

TYPEE: A Romance of the South Seas (1846)

Herman Melville

Overview

Although very few people have heard of Herman Melville's first novel, *Typee: A Romance of the South Seas*, published in 1846, it was a tremendous success and established him as a writer whose descriptions of adventure in exotic South Sea islands captured the imagination of American and British readers. Like all of Melville's novels, *Typee* is a deeply layered narrative that contains social, political, religious, and philosophical commentaries. As in some of his later works, such as *Moby Dick*, *Typee* is marked by a kind of innocence and wonder, as his protagonist, the always curious yet cautious Thomas (called Tommo) meets with another innocent, the native of the Marquesas islands, Kory-Kory. *Typee*, which refers to the name of one of the tribes of indigenous peoples who lived on the island of Nukuheva, in the Marquesas Islands, fascinated, titillated, and scandalized the straight-laced New England descendants of the Puritans, as it gave detailed descriptions of tattoos, tattooing practices, exotic flora and fauna, tropical valleys with rainbow-adorned waterfalls, battles between warriors, cannibalism (and its rationale and practice), ideas about feminine modesty (or lack thereof), clashes between missionary values and those of the Typee and Happar peoples, social organization, and the dominating social structure of the concept of the "taboo." Because the novel is drawn from the author's own experiences, it has a unique sense of authenticity, and while it might not be absolutely autobiographical, Melville does incorporate his experience as a sailor on ships in the South Seas, and even his own adventures as a part of a mutinous uprising, and then as a deserter / ship-jumper. As Tommo and Toby find themselves in different situations and predicaments, they often wonder if they are guests, prisoners, or potentially a main course for a future banquet. Melville shows the reader how the Typee perceive the "Wee-wee" (the French, called "wee-wee" for the "oui-oui", missionary women, and ship-jumping sailors such as Tommo and Toby. At the same time, we see the Kory-Kory, Fayaway, and the others of the Typee community from the point of view of Tommo and Toby. The result is fascinating, and, like other novels of castaways, ship-jumpers, and adventurers, such as Daniel Defoe's *The Swiss Family Robinson*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, and the journals of buccaneer naturalists such as William Dampier, the narrative creates a heightened state of consciousness, a mindfulness of the "new", and a sense of going into a new world; if not an Eden, at least one that promises a reconnection to a primordial self.

Story

The story itself is quite simple. *Typee* is the story of Tommo in the South Seas. Tommo is a sailor who goes to sea for a sense of adventure and has very little tolerance for monotony, tyrannical captains, and bad food. They arrive in the Marquesas Islands after a voyage that lasted much longer than intended, and Tommo is eager to abandon his post and jump ship. His shipmate, Toby, is perhaps even more restless, and he happily accompanies Tommo for adventures in what appears to be an absolute tropical paradise.

They take food with them from the ship -- moldy sea biscuits, but not much more. Needless to say, that is not the sort of provender that sustains human life, and after a few days, they are at the point of collapse. They find themselves in a gorgeous valley with rainbow-draped waterfalls, exotic multi-colored birds, and lovely cone-shaped peaks. Just as they are about to faint away, a group of dark-skinned, scantily clothed (yet elaborately adorned with tattoos) men approach them. They carry them to their village of elevated huts with thatched grass roofs and painted bark walls. There they communicate with each other slowly as Tommo and Toby are nursed back to health.

The king of the group is named Mehevi, and he is attended by a number of his subjects. Apparently, hospitality is not just a human value, it is a requirement of their religion, and if they do not treat them well, they could be visited by angry ghosts of ancestors. So, Mehevi and his group have a lot of incentive to

treat Tommo and Toby well (although it does not necessarily negate the possibility that they will be eaten).

Tommo and Toby are at first too battered by their adventure through the jungle without food to feel too worried about who their rescuers are. Later, however, they become concerned as they remember that they heard that there are basically two types of people on the Marquesas. The first, the Happar, who live in the Happar valley, are kind-hearted, tranquil, and gentle. The second, the Typee, are vicious cannibals.

When Tommo and Toby learn that they have been rescued by the Typee, they are quite worried. But, they find, to their relief, that Kory-Kory, who has been directed by Mehevi to attend them, is extremely solicitous, kind, and conscientious. The gorgeous young woman, Fayaway, immediately enchants both of them with her exotic beauty and relaxed attitude about nudity.

