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赫尔曼·麦尔维尔在《泰彼》中体现的对
殖民主义的矛盾态度

Herman Melville's Ambivalent Attitude towards
Colonialism in *Typee*

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Abstract

Throughout the critical history of Herman Melville's first novel *Typee* based on his personal sea travel experience, a lot of critics have noticed Melville's pointed critique of colonialism in his narrative, but they more or less ignore Melville's unconscious complicity in the colonial ideology of his time. Although some critics have observed Melville's complicated view concerning colonialism represented in this novel, they primarily emphasize Melville's intentional complicity in colonial discourse. This M.A. thesis aims to examine Melville's explicit anticolonial assertions and his implicit reinforcement of colonialism in *Typee*. The basic argument of my thesis is that Melville's attitude towards colonialism in *Typee* is ambivalent. He overtly critiques colonialism but unwittingly consolidates the colonial ideology he ruthlessly condemns.

Chapter one concentrates on the analysis of Melville's overt effort to challenge the ideologies of colonial and racial thinking that were prevalent in the mid-nineteenth century. Melville's text is replete with his ruthless denunciation of colonialism and radical interrogation of the colonized natives' rigid images of alterity fabricated by the colonizers to confirm their self-identity. The Eden-like *Typee* society is entirely distinct from the corrupted and wicked Western world and the islanders' goodness, simplicity and nobility stand in sharp contrast to Westerners' barbarity, over-sophistication and depravity. It is fairly doubtless that this novel conspicuously incorporates Melville's scathing critique of the modern Euro-American colonial venture in the South Seas.

Chapter two discusses *Typee's* covert complicity in the West's colonial discourse. Melville's explicit anticolonial assertions are undermined, however, by the narrative strategies of manipulating the natives and their culture. Melville's representation of Marquesas Islands in an imaginary West-oriented geographical structure and the narrator's cultural privilege over the Marquesan natives in some

sense reinforce implicitly ethnic differences and ethnocentrism. It can be said that Melville's narrator does not give up his White Supremacy when he observes the native culture and thus does not sever himself entirely from the colonial ideology despite his radical critique of Euro-American political, economical and ideological intervention in the South Pacific.

Since the previous two chapters of my thesis mainly focus on the narrator Tommo and his changing views of the islanders, chapter three concentrates on the analysis of subversive forces of native islanders in their contact with Euro-Americans. Tommo, the spokesman of Melville, in many situations of the novel is a privileged and confident observer. However, the native islanders are not entirely inactive or submissive to white authority and privilege in Melville's narrative. *Typee* includes many radical transgressive situations in which native people are not passively on the short end of the interaction with white Westerners. On the contrary, they positively manipulate many situations that render the colonial Westerners to a disadvantageous level and thus challenge the colonial domination. Melville's critical stance of anticolonialism is further illustrated by the subversive images of the natives he constructs in the novel.

The conclusion summarizes Melville's antagonistic attitude towards colonialism and his unconscious complicity in colonial discourse, which are simultaneously embodied in the novel. This part also briefly discusses the causes of his ambivalent attitude in the historical context of his time and the significance of this thesis.

Key Words: colonialism; anticolonialism; ambivalent attitude

摘 要

对于赫尔曼·麦尔维尔以自己的航海经历为背景创作的第一部长篇小说《泰彼》，很多文学评论者注意到了麦尔维尔在该小说中对殖民主义的无情批判，但他们或多或少忽略了麦尔维尔对同时代殖民主义主导意识的潜在参与。虽然也有评论者指出了麦尔维尔在《泰彼》中体现的对殖民主义的复杂立场，但这些批评家多重在分析麦尔维尔对西方殖民话语的有意识参与。本文将《泰彼》置于殖民主义和帝国主义语境下加以研读，旨在指出麦尔维尔在这部早期作品中体现的对殖民主义的矛盾态度：他既对十九世纪中叶的种族和殖民的主导意识进行了批判又与之保持了某种暧昧关系，只不过前者是显性的而后者表现得较为隐晦。麦尔维尔既是同时代欧美殖民主义主导意识的反叛者，同时也是同谋者。

第一章论述了麦尔维尔对十九世纪中期殖民意识形态和种族偏见的有意识的质疑。麦尔维尔不仅在文本中多次对殖民主义进行了猛烈抨击，同时对殖民者为强化自我而臆造的被殖民者的“他者”形象进行了质疑。与腐坏堕落的西方文明世界截然不同是马克萨斯岛民伊甸园般的社会。麦尔维尔笔下的土著岛民单纯、善良、真诚，与世故、邪恶、虚伪的西方文明人形成鲜明对。可以说这部小说深刻体现了作者对同时代欧美殖民主义的批判精神。

