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Face Divine, Race Demonic: Tattooing as Spectacle in the Slave-Captivity Narratives of Melville and Oatman

Keiko Shirakawa

I. Introduction

From Herman Melville's earlier works, *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847), through *Moby-Dick* (1851), to *Billy Budd, Sailor* (1891) Melville portrays both tattoos and the act of tattooing in vivid descriptions that largely avoid overtly attributing racial connotations to the practice. Yet in *Typee*, Melville reveals an implicit racial agenda through his narrator Tommo's abhorrence at the prospect of his white "face divine" (220) being tattooed by his cannibalistic captors. Tommo's abhorrence represents the broader fears of even tolerant antebellum Caucasians towards non-white, non-Christians, and conveys a view of tattoos as both literal and figurative signs of racial inferiority, even though Melville consistently displays the sympathetic and multivalent attitudes towards the various races through the life of sea. During the 19th century, assertions of the racial inferiority of non-whites were central to justifications of American imperialism; numerous critics— including Mitchell Breitwieser, Malini Johar Schueller, Wai-Chee Dimock, and S. X. Goudie—have argued broadly that *Typee*, despite both the protagonist's ostensible sympathy for indigenous peoples and his apparent critiques of Western imperialism, comprises a discourse of racial colonialism that in fact supported the American expansionist project.

Reflecting upon the historical issues of slavery and territorial acquisition that surrounded the composition of *Typee*, John Carlos Rowe observes that the novel is informed by two American narrative traditions: the fugitive slave narrative and the Puritan captivity narrative (255-56). In view of these traditions, *Typee* can be understood as a rendering of both the rhetorical and political structure of racial conflict in terms of an objectifier-objectified relationship, as defined by Leonard Cassuto.

From this perspective, Melville's maritime slave-captivity narratives inform and are informed by actual historical cases of white tattooed captivity survivors. Melville composed his novels at a time when theatrical performances featuring white tattooed survivors of captivity in indigenous South Sea cultures enjoyed popularity. Furthermore, a central episode in antebellum racial discourse was the captivity of Olive Ann Oatman, who was tattooed during a five year sojourn among Yavapai and Mohave Native Americans. Whereas Melville represents his ambivalent multi-racial situation in his narratives especially through the act of tattooing, Oatman embodied such complicated racial complexity by her transfiguration of her own body.

This essay explores the negotiations within and between the captivity narratives of Melville and these actual captivity survivors—particularly Olive Oatman—on the meanings of tattoos and tattooing in relation to social constructions of fiction and reality, dominance and subordination, and racial identity in the antebellum American cultural arena. Specifically, this essay will consider how Melville, who described racial hybridity under the multicultural situation on the board of the Pequod, had constructed his early narratives in accord with dominant antebellum racial discourse, representing tattoos as emblems of racial inferiority that were degrading to the white "face divine;" as well as how Oatman deconstructed Melville's narratives

through public exhibitions of her facial tattoos that subversively challenged the dominant racial discourse, undermining notions of superiority and inferiority that sustained the antebellum social order.

Both Melville and Oatman must have recognized that tattoos and being tattooed—going native—was threatening to the white race not because the mark simply demonstrated racial degradation but because it may have had the power to subvert the Anglo-Saxon's racial criteria. On the one hand, Melville confined the fear of tattoos and tattooing within his narratives, making reference to the actual reports of ethnography or adventure stories. Oatman, on the other hand, foregrounded the precarious definition of race by turning the figurative description of tattooing concealed in narratives into the literally visible stigmata that ironically possessed the potential of blurring the color line.

II. Saving Face, Preserving Race

Melville's representation of tattoos as stigmata of racial inferiority reflected a common view of tattooing in antebellum America, a period during which the United States was escalating its ongoing national effort to subjugate African and Native Americans domestically even as it pursued broad ambitions to establish hegemony over diverse non-white, non-Christian peoples abroad. Domestically, white Americans had frequent opportunity to witness the branding of slaves, livestock, and criminals, and were widely aware of the customary wearing of face and body tattoos among Native Americans. As news of American (and European) imperialist activities reached the United States from abroad—not least through the tales of sailors and explorers—white Americans gained familiarity with customary tattooing among diverse indigenous peoples. Given prevalent white attitudes towards race, the ineradicable blackish-blue mark of the

tattoo came to be regarded as a sign of the inhumanity of the dark-skinned races, and the unblemished skin of their conquerors as a sign of white superiority.

In regard to Melville's depiction of tattooing, the history of American imperialism in the Marquesas Islands—the setting of *Typee*—bears mention here. English explorer James Cook introduced the islands to colonial history in 1774, but with the War of 1812, American naval commander David Porter took control of the Marquesas for the United States; America annexed the island of Nukuheva outright in 1813. As is widely known, Melville referred to Captain Porter's logbook during the writing of *Typee*, a point worth noting in regard to arguments concerning the hegemonistic subtext in this and other Melville novels.

Turning to such arguments, Michel Breitwieser has indicated Tommo's narrative oscillations between two perspectives: the Marquesan innocence and depravity. Extending Breitwieser's discussion, Malini Johar Schueller has contended that despite its seeming critique of Great Power colonialism, *Typee* lent strong indirect support to the discourse of American cultural imperialism by drawing clear distinctions between colonizers as civilized and the colonized as savage (4). Homi Bhabha has referred to the drawing of such distinctions as a "strategy of disavowal," a hegemonistic practice whereby "the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something *different* " (172).