As time goes on, the Typee admit Tommo and Toby to almost all aspects of their life, with the exception of the rituals that are considered taboo -- mostly those that have to do with the preparation of cloth and masks for ceremonies, and many things that are considered to be of the exclusive domain of either the male or the female.

After many months go by and Tommo and Toby begin to learn the language, they start to realize that there are violent clashes between the Typee and the Happar. Ironically the Happar are in reality the vicious cannibals to be feared, the the Typee more compassionate. Tommo and Toby are worried because they are considered wonderful war prizes for the Happers as they raid the village.

Not only does Tommo fear being kidnapped and tortured (and eaten) by the Happar, he begins to be aware that the Typee may have plans for him and for Toby. The first has to do with tattooing white skin. Tommo has seen the way that tattooing is done on the face and over the entire body, and he is worried that if his face is tattooed, he'll be too deformed to be able to go back the United States. Further, he knows that it would not be easy to dissuade the tattoo artist -- he looks at Tommo's white skin as a new type of canvas for his genius. He knows he cannot count on Kory-Kory to truly protect him because Kory-Kory's values are, after all, of the South Sea islanders, and his loyalties would ultimately lie with his kinsmen.

After finding themselves in a few skirmishes, and then also witnessing the cannibalistic practices associated with captive enemies, Tommo and Toby decide that they are ready for a change. But, escape is not as easy as it might seem, and Toby has fallen in love with the local women. They argue and then decide to go their own ways.

Toby is captured briefly by the Happar, and Tommo loses touch. He believes that Toby has either died or escaped back to a nearby sailing ship. Tommo goes through a period of wandering, and also must pass through the valley of the Happers. He learns that the Typee are in truth kinder, but they, too, are cannibals, but manage to disassemble more effectively, and maintain the rather devious assertion that they only eat "Puarki-Puarki" (wild pig) and nothing at all related to human flesh.

Actually, most of their diet consists of fish (some eaten raw -- even live), poi (pooee-pooee), breadfruit, roasted wild pig, bananas, and other fruits. Many of the chapters include dramatic and illustrative scenes that rivet the reader. One can only imagine how fascinating it must have been for the 19th century reader, especially knowing that the author had very likely seen these things with his own eyes.

For example, Tommo describes how he witnessed what he thought was probably taboo -- the process of a man being tattooed. Tommo states, "I beheld a man extended flat upon his back on the ground, and, despite the forced composure of his countenance, it was evident that he was suffering agony. His tormentor bent over him, working away for all the world like a stone-cutter with mallet and chisel. In one hand he held a short slender stick, pointed with a shark's tooth, on the upright end of which he tapped with a small hammer-like piece of wood" (Chapter 25). Tommo comments that the tattooer was excited by the idea of carving a tattoo on white skin, and it filled him with "a painter's enthusiasm" - Tommo was horrified by the idea of having a face tattoo (the man was having his eyelids tattooed (!)) so he offered his

arm, thinking it would be a good compromise. However, the tattooer rejected it and continued to look at his face. He even started to plan the artwork: "his forefinger swept across my features, in laying out the borders of those parallel bands which were to encircle my countenance, the flesh fairly crawled upon my bones." The reader can certainly sympathize and it's a relief when Tommo breaks away from the tattoo artist the two others who held him down. Tommo ran shrieking to old Marheyo's house. The tattoo artist and his consorts followed Tommo and it was only when Kory-Kory interfered and dissuaded them that he was able to escape without having to undergo the hideously painful and disfiguring face tattooing (!). After that experience, Tommo remarked, "This incident opened my eyes to a new danger; and I now felt convinced that in some luckless hour I should be disfigured in such a manner as never more to have the FACE to return to my countrymen, even should an opportunity offer." (chapter 25)

Typee is a "full circle" narrative, which is to say that it ends pretty much in the same place that it begins. Tommo is, again, escaping a situation he feels is untenable. The story of *Typee* contains escape after escape. He escapes from his life in New England, then he escapes the tyrannical reign of a cruel captain of the *Dolly*. Then, he escapes from the *Typee* and finds the "Julia." On reaching the 'Julia' I was lifted over the side, and my strange appearance and remarkable adventure occasioned the liveliest interest. Every attention was bestowed upon me that humanity could suggest. But to such a state was I reduced, that three months elapsed before I recovered my health." (chapter 34) "

The reader recognizes that it is likely that Tommo will find himself needing to escape again, leading to more adventures. *Typee: A South Seas Romance* hints at a sequel. And, a sequel indeed does appear, named *Omoo*. It is also directly autobiographical and draws from Melville's life.

