In this paper, I read the whiteness and masculinity of Herman Melville’s narrator in *Typee* (1846), arguing that Tommo’s white hegemonic masculine identity is dependent not only on notions of homophobia and racism, but on a specific settler/native narrative unique to the American colonial experience. I interpret the narrator’s depiction of a forlorn rooster named Pedro ekphrastically, as a frame narrative indicating his own unreliability as narrator whose dependency on the discursivity of the settler/native binary present in the American captivity narrative that relies on notions of indigenous primitivity for propagation. When Tommo finds himself disabled and disempowered in ways similar to Pedro, he leverages the discourses of imperial imaginaries to bolster his own authority and belonging. The subsequent uncertainty that follows the narrator’s application of this particular American narrative unsettles the reality of the empire/masculinity relationship, revealing the underlying frailty of American exceptionalism.