In this light, although Melville admits the ethnographic uniqueness of the Typee, his loathing of facial tattoos emerges as representative of American attitudes underpinning and justifying the conquest of Polynesians: specifically, the view of the literal blackening of the tattoo not as an affirmation of tribal, religious, and cultural identity, but rather as a mark of degradation. This view of tattooing emerges most clearly in Melville's

portrayal of his white narrator confronting the possibility of being tattooed:

> Horrified at the bare thought of being rendered hideous for life, if the
> wretch [the tattooist Karky] were to execute his purpose upon me
> [Tommo], I struggle to get away from him, while Kory-Kory, turning
> traitor, stood by, and besought me to comply with the outrageous
> request. (254-55)

Despite the narrator's playful tone, Melville expands upon Tommo's
negative view of tattooing with an overt expression of Tommo's revulsion
for the practice:

> These apprehensions were greatly increased by the desire which King
> Mehevi and several of the inferior chiefs now manifested that I
> should be tattooed. [. . .] Doubtless he [Karky] had plotted a
> conspiracy against me and my countenance, and would never rest
> until his diabolical purpose was accomplished. [. . .] What an object
> he would have made of me! (255)

Interestingly, even in *Omoo*, Melville reserves particular antipathy on the
part of his narrator for Caucasians who submit willingly to being tattooed:

> With them also came a stranger, a renegado from Christendom and
> humanity—a white man, in the South Sea girdle, and tattooed in the
> face. A broad blue band stretched across his face from ear to ear, and
> on his forehead was the taper figure of a blue shark, nothing but fins
> from head to rail.
> Some of us gazed upon this man with a feeling akin to horror, no

ways abated when informed that he had voluntarily submitted to his embellishment of his countenance. What an impress! Far worse than Cain's. (353)

Thus, Melville's persistent description of abhorrence to being tattooed suggests that the protagonist's worst fear is not Typees' cannibalism but their custom of tattooing.

It is noteworthy that Tommo's fear of being tattooed applies especially to his face. Reasoning that civilized people might find an arm tattoo acceptable given his occupation as a seafarer, Tommo offers to submit his arm rather than his face to tattooing in hopes of appeasing his captors. When they insist upon tattooing his face, Tommo's panic reaches a crescendo and the specific nature of his fear emerges: if his "face divine" is ruined forever, he will "never more [. . .] have the face to return" to his countrymen, "even should an opportunity offer" (255).

Samuel Otter sheds light on the special significance of facial tattooing for Tommo as a Caucasian. In his *Melville's Anatomies*, Otter juxtaposes a number of images of the head from the antebellum period, including contemporary engravings of two inhabitants of the island of Nukuheva and a Frenchman, Jean Baptiste Cabri, who had been tattooed during his captivity among them;[1] exemplary heads from the phrenology manuals of the famed Fowler brothers; and a chart of cephalic characteristics measured by the then-prominent craniometer introduced by Thomas Sewall (29-44). Comparing these images, Otter recognizes in the patterns of male Marquesan facial tattoos the contours of racial inferiority delineated by the widely discussed nineteenth century pseudosciences of phrenology and craniology. Otter furthermore draws a striking analogy between the division of the tattooed Polynesian face into black and white zones and the pigmentation

patterns resulting from the congenital disorder of albinism in blacks, thereby exposing the subconscious identification of being tattooed with taking on black characteristics by antebellum whites. "The stable imperfections of blackness" (Otter 44) inherent in Marquesan tattoos was so strong that once the characteristic lines of the tattoo were inscribed on white skin, the owner of that skin became, like Cabri, a racial freak in the eyes of antebellum society. It is this sense of racial indeterminacy that is at the heart of Tommo's fear of tattooing.

In light of Otter's analysis, the difference between cannibalism and tattooing for Tommo is one of signification. Whereas by eating human flesh—or indeed, being eaten by the Typees—Tommo would suffer no evident loss of status as a Caucasian, a tattoo would mark him with an unconcealable stigma of racial degradation. In order to avoid bearing such a sign of inferiority, Tommo is willing to face the possibility of returning to his former position of actual inferiority—indeed, of forced servitude—under an oppressive ship's captain.

Tommo's fear of tattoos is shared by another of Melville's protagonists, Ishmael of *Moby-Dick*, whose attitudes towards tattooing are clearly reflected in his initial reactions to the Pacific Islander Queequeg. Ishmael first meets Queequeg at an inn in New Bedford when the proprietor of the overbooked establishment assigns Ishmael to be Queequeg's roommate. Despite both his own claim to be "no coward" and the proprietor's forewarning of Queequeg's eccentric but harmless demeanor, Ishmael finds himself as frightened upon Queequeg's nocturnal arrival in their room "as if it was the devil himself who had thus broken into [the] room at the dead of night" (29). What Ishmael finds particularly frightening about Queequeg is less the string of dried, shrunken human heads that the "cannibal" happens to be carrying than the tattoos upon his face, which Ishmael describes as being

of "a dark purplish yellow color, here and there stuck over with large, blackish looking squares" (28). Although Ishmael quickly comes to find Queequeg a rather attractive individual—and indeed, to feel a sense of shared destiny with him in the course of their joint servitude under Ahab— this excessive initial reaction to Queequeg's tattoos bears close consideration.