Parallels

Typee: A South Seas Romance is a part of a literary tradition that blends travel, natural history, and the romance associated with traveling to exotic lands and experiencing heightened perceptions. There is usually a bit of self-reliance involved, as people are thrust into difficult situations due to either shipwreck, misadventure, or caprice (deciding to jump ship or join the navy).

Naval history novels such as Frederick Marryat's *Mr. Midshipman Easy* (1835) was one of the first to detail the life of a sailor who joins out of a sense of adventure. He does not go to the South Seas, but his experiences are very realistic, and even more believable due to the fact that Frederick Marryat was a retired admiral. This was a British novel, and did not have a very extensive readership in the United States, partially because of hostility toward the British after the War of 1812.

Daniel Defoe's *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* was published in 1719 was extremely influential in that it creates both a romance and a novel of self-sufficiency.

Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) was in large part a political satire and attacked the reign of King George I, and his treatment of the Irish. It's a good example of the "traveler's tales" genre.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's letters from the Turkish Embassy (1717) were published to much acclaim. They described her visit to a Turkish bath, a harem, and other locations, which many found to be very exotic and fascinating. In a certain way, they were continuations of first-person narratives such as Margery Kempe, who traveled during the Middle Ages to the Holy Land, but Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's were much more secular.

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611) describes an island and a shipwreck, as does *Twelfth Night*. Both include encounters with new civilizations and in some cases, the need to conform to a new culture. Caliban is potentially a cannibal. He is filled with rage and resentment.

Finally, Montaigne's *On Cannibals* (1580) is probably the first and best essay written about encountering cannibals in exploring new worlds in Brazil. It is very likely that Melville was familiar with Montaigne, and that he understood and appreciated the argument that Montaigne is making, which is that the "savage" lives in a state of purity. Melville seems to embrace Montaigne's stance in terms of Fayaway and the

other beautiful females, but he does not accord the men such an exalted state, especially as he sees them to be rather menacing.

THEMES

Traditions and Taboos: When Tommo and Toby escape to the tropical paradise of Nukuheva which is part of the Marquesas islands, they think that it is a place of absolute freedom. It is not surprising that they think so, since the rules that govern New England are definitely not in place in the Marquesas, especially when it comes to issues of nudity and diet. However, they find out that there are strict codes with severe penalties. These are the strict “taboos.” There are also very clearly defined traditions that have to do with pleasing the gods and ancestors in order to have a successful fishing expedition, to have health, and to vanquish the enemies. As Tommo remarks, the system of taboo is difficult to decipher: “There is a marked similarity, almost an identity, between the religious institutions of most of the Polynesian islands, and in all exists the mysterious ‘Taboo’, restricted in its uses to a greater or less extent. So strange and complex in its arrangements is this remarkable system, that I have in several cases met with individuals who, after residing for years among the islands in the Pacific, and acquiring a considerable knowledge of the language, have nevertheless been altogether unable to give any satisfactory account of its operations. (Chapter 23)

Natural history / sense of discovery: One of the qualities of the novel that makes it so fascinating to the reader is that Melville opens the door to a fascinating new world. He is a careful chronicler of nature and it reminds one of the diarists such as William Dampier, the English buccaneer, botanist and natural historian whose travels took him to the South Seas, where he sketched what he saw. Melville’s verbal sketches are captivating. Birds—bright and beautiful birds—fly over the valley of Typee. Tommo observes that “You see them perched aloft among the immovable boughs of the majestic bread-fruit trees, or gently swaying on the elastic branches of the Omoo; skimming over the palmetto thatching of the bamboo huts; passing like spirits on the wing through the shadows of the grove, and sometimes descending into the bosom of the valley in gleaming flights from the mountains. Their plumage is purple and azure, crimson and white, black and gold; with bills of every tint: bright bloody red, jet black, and ivory white, and their eyes are bright and sparkling; they go sailing through the air in starry throngs; but, alas! the spell of dumbness is upon them all—there is not a single warbler in the valley!” (chapter 29)

