*, edited by Walter F. Wright. (186)

⁵ John Bryant, in his comprehensive introduction to this author's edition of *Typee*, gives many examples of revisions Melville had to make, especially for the American version. Bryant claims that Melville's original *Typee* manuscript, discovered in 1983, generated a field of study.

⁶ Lest readers object to this characterization of Conrad's writing, it's this author's intention to point out that, next to Melville, with his lengthy digressions, Conrad could be thought of as a purposeful writer. Bios, critical pieces, and his own writing indicate he tried to imitate Henry James and French writers and pay close attention to the craft of a novel. The earlier novels, though using time shifts and multiple points of view, and many of the distancing techniques listed by Seltzer, don't have the excessive word repetitions, blatant signposts and symbolism, rhetorical interludes, and general obfuscation most readers associate with *Heart of Darkness*.

⁷ I'm drawing on Robert Hampson's account of the textual tradition of Conrad's time. It should be pointed out that it's also Melville's textual tradition to some extent, when discussing Marsden and Raffles, because of the eventual adoption of European thought by the U.S. Similarly, explorers and adventurers named by Melville would likely have been familiar to Conrad as a fellow explorer and avid reader. Marsden, Wallace, and Raffles' portrayals of indigenous will be elaborated further in this paper.

⁸ Captain Carlos Marris, quoted in Hampson. (12) Marris wrote a letter to Conrad in 1909 when he was in England for medical treatment and then visited Conrad for a day before he went back to the archipelago. He'd been on the *Vidar* that Conrad used to sail up the Berau River on. Marris had worked on the *Rajah Laut* with Lingard's nephew, Joshua Lingard.

⁹ From an abstract of Russell Thomas's article, "Yarn for Melville's *Typee*," in *A Critical Guide to Herman Melville: Abstracts of Forty Years of Criticism*. (72)

¹⁰ Hampson. (73)

¹¹ Hampson's description of the three histories and the textual tradition they represent I've attempted to summarize. Hampson describes Wallace's illustrations of natives in fields working or in homes. They are clearly pictured, and their individuality is emphasized.

¹² Christopher GoGwilt, quoted in Hampson. (15)

¹³ Hampson's overview of the various native ethnic groups and also enterprising outsiders from Bali and elsewhere, as well as the role of the Dutch and British, are referenced here. Even armed with Hampson's comprehensive overview, it's hard to pinpoint the ethnicity and national origin of many of Conrad's native characters and to distinguish between long-time residents, relatively recent immigrants, and those taking up residence at the time the stories take place.

¹⁴ Hampson jokes that James Banks's running naked in the indigenous mourning ritual was early participant-observation. (47)

¹⁵ Maya Jasanoff in *Dawn Watch* ties a few of Conrad's novels to modern times and stresses their prophetic quality. She shows how the Congo influenced *Almayer's Folly*. She believed Conrad always had Poland on his mind when he wrote about oppressed people. Gay Wilson Allen in *Melville and His World* relates how many times Melville's family suffered financial setbacks, borrowed, and moved. Illustrations of illustrious relatives and various homes, as well as documents such as the *Acushnet* passenger list, add poignancy.

¹⁶ Leon P. Selzer's book, *The Shared Vision of Melville and Conrad*, is the most comprehensive and relevant study on the two authors found by this author. It argues that the two authors are "kindred spirits" and share similar outlooks. The shared vision extends to characterization and distancing devices and, in fact, permeates all aspects of their writing.

¹⁷ "Tommo" is more or less nameless in *Omoo*. I don't see his name on the *Julia* Round Robin. He was Tom before he was Tommo, but Long Ghost and he use "Peter" and "Paul" for protection when they're potato farmers. A few critics use "the narrator." The *Omoo* narrator differs from Tommo, and *Omoo* may be a *Typee* sequel but hardly connects with it. Dillingham says the *Omoo* narrator is typical of Melville recording narrators in his restlessness but, unlike the *Typee* narrator, not anxious or brooding and not interested in recapturing the past. (80)

¹⁸ These are the first-mentioned and most fundamental approaches set forth in the anthropological methods I accessed. Wikibooks techniques of anthropology WikiBooks: Cultural Anthropology/anthropological methods http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Spradley

¹⁹ Cabeza de Vaca's nine-year journey from Florida to Texas, where a handful of men survived from stranded ships, tells how, among other things, he became a witch doctor to survive. His tells his story in *Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca: Chronicle of the Navaez Expedition*. Mary Jemison's dictated story is included in *Women's Indian Captivity Narratives*. She tells in the English she never forgot how she watched her family's scalps be heated and dyed, and later had two husbands and named her children after members of her family. She ate with her hands, sat on the floor, and looked up at her audience from under her eyebrows.

²⁰ Conrad made a similarly impassioned, much longer speech to his inspiration, Charles Olmeijer, but he made it outside the confines of the novel. He is quoted in *Joseph Conrad on Fiction*. Edited by Walter W. Wright. (141–142)

²¹ Nathaniel Hawthorne is quoted by William P. Dillingham in Chapter 1, "Lee Shore and Howling Infinite," *An Artist in the Rigging: The Early Work of Herman Melville*. (1) Hawthorne wrote the words in the preface of a collection of short stories, some written early in his life. The original source is *The Snow-Image and Other Twice-Told Tales, The Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Boston, 1883), III, 399.

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