It is of particular interest that an element of curiosity informs Ishmael's fearful reaction, a curiosity perhaps akin to that which drew antebellum American audiences to popular stage performances featuring tattooed aboriginals, white survivors of captivity in indigenous cultures, and other exhibitions of people whose existence transgressed received notions of white norms. Such performances date at least from the sixteenth century, when imperial powers captured Eskimos, Philippine natives, and Native Americans—all bearing blue images upon their skins—from the margins of the known world for display at fairs and other public exhibitions. The first tattooed white man thus displayed on the American stage was the Irishman James O'Connell, a survivor of captivity on the Micronesian island of Ponape, who began his entertainment career as a circus act in the mid-1830s.[2] Cabri, the tattooed French captivity survivor introduced in the travel sketches of G. H. von Langsdorff,[3] pursued a similar career after his rescue, as did an English captivity survivor, John Rutherford. In 1841, such spectacles of non-normative humanity - commonly referred to as "freak shows"—reached a watershed with the opening of P. T. Barnum's museum in New York, wherein Barnum displayed, in his words, "mysterious deviations from nature's usual course"(Gilbert 136). The antebellum American public received these ostensibly true narratives of the deviant with a titillating mixture of enjoyment and fright, and as eloquent testimony— particularly with regard to white tattooed freaks such as O'Connell, Cabri,

and Rutherford—that the normal could become abnormal.[4]

By the time Melville wrote *Typee*, the narratives of such white tattooed freaks—and of the culture of freak and minstrel shows in general—were well-established in the public consciousness; Melville's novels must thus be read against a backdrop of white racialist discourse wherein real tattoo-blackened freaks aroused both curiosity and fear at the potential for Caucasian racial status to be transgressed—that is, for whites to be transformed into inferior, degraded beings. Casting such subjects of abjection within the confines of fiction in the context of this political/cultural discourse, Melville might well have subverted the conqueror-conquered relationship had he chosen to pursue a discursive strategy to this end. Yet despite his awareness of the freak show milieu, what Melville provided for antebellum Americans was essentially restorative adventure fiction: Tommo escapes tattooing to return safely to white society with no loss of face; and despite the author's multivalent attitudes towards racial politics, Ishmael alone, as his educated white author's alter ego, survives the catastrophic encounter of the Pequod with Moby Dick, while the ship's entire complement of abnormal, inferior beings—its insane, one-legged captain; its tattooed black, red, and yellow heathen savages; and its lower-class sailors—are destroyed.

Observing the antebellum rise of the freak show and the contemporaneous escalation of the slavery controversy, as well as the postwar decline of the freak show and concurrent growth of the civil rights movement, Leonard Cassuto argues that freak and minstrel shows were both sites of racial conflict at which the ideology of inequality played out, with the unstable master-slave dynamic sustained only by the overwhelming power of the master to contain any challenge from the enslaved. Speculating on the sources of nineteenth century racialist psuedoscience and freak

shows, Cassuto specifically identifies Tommo's fear of tattooing in *Typee* with white fears of the collapse of this racial dynamic:

> The early study of the cultures of native people was part and parcel of the discourse of racial inferiority, and the goal of nineteenth-century science was the same as that of the freak show: to construct and scrutinize the edges of humanity. Thus, the discussion about tattooing and cannibalism in Tommo's time was part of a larger discussion about race—and Tommo's fear of being tattooed was essentially a fear of losing his membership in the white class that was doing the analyzing and setting the categories. The result would be his exile to the nonwhite class of "objects" being analyzed. (191)

That is, saving his face from tattooing amounts for Tommo to preserving "his membership in the white class." Yet it is ironic that in thus preserving his status, Tommo resigns himself to resuming his former slave-like position as a common sailor. Unlike the genuine white tattooed freaks of the antebellum American stage, the fictional Tommo escapes the degradation of tattooing; yet like his counterparts in reality, Tommo's post-captivity position is compromised: captivity inescapably blurs the boundaries between colonizer and colonized, superior and inferior, and master and slave. The greater irony, however, is that by saving his Caucasian alter ego's "face divine," Melville shows his double face as an author sympathetic/antipathetic to racial Others, and therefore, in the end, reveals his true face as an adherent of contemporary racial politics of white primacy.

