

PREFACE

This book about a fluid text is itself a fluid text because it has evolved through several versions. It began soon after the 1983 discovery of the *Typee* manuscript when I purchased a microfilm of the document and began comparing its text to that of a print version, taking notes on the differences. I saw enough to make me think that Melville's revisions were extensive and meaningful, but I realized, with some gloom, that my notes were utterly inadequate to convey the meaning of Melville's revisions to others, or myself for that matter. I also recognized that someone would have to perform a complete transcription of the manuscript, and I discovered, again more gloom, that no one else was willing to do that job.

The first version of this book, then, was a full transcription and brief introduction that I kept to myself and shared with students at Hofstra University and in two NEH Summer Seminars I conducted in 1993 and 1995. By then I had become a member of the Society for Textual Scholarship and was developing my ideas about what I call "the fluid text" as they relate to the textual theories and editorial practices of G. Thomas Tanselle, Jerome J. McGann, Peter Shillingsburg, and Hans Walter Gabler. As a practicing editor trying to make sense of Melville and his creation of the *Typee* manuscript, I also drew inspiration and support from Harrison Hayford and Robert C. Ryan, who like Tanselle are noted Melville scholars and textual critics.

However, in trying to teach Melville's revision strategies, I quickly determined that a transcription of the manuscript, by itself, was useless, first, because the transcription, with all its messy deletions and interlinear insertions reproduced faithfully, is just as hard to read as the manuscript and, second, because a transcription tells us nothing about evolution; it keeps hidden from readers what I have now come to call the "invisible text of revision," that is, the actual wordings Melville must have considered as he revised on the page and the stories behind those revisions. What I learned by teaching revision was that in order to make the invisible visible, I also had to determine the sequential steps Melville took in each revision. Thus, for several years, I spent my summers creating for each of the one thousand

revision sites in the manuscript a unique revision sequence and an accompanying explanatory revision narrative. I also devised a reading text of the manuscript that provides the final wording Melville intended by his many revisions.

From the beginning of this project, I had also recognized that a digital edition of *Typee* would be an exciting way to make Melville's creative process come alive for readers. Initially, I had the naive notion that I might devise a program that would show the manuscript text actually growing on the screen as that text must have grown, as it flowed from Melville's quill: it would be a sort of animated manuscript. But continued inspection of the manuscript revealed to me that the document represents many phases and stages of writing that do not flow neatly one to the other but in fact overlap, so that my imagined textual animation could not really work. Furthermore, I also came to feel that a digitized reenactment of textual growth, however managed, would give readers the false impression that the enactment is the act itself, when in reality it can be nothing more than a clever, glittering, fragmentary critical construction. Of course, I could not escape making a textual construct, no matter what I did editorially—it is the nature of editing to create a textual construct—but I did not want readers to confuse glitter with reality, or worse, to assume that my “bells and whistles” represented anything more than my speculation.

Instead I developed the “storyboard” for an online site that would allow readers to inspect digital images of the manuscript and my transcription simultaneously, and to use a version of my reading text to hyperlink to the revision sequences and narratives I had composed. I shared this storyboard with John Unsworth and Daniel Pitti at the University of Virginia's Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities. They agreed that my ideas could be transformed into an actual site, but despite their support, for which I remain grateful, government funding was not forthcoming. In due course, Michael Gusinde-Duffy of the University of Virginia Press accepted the project as part of the Press's Rotunda series of electronic editions; David Sewell and Timothy Finney saw the project through to completion. The final product, titled *Herman Melville's Typee: A Fluid-Text Edition*, was launched in 2006, and my gratitude to the Press and its staff is expressed more fully in the site's acknowledgments. To use the edition, readers can visit http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu:8100/index.php?page_id=Home.

But while an electronic edition is the perfect solution for displaying the full archive of materials related to the *Typee* manuscript, it does not provide

the creature comforts of a book, which, in my view, is the better venue for the kind of theorizing and critical analysis I was beginning to perform based on findings in the manuscript. For my study of *Typee*, I set about writing a book. In its early manifestation this book laid out a theoretical framework and critical vocabulary for discussing fluid texts and then offered a critical and historical analysis of the *Typee* manuscript as an introduction to a print version of the edited document. LeAnn Fields, acquisitions editor for University of Michigan Press and a champion of scholars, accepted the book for publication, and quietly suggested that what I had submitted might really be two books. She was right, of course. With good advice from George Bornstein and helpful readings from Peter Shillingsburg and Robin Schulze, I pulled out the theoretical chapters from the book and expanded them into a separate book, titled *The Fluid Text* (2001).

While *The Fluid Text* uses *Typee* as its principal example, it does not scratch the surface of what I had found in the manuscript, a document that represents some of the earliest stages of writing of Melville's first book. With a sabbatical from Hofstra in 2003–4 and an NEH fellowship in 2004–5, I was able to augment, revise, and reassemble the remaining chapters of my original book into *Melville Unfolding*, a critical companion to its more theoretical predecessor, *The Fluid Text*. A version of chapter 9 has already appeared as "The Native Gazes: Sexuality and Self-Colonization in Melville's *Typee*" in *Melville Among the Nations*, ed. Sanford E. Marovitz (Kent State University Press, 2001). Let me also thank the various contributors to Ishmail, the Melville Society's online discussion group, for listening and responding to my ideas, and the remarkable members of the Melville Society, among them Charlene Avalone, the late Jill Barnum, Mary K. Bercaw Edwards, Dennis Berthold, Alex Calder, Randall Cluff, Henry Hughes, Wyn Kelley, Robert Levine, Sanford E. Marovitz, Robert Milder, Steven Olsen-Smith, Samuel Otter, Jack Putnam, Elizabeth Renker, André Revel, Douglas Robillard, Geoffrey Sanborn, Elizabeth Schultz, the late Bryan Scott, Haskell Springer, Christopher Sten, and Robert K. Wallace: some have read parts of this book, each has influenced my thinking about *Typee*, Melville, and texts; all remain good friends.

I want to express my further indebtedness to LeAnn Fields for her continued championing of this work during an era in which such scholarship is no longer deemed cost-effective, hot, or sexy; although for the life of me I do not know why. Similarly, I am indebted to Hofstra Provost Herman Berliner and Dean Bernard Firestone for their financial support in the preparation of

this volume's appended fluid-text edition. I am also grateful to Rebecca Mostov and especially her successor Anna Szymanski, as well as Marcia LaBrenz, who squired this complicated book through production. Thanks go as well to those at the New York Public Library who from as early as 1986 have given me direct access to the *Typee* manuscript and permission to reproduce images of it: they are Lisa Browar, Mimi Bowling, William Stingone, and Thomas Lisanti.

The projected third volume in my fluid-text trilogy is called *Witness and Access*, and it argues that culture like a text is fluid; it always revises itself. And if that is the case, then reading texts as fluid texts might also help us understand how cultures and the people within them redefine themselves and evolve. It's just an idea, but one that has been brewing in me since 1986, and I hope to see it through. In these past twenty years I have seen much change in this country, my family, and myself. I have helped raise two children and adopted a third, who came to us suddenly, from China, and by an unexpected route—these three are Emma, Eliza, and Liana—and their growth has been the leaves of my being. But their unfoldings and my own—my writing, my life—would have no substance or light except that they are shared by Virginia Blanford, my inmost leaf.