第二章探讨《泰彼》对西方殖民话语的潜在参与。麦尔维尔的叙述者托莫一方面贪婪地享受着泰彼峡谷中原始单纯的美好生活，一方面又积极地观察和揣度着异域生活。当地的地理风貌、土著人的面貌、生活习惯、宗教习俗等都成了他好奇并想了解的“他者”。他虽对殖民主义有所批判，但始终保持了一种“白人优越感”和文化特权。通过对南海岛民进行种族优劣划分、某种程度上对他们的人性的否定、对土著“食人”威胁的渲染、以民族志的口吻对异域文化进行的主观评价及对自身西方物质文明优越感的强化，《泰彼》也潜在地参与了文化殖民主义，从而削弱了它反殖民主义的力度。

如果说前两章主要是从叙述者托莫的视角分析《泰彼》的双重殖民话语性质，第三章则重在探讨麦尔维尔在文本中赋予南海岛民的颠覆殖民统治和种族压迫的反叛性力量。在西方入侵者与当地岛民接触、较量的诸多情形中，泰彼居民并非总是被动地处于被审视观察的地位，而是主动操控着众多局面、积极地对西方外来者实施着监制，决定着托莫的去留、更企图用纹身的做法使托莫皈依当地文化。其它南海岛民也在诸多“越界”情形中扮演了积极的角色，使西方殖民者处于双方交往的不利位置，颠覆了作为“他者”的僵化形象，从而进一步体现了麦尔维尔的反殖民主义立场。

本文结论部分结合同时代美国历史文化语境，对麦尔维尔在《泰彼》中同时体现的反殖民主义与殖民主义的复杂立场进行了总结，并简要探讨了麦尔维尔矛盾态度的原因其本文研究意义。

关键字： 殖民主义 反殖民主义 矛盾态度

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Introduction

1. Herman Melville and *Typee*

Typee is Herman Melville's first literary undertaking based on his sea travel experience in the South Pacific and his sojourn on the Islands of Marquesas from July to August 1842. In 1841, Herman Melville went to sea aboard the whaler *Acushnet* as a crew member. This journey took him around Cape Horn and into the Pacific Ocean. Partly bored with the tedious and oppressive service on the whaler and partly tempted by a desire to try the life on a lush tropical island among a kindly and unspoiled people, Melville and his shipmate named Richard Tobias Greene (the character of "Toby" in *Typee*) covertly deserted their vessel when it arrived in the Marquesas Islands in July 1842. In the process of eluding recapture, they accidentally wandered into a valley that was inhabited by the Typees, said to be ferocious man-eaters, rather than the gentle tribe Happers which they expected to encounter. Yet they were treated friendly. Melville spent about four weeks (which was considerably lengthened to four months in the book) among the islanders and was subject to a kind of friendly imprisonment. Melville found life here interesting and on the whole pleasant. But his companion's mysterious disappearance after being allowed to seek medical assistance for his injured leg and the apprehension of being eaten by the assumed cannibals constantly haunted him before he eventually left for Tahiti on an Australian vessel *Lucy Ann*. After taking a series of voyages in the South Seas, he was enlisted in the U.S. Navy and sailed back to Boston on the frigate *United States* in 1844.

Once back home with his family, Melville started working on drafting his inimitable experience of Nukuheva adventures. Melville's sojourn in the Typee valley with the supposed cannibalistic natives became the subject of his apprentice work. The manuscript was taken to London by Melville's elder brother Gansevoort, who had just been appointed Secretary of the Legation there. It was soon accepted by

John Murray, who required Melville to add more authentic contents and then published it in his prestigious “Colonial and Home Library” series, a collection profiling cultural life on colonial lands. Appearing almost simultaneously in England and in the United States (published by Wiley and Putnam) as *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life* (1846), it achieved instant success and popularity, which made Melville launch his literary career.

2. Literature Review on the Studies of *Typee* and My Approach to It

When *Typee* was published in 1846, most British and American reviewers on it were fully attracted by the freshness, humor and vivacity of Melville’s writing as well as its intimate ethnographical description of the Marquesans. However, a few hostile critics were outraged by *Typee* for its radicalness and open implication of voluptuousness as well as its mockery of Western colonization and Christian missionaries. Therefore, those critics attacked Melville’s adamant assertion of “unvarnished truth” (T xx)¹ in his narrative and denounced the book as a fabrication and Melville as an imposter (Huggins and Parker 76-80). It is fairly obvious that many of the earlier studies focus on the authenticity of Melville’s narrative and thus treat it mostly as biographical in nature. *Typee* also “attracts criticism of the universal and symbolic school” (Schueller 6). This novel has been considered as a symbolic “descent into the canyon of the past” (Arvin 12), a symbolic exploration into the “murderous part of all men” (Stern 137) and “an apprentice version of Melville’s horror at the relativity of values” (Oliviero 42). These interpretations generally overlook the historical context and cultural complexities in which a text is involved and through which it derives its significance. In order to foreground a social and political context that is often ignored, it is worth mentioning some of the historical information about the Marquesan colonization.

Typee can be seen as a representation of the colonial history of Marquesas

¹ See Herman Melville. *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life*. New York: Modern Library, 2001. Subsequent references to the novel are cited by abbreviation and page number in the text.

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