III. Losing Face, Winning Fame

Melville's South Sea slave-captivity narratives resonate not only with

the theatrical culture of white tattooed captivity survivors, but also with the literature and reportage of their narratives; a particularly significant case in regard to Melville was the Native American captivity of the Oatman girls that commenced in 1851,[5] the same year that *Moby-Dick* was published. Whereas Ishmael confronts the tattooed visage of Queequeg en route to the society of the Pequod and the "golden sea" (406), Olive Ann and Mary Ann Oatman were captured, enslaved, and had their faces tattooed by an Indian tribe while traveling with their family to the "western gold-land" (Stratton 36). In the light of her Indian captivity experience during the years of America's ongoing territorial expansion, Olive can be understood as a personage who challenged the antebellum racial dynamics represented in both tattooed freak shows and the literary genre of slave-captivity narratives.[6]

Let us therefore consider the historical case of the Oatman girls from this perspective. In 1850 the Oatman family, Mormon converts, elected to follow the leader of a splinter sect of the Church of Brigham Young, James Colin Brewster, from their home in Illinois to what they regarded as the promised land of Bashan in the southwestern corner of New Mexico Territory. Leaving Illinois in the cold of winter, they traveled through Independence, Missouri, then onward by wagon train on a route known to be dangerous. In February, 1851, the Oatmans were attacked 80 miles east of Fort Yuma by Yavapai Indians in what was widely referred to as the "Oatman Massacre." In this attack, the entire Oatman party was killed except for Olive Ann (13 years old) and Mary Ann (7 years old), who were taken captive by the Yavapai, as well as their brother Lorenzo (14 years old), whom the Yavapai attackers left for dead. After spending about a year as Yavapai slaves, the two Oatman girls were bartered to the Mohave in exchange for horses and several other items in 1852.

The details of Olive and Mary's experiences with the Mohave are uncertain, but it was during their captivity with the Mohave that the girls were tattooed with five vertical lines from lower lip to chin. Adopted as daughters by the Mohave tribal chief, the girls seem to have been treated relatively well on the whole. Indeed, despite Olive's denials, rumors circulated that she married the chief's son and bore several mixed-race children. Nonetheless, the girls suffered from chronic starvation due to a drought, and during the winter of either 1853 or 1854, Mary Ann starved to death. Olive survived, and almost exactly five years after the massacre, her brother Lorenzo—who had been rescued after the Yavapai left him behind— succeeded in tracking her down. Olive was liberated from captivity and returned to white society at Fort Yuma in February 1856.

Olive's story received wide attention in 1857 when the Reverend Royal B. Stratton, a Methodist missionary who became her guardian, published *Life among the Indians*, a narrative of the Oatman ordeal based on testimony by Lorenzo and Olive. This book met with remarkable sales, as considered below. A stage version was also mounted; however, this failed completely, closing after one performance at San Francisco's American Theater on September 9, 1857. Olive herself lectured with Stratton on her experiences with the Indians until her marriage to John B. Fairchild, a broker and banker in Rochester, New York in 1865; during her lectures she made a practice of exhibiting her facial tattoo to the audience, presumably—at least in part—to promote sales of the book. Olive died at the age of 65 in Sherman, Texas, in 1903.

From the moment the Oatmans decided to join the Western migration, their fate was overshadowed by United States governmental policies promoting the eradication of Native Americans. That is, the Oatman Massacre took place amidst a virtual state of war between whites and Native

Americans, spurred by both genocidal United States policy and nationalistic propaganda promoting territorial expansion. From a religious perspective, the Oatmans were never to arrive at their Promised Land, but rather were doomed to familial holocaust; in the aftermath of this holocaust, Olive's Caucasian "face divine" was tattooed by what Rev. Stratton called "brutal savages and human-shaped demons" (97) as a sign that she was their slave. Thus was the dark fate of the family sealed.

With her tattooed face, Olive must have been seen in white society as a symbolic figure conjoining fiction and reality. The sign of racial degradation emblazoned on her white skin—embodied and eminently visible to "civilized" American society—brought into reality what had been largely confined to South Sea adventure narratives in the experience of most Americans: the worst fears of fictitious Tommo in *Typee* came literally to life in Olive's lived experience.

Olive's actual tattooing at the hands of members of an "inferior" race, whether Marquesan or Native American Indian, must have created a strong sense of transgression with regard to the order of racial dominance and subordination that the racial psuedosciences had established in Victorian American culture. In the context of the ongoing practice of slavery, blackness was regarded as a negative, unifying attribute of all non-white races during the antebellum period. Thus, both Marquesans and Native Americans shared a common "Negro-like appearance," as Langsdorff observed in his *Voyages and Travels*—Melville's key reference on Marquesan tattooing practices (vol. 1, 119).[7] With specific regard to Melville, Edward Fussell argues convincingly that Maraquesans and Indians were interchangeable figures for the author (234-35).

Turning once again to Langsdorff, it is noteworthy that the German naturalist who exerted such a strong influence on Melville with regard to

tattooing recognized a range of distinctions in the physical attributes of racial Others. In the following passage on Nukuhevan tattooing, for example, Langsdorff, like Tommo, indirectly acknowledges the essentially fair appearance of the Polynesian body:

> When once the decorations are begun, some addition is constantly made to them at intervals of from three to six months, and this is not unfrequently continued for thirty or forty years before the whole tattooing is completed. We saw some old men of the higher ranks, who were punctured over and over to such a degree, that the outline of each separate figure were scarcely to be distinguished, and the body had an almost Negro-like appearance. (vol. 1, 119) [8]

In contrast, Langsdorff sees the least impressive of features in the Native American physique, as the following passage on the settlement of Saint Francisco reflects:

> These Indians are of a middling, or rather of a low stature, and of a dark brown colour approaching to black.[. . .] They have large projecting lips, and broad flat Negro-like noses; indeed, many of their features, as well as their physiognomy, and almost their colour, bear a strong resemblance to the negroes. [. . .] this has a very disagreeable appearance in the eyes of an European. [. . .] they were ill-proportioned, and had such a dull heavy negligent appearance, that we all agreed we had never seen a less pleasing specimen of the human race. (vol. 2, 164) [9]

Yet, despite the contrast that Langsdorff observes between Marquesans and

Native Americans, the body paintings of dancing Native American men on an engraving accompanying his description of the Indians in Saint Francisco (vol. 2, 195) are surprisingly similar to the tattoo patterns of Marquesan men, particular in regard to the characteristic division of the face into black and white horizontal zones—the very feature towards which Tommo feels such apprehension.

Nonetheless, if Langsdorff's impressions of the racial inferiority of Native Americans vis-à-vis Marquesans can be extended to antebellum society in general, it follows that Olive's tattooing would be found even more deplorable in the eyes of society than the tattoos received or feared by fictitious precursors such as Tommo. Because the events of her involvement with the Native Americans could never be undone, her indelible facial tattoo marked her irreversible corruption by one of the most inferior of races.[10]

In the context of this antebellum cultural logic, Rev. Stratton's narrative of the Oatman ordeal—the text upon which contemporary understandings of Olive's experience were based—merits closer attention. Regarding its publication history, *Life among the Indians* created an immediate sensation with its portrayal of Olive's five-year sojourn among the Yavapai and Mojave. With the success of the first edition in 1857, *Life among the Indians* was reissued in second and third editions (1857, 1858), though with a new, less neutral title: *Captivity of the Oatman Girls.*[11] According to Stratton, "[t]he first [edition of] five thousand was put out as an experiment," ("Preface of the Second Edition," 9)[12] and the second edition of six thousand "was nearly exhausted in the California and Oregon trade within a few months" ("Preface of the Third Edition," 13). From 1857 to 1860, the book sold between 26,000 and 30,000 copies.

Captivity of the Oatman Girls narrates the events of the massacre, the girls' tribulation, and their ultimate release according to the conventions of

the captivity/conversion narrative tradition, appealing to readers with its thrillingly detailed descriptions of cruelties such as tattooing suffered by the girls at the hands of the Indians. In the scene in which the girls receive their tattoos, for example, the narrative asserts that their "condition was that of unmitigated slavery"(173):

> I ventured to plead with them for a few moments that they would put those ugly marks upon our faces. But it was in vain. To all our expostulations they only replied in substance that they knew why we objected to it; that we expected to return to the whites, and we would be ashamed of it then; but that it was their resolution we should wear their 'Ki-e-chook.' They said further, that if we should get away, and they should find us among other tribes, or if some other tribes should steal us, they would by this means know us. [. . .] They told us this could never be taken from the face, and that they had given us a different mark from the one worn by their own females, as we saw, but the same with which they marked all their captives, and they could claim us in whatever tribe they might find us. (182-83)

Out of various Indian captivity narratives in the Unites States, Olive's experience is signalized by the description as such, since the girls' status was less than Indians both literally and figuratively.

It must be noted that Olive's experiences held a prurient interest for antebellum readers in regard to tattooing, perhaps heightened by the theatrical culture of white tattooed captivity survivors who had married, and in some instances received their tattoos in conjunction with these relationships. Jean Baptiste Cabri, John Rutherford, Prince Constantine[13] were all believed to have married native women. A circus poster of

Constantine in particular clearly depicts him being tattooed by his native wife, an image in which the public could read sexual as well as racial tensions. Olive's story too aroused such tensions in the public imagination, though as represented by Stratton she consistently declares in both *Life among the Indians* and *Captivity of Oatman Girls*, "I considered my age, my sex, my exposure, and was again in trouble, though to the honor of these savages let it be said, they never offered the least unchaste abuse to me" (231).[14] Yet rumors of a Native American husband and children persisted. For instance, in 1922, in reference to a divorce case of John Oatman, a Mohave Indian, who claimed to be Olive's native grandson, *The Arizona Republican* reported the tragedy at Oatman Flat: "One daughter [of the Oatmans], Olive was spared and forced to marry a Mohave brave. She became such a thorough Indian woman that years later, when her brother insisted that she leave her husband and children, she went insane." (Doman)

Olive Oatman's clearly endured terrible hardship during her captivity— the killing of her parents and other family members, starvation, forced labor, the death of her sister, tribal conflict, and the executions of tribal prisoners— and thus reality undeniably informed the sensation that her story created. Yet it can be argued that this sensation derived less from Olive's Native American captivity than from the captivity she endured after her return to white society, a captivity of exploitation.

The primary agent of this exploitation was Rev. Stratton. A. L. Kroeber observes that Olive's narrative is "Stratton's book," and that its aims and failings mirrored Stratton's own: the book attempts "to be sensational but is imprecise, wordy, vague, emotional, and pious" (Kroeber, 9). Stratton acknowledged his intention in the book of providing textual entertainment to support the national effort to eradicate Native Americans,[15] and invoked divine authority as justifying this effort. To further his intention, Stratton

appropriated Olive's first person narrative voice, employing it in order to mitigate the distancing effect of the "editor-biographer's narrative presence," thereby creating a "fictive" text that tends toward fiction by "using narrative strategies appropriate to that genre" (Derounian-Stodola 43).

Considering Olive's exploitation by Stratton in a broader sense, Kathryn Zabella Derounian-Stodola compares every version of Olive's Indian captivity narrative to that of Mary Rowlandson, and finds that the narratives of the two cases share a number of similarities—including discursive strategies to maximize sales and distribution, acknowledgments and invocations of clerical authority; influences of anti-Native American propaganda, and sensational/sentimental appeals to contemporary feminine sensibilities—as well as a significant difference: whereas Rowlandson retains control of her own voice and style in a "factive"(43) narration that largely separates her account of events from her politics, Olive's voice is dominated by the clergyman Stratton, resulting in an unknottable tangle of fact, fiction, and propaganda.

Stratton's control of Olive's narrative is reflected in the increasing displacement of the first person Olive/Lorenzo narrative voice with each new edition of *Life among the Indians*; this and other pronounced differences among the three editions—including changes to the illustrations, length, tenor, and title—"certainly improved the book's marketability, but ironically they also carried the text farther and farther away from autobiographical material obtained from Olive and Lorenzo, thus exploiting any original veracity" (Derounian-Stodola 38-39). The most visually striking alteration between the first and second editions concerns an illustration of Olive with her facial tattoos; the illustration was moved from the end of the last chapter to the first page of the book. Additional changes to enhance the dramatic effect of the narrative between the second and third editions

included the resetting of the illustrations within a more provocative graphic design, as well as an increase in the total number of illustrations.

Surprisingly, Olive Oatman is herself implicated in her own exploitation, having joined Stratton on the religious lecture circuit between 1859 and 1865 to lecture and display her facial tattoos. These public appearances aimed both at promoting book sales and raising funds for the Methodist church, and towards these ends Olive framed her lectures in the most sensational terms, as her lecture notes demonstrate. With regard to her language, Olive characterized her ordeal in fear-inspiring, negative terms such as "adversity & horror (Pettid 3)," and "a fate worse than death (11);" her captors she characterized as "reckless (1)," "cruel (1,5)," "treacher[ous] (5)," "formidable (5)," "hostile (5,7)," "fiendish (10)," "brutal (12)," "murderous (13)," "fierce [and] ugly looking (9-10)," "horrible (14)," and "demons (10);" and she characterized their activities as "cruel slaughter (10)," "[wild] savages (10, 11), and "rudest barbarism (1)." Olive furthermore presented her tattoos in exclusively negative terms, for example explaining that her captors tattooed their captives with "the tribe's slave marks so that in case they desert to any other tribe they can be recognized at once. You perceive I have the mark indelibly placed upon my chin." (Pettid, 19).

Derounian-Stodola convincingly maintains that the Methodist church encouraged these public appearances—and rewarded Stratton for his efforts to promote Olive's narrative—because it received a percentage of the proceeds; thus exploited by her church, her guardian, and herself, Olive became a "tattooed freak" much like the white tattooed captivity survivors— O'Connell and Prince Constantine—then popular on the American stage. Even after her emancipation from captivity, Olive found herself in the servitude of a white master, much as Tommo was destined to remain in

servitude under a white captain. In the role of white master, Stratton—much like P. T. Barnum—was a "talented showman," and must surely have drastically altered the narrative of Olive's "happy return" to maximize her appeal to white society.[16] In turn, the antebellum public eagerly turned their curious eyes on Olive for much the same reason that they sought out tattooed white freak shows—that is, in order to immerse themselves in the political, racial, and cultural discourse of white primacy.

Finally, by exploiting Olive as a source of profits, the Methodist church must be noted in particular for involving its religious authority in the production of sensational spectacles; ironically, the financial benefit of these spectacles to the church depended upon precisely those transgressors of the Caucasian "face divine" that white society was bent on exterminating, with church sanction. However great the celebrity that Olive may have attained after her return to antebellum society, she was nonetheless transformed into an objectified instrument of religious and secular authority, valued for her degradation. Olive Oatman can thus be understood as a living embodiment of the horrific destiny that Tommo imagined as he contemplated being tattooed: a figure of disfigurement to be sacrificed to, exploited by, and exhibited in support of the antebellum order of white racial dominance.

IV. Subversive Defacement

Unlike Tommo, neither Olive nor her white tattooed counterparts on the American stage appeared to have been able to escape tattooing, and thus in the eyes of white society they were branded with stigmata of corruption by inferior races. From a more personal perspective, however, these tattoo-blackened returnees to the white world emerge as more than simple victims of degradation and exploitation, and their tattoos emerge as something other than stigmata of inferiority. By displaying themselves as ostensibly

marginalized beings, these tattoo-bearers in reality put themselves at the center of public attention, a position from which they succeeded in actively manipulating social perceptions of their status for the purpose of ameliorating their actual, lived status, as well as to benefit financially. These tattooed "freaks," former captives of "racial demons" seemingly held captive a second time by the interests of white exploiters, can thus be seen to have captured, in a sense, their latter white captors.

From this perspective, Olive in particular emerges as a figure who wielded her "defacement" to achieve what might be termed her "refacement." Rather than merely trading on her victimhood, Olive employed the authority and discourse of both Stratton and the Methodist church—as well as the literary power of the captivity narrative tradition—to refashion herself as figure worthy of admiration. Although Olive may in part have joined the religious lecture circuit for financial gain—and although Stratton and the Methodist Church clearly supported her there for this purpose—Olive almost certainly made use of the religious establishment in part to contain rumors of her Native American husband and children. The persona that Olive fashioned in her lectures served moreover to undermine dominant pseudoscientific discourse that identified her as a racial freak, in that she consistently presented herself as a victim of tattooing in no way complicit with her captors. This strategy succeeded in restoring Olive's status in Victorian American society so well that she was able to leave the lecture circuit and become an upper-middle class wife and mother of an adopted daughter, Mamie; related strategies of white tattooed stage performers also succeeded, winning them fame in the American cultural arena. Thus, in the cultural tradition of the white tattooed captivity survivor, the agency of the tattooed subject can be seen as blurring the distinctions that societies draw between captor and captive, objectifier and objectified,

and black and white.

Indeed, although the best-known white tattooed "freaks" all insisted that they were tattooed against their wills, this appears not to have been the case for a number of famous tattoo-bearers. For instance, Stephan Ottermann maintains that Rutherford's narrative, *The Great White Chief John Rutherford* (1830), is largely a fabrication, and that O'Connell had his face tattooed in order to outdo his literary competitors (199). Prince Constantine is reported to have undergone tattooing in Burma with the intention of pursuing the show business career that he commenced in 1870 (Gilbert, 137). John Hayes, born in 1864 and taken prisoner by Native Americans in the Wild West, offered a narrative similar to Olive's in public displays of his tattoos, but in reality had received them willingly at the hand of Samuel O'Reilly, a famous American tattoo artist and inventor of the electric tattoo machine (Ottermann, 201).

One additional case contributes particularly to an understanding of these performers in their full complexity: that of the remarkable Horace Ridler, also known as The Great Omi or the Zebra Man. As the latter name illustrates, Ridler had his entire body, including his face, tattooed with inch-wide stripes in 1927, giving himself the appearance not only of a zebra but also of a black albino. Ridler's case takes on special significance because of his educated, upper-middle background; in contrast, his white tattooed precursors came predominantly from the lower classes. Ridler's socioeconomic origins fundamentally inform the significance of his tattoos: rather than signifying inferiority or racial degradation, his tattoos can be viewed as ornaments which symbolically fuse not only true experience and fictionalized narrative, but also the white self and black Others.

Like Ridler and other subversive celebrities who intentionally bore upon their own flesh the white fears of disfigurement that Tommo's terror

represented, Olive Ann Oatman can be read as an empowering figure of defacement/refacement. In all its complexity, Olive's life—as informed by its central episode of tattooing—illustrates the blurring of boundaries between fact and fiction, objectifier and objectified, savage and civilized, captive and captor, and religious pulpit and freak show stage that accompanies racial transgression. In so doing—and in sharp contrast to Melville's *Typee*—Olive Oatman and these white tattooed performers fundamentally challenged the existing racial order of American society, undermining entrenched conceptions of racial superiority/inferiority. In that Tommo wrote distinctly from the perspective of the dominant, the narratives of the white tattooed captivity survivors served as implicit critiques, redefining these narrators as the more inclusively representative authors of antebellum America.

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[Notes]
1. Otter's source for these engravings is G. H. von Langsdorff's *Voyages and Travels in Various Parts of the World, during the Years 1803, 1804, 1805, 1806, and 1807*. Langsdorff was a German naturalist who visited the Marquesas while accompanying an expedition led by Russian admiral A. J. von Krusenstern's. Otter maintains—as do Rowe and Schueller—that Langsdorff's vivid descriptions of tattooing in Nukuheva served as a crucial source on the subject for Melville. For Langsdorff's discussion of tattooing in the Marquesas, see vol. 1, chapter IV and V.
2. Extending Evelev's proposition of Typee's indebtedness to O'Connell's *A Residence of Eleven Years in New Holland and the Caroline Islands: Being the Adventures of James F. O'Connell, Edited from his Verbal Narration* (Boston, 1836), Goudie suggests that O'Connell is perhaps the prototype for Jimmy in *Typee*, indicating his functions as "a

go-between for Western sailors, merchants, and natives for five years before escaping Ponape in 1833": "O'Connell [. . .] like Melville's Jimmy, was notorious for his falsehoods, exaggerations, deception, and unreliability. O'Connell's curiously marked body, with its admixture of tattoos and markings from multiple sites in the South Pacific, proved unsettling to his American audience." Goudie furthermore develops this argument that O'Connell's/Jimmy's harlequinades anticipate Melville's many confidence men in his subsequent writings. (233)

3. See also n. 1. Cabri, the tattooed Frenchman, was first introduced to the Western public by Langsdorff, whose travel sketches were published in 1813. For an engraved portrait of Cabri, see Langsdorff's *Voyages and Travels*, vol 1, 97.

4. For more on tattooed freak spectacles and their performers during this period, see Bogdan, Gilbert, and Caplan. For more on tattooed/racial freaks and *Typee* in particular, see Cassuto. For more on James F. O'Connell, see Riesenberg, and O'Connell's narrative. See also n. 3 and n. 4.

5. For more on "The Oatman Massacre," see Dillon, Turner, Taylor, Rice, Maloney, Kroeber, and Kroeber and Kroeber.

6. As for his criticism of *Typee* and the politics of freak /minstrel shows, Cassuto accompanies his discussion with a photograph of Olive Oatman (*Inhuman*, 198); however, it does not contain any sufficient explanation particularly from the viewpoint of her re-enslavement by her guardian preacher after returning to the white society. He does not mention exactly how the Oatman Massacre was related to the racial tensions in Melville's works and how Olive's lecture circuits were paralleled with the contemporary freak shows. Cassuto's analyses are restricted to Melville and freak shows, only inducing us to conjecture Olive's captivity experience relates to both Melville's slave-captivity narratives and white tattooed freak shows in terms of the nineteenth century objectifier-objectified racial principle. Therefore, my intention in this paper is in part to present the close connection between Oatman and white tattooed freak shows that Cassuto reserves, as well as her distinguished displacement of defacement/refacement.

7. See also n. 1.

8. Samuel Otter provides similar analyses of observations that related tattooing to physical attributes of race made by other visitors to the South Sea islands in this

period. Otter considers passages from Charles S. Stewart's *A Visit to the South Seas in the U. S. Ship Vincennes, during the Years 1829 and 1830; with Scenes in Brazil, Peru, Manilla, the Cape of Good Hope, and St. Helena* (2 vols. New York: John P. Haven, 1831), William Ellis's *Polynesian Researches, during a Residence of Nearly Eight Years in the Society and Sandwitch Islands* (4 vols. New York: J. & J. Harper, 1833), Frederick Debell Bennett's *Narrative of a Whaling Voyage round the Globe, from the Year 1833 to 1836. Comprising Sketches of Polynesia, California, the Indian Archipelago, etc. with an Account of Southern Whales, the Sperm Whale Fishery, and the Natural History of the Climates Visited* (2 vols. London: Richard Bentley, 1840), and A. J. von Krusenstern's *Voyage round the World, in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805, and 1806* (2 vols. London: Printed by C. Roworth for John Murray, 1813). See Otter, 26-27.

9. For additional observations of California Indians, see Langsdorff, vol. 2, chapter VII, VIII, IV.

10. Langsdorff also reports the female Native American tattooing patterns, one of which is almost the same as Olive's: "Tattooing is also used, but principally among the women. Some have a double or triple line from each corner of the mouth down to the chin; others have besides a cross stripe extending from one of these stripes to the other; and most have simple long and cross stripes from the chin over the neck down to the breast, and upon the shoulders. (vol. 2, 167)

11. Reverend Stratton produced three editions of Olive's narrative: *Life among the Indians* (1st ed. San Francisco: Whitton, Towne, 1857); *Captivity of the Oatman Girls* (2nd ed. San Francisco: Whitton, Towne, 1857); and *Captivity of the Oatman Girls* (3rd ed. New York: Carlton & Porter, 1858). Two juvenile versions of the story based on Stratton's writings were also published: Evelyn Subley Lampman, *White Captives* (Atheneum: A Margaret K. McElderry Book, 1975), and Margaret Rau, The Ordeal of Olive Oatman: A True Story of the American West (Greensboro: Morgan Reynolds Incorporated, 1997).

12. The third edition of Olive Oatman's narrative includes the prefaces from the first, second, and third editions, written by Stratton, as well as a foreword by Wilcomb E. Washburn.

13. Prince Constantine, also known as the Greek Alexandrino, Captain Georgi, the

Suliote "Tsavella," and Captain Constantenus, was the most flamboyant and the best known of all tattooed men. His body was covered by the multicolored oriental tattoos—388 animal and floral designs. He appeared in the American stage around 1870s. For more on Prince Constantine, see also Cassuto *Inhuman*, 183.

14. In the first edition, this passage appears on page 149. Olive was not alone in maintaining that she had escaped sexual violation. The Los Angels *Star* reported that "during her long captivity, she had invariably been treated with that civility and respect due her sex. She had not been made a wife, as has been theretofore erroneously reported, but has remained single and her defenseless situation entirely respected during her residence among Indians." Richard Dillon speculates that such accounts reflected contemporary sexual mores, explaining that "Victorians could not admit that Olive bore two Indian children" (Dillon, 59). The truth of rumors concerning a Native American husband and children is uncertain.

15. In the preface of the third edition, Stratton writes: "These dark Indian tribes are fast wasting before the rising sun of our civilization; and into *that history that is yet to be written* of their past, and of their destiny, and of the many interlacing events that are to contribute to the fulfilling of the wise intent of Providence concerning them and their only dreaded foe, the white race, facts and incidents contained in this unpretending volume will enter and be appreciated" (16).

16. A. L. Kroeber and C. B. Kroeber suspect that Stratton intentionally exaggerated the cruelty of Olive's captors. As evidence, the Kroebers cite questions and answers reportedly exchanged between Olive and Captain Martin Burke at Fort Yuma just after her rescue, in which she seemed to speak favorably of her treatment, at least by the Mohaves. The Kroebers conclude, "There is too little record of her adult life for us to judge whether it could be called a happy one; but there is every indication that her Mohave years were reasonably so" (313).

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