The exotic / Noble Savage: Bartolomé de las Casas coined the term “noble savage” and it quickly became a feature of many of the adventure and travel novels, as well as any having to do with exotic lands. The basic notion is that the indigenous peoples are not corrupted and possess an essential innocence, which makes them worthy of protection rather than wholesale slaughter. While it was probably better to think of a “noble” savage rather than one to be exterminated and feared, the truth is that the “noble savage” concept was deeply chauvinistic, and resulted in infantilization and the notion that it was necessary to control, “protect,” and strip the indigenous of their rights.

New Species in a New Land: What happens to introduced species when they arrive in Nukuheva and spend time in the valley of Typee? Melville’s description of what happens to dogs who have been introduced by sailors and missionaries is entertaining by itself, but doubly amusing when considering that it could function as a metaphor of what happens to the outsiders as well. Tommo describes them: “Big hairless rats rather; all with smooth, shining speckled hides—fat sides, and very disagreeable faces. Whence could they have come? That they were not the indigenous production of the region, I am firmly convinced. Indeed they seemed aware of their being interlopers, looking fairly ashamed, and always trying to hide themselves in some dark corner. It was plain enough they did not feel at home in the vale—that they wished themselves well out of it, and back to the ugly country from which they must have come” (chapter 29). When Tommo suggests rounding them up and exterminating them to the tribal chief, Mehevi, “the benevolent king would not consent to it. He heard me very patiently; but when I had finished, shook his head, and told me in confidence that they were ‘taboo’. (chapter 29)” So, it was interesting to think that the “invasive” species were protected and “taboo.” They were kept apart and shunned, while also being protected, much like the invasive human species.

Self-Reliance: Similar to Robinson Crusoe, Tommo and Toby seem, at first blush, to be a marvel of self-reliance, and they seem to affirm the notion that human invention will result in the complete domination of nature and any unexpected occurrences in the phenomenal world. It is essentially a positivistic notion, which suggests that control over the environment is, in fact, always possible. It also privileges positivist thought -- that there are universal ideas that can be applied without needing to accommodate cultural or environmental difference. Melville both affirms self-reliance and subtly subverts it as Tommo and Toby show themselves to be hopelessly inept in surviving in the rough, and are not able to forage anything at all, and begin to starve as soon as their small store of soggy, sweat-soaked biscuits is exhausted.

“Natural” Feminine Beauty: When sailors see the women of Nukuheva, they are enchanted by what they assume to be natural and uninhibited. And, because they are more or less naked, and are not ashamed to be seen with very little clothing, it is assumed that they are completely sexual beings who have no boundaries. They are surprised to find that the Typee behaviors are even more circumscribed than the female missionaries -- it's just that the sailors are not acquainted with the complex system of taboo. The reactions of the French sailors to the openness of the women is humorous: "when all at once the royal lady, eager to display the hieroglyphics on her own sweet form, bent forward for a moment, and turning sharply round, threw up the skirt of her mantle and revealed a sight from which the aghast Frenchmen retreated precipitately, and tumbling into their boats, fled the scene of so shocking a catastrophe." (Chapter One.)

Comical mis-perception of values – cultural clashes: Cultural misunderstandings are mutual. The islanders also misunderstand the role of women. For example, when they first see the missionary women, they think that perhaps the dresses are part of their skin: "The islanders at first gazed in mute admiration at so unusual a prodigy" as they looked at the missionary's young, beautiful wife. and "they seemed inclined to regard it [the woman] as some new divinity. But after a short time, becoming familiar with its charming aspect, and jealous of the folds which encircled its form, they sought to pierce the sacred veil of calico in which it was enshrined, and in the gratification of their curiosity so far overstepped the limits of good breeding, as deeply to offend the lady's sense of decorum. Her sex once ascertained, their idolatry was changed into contempt and there was no end to the contumely showered upon her by the savages, who were exasperated at the deception which they conceived had been practised upon them." (Chapter one)

CHARACTERS

Thomas (“Tommo”): Thomas, who is referred to as Tommo by the Typee, who prefer that pronunciation, is the protagonist of the novel. His voice is very authentic, and the descriptions are so realistic and his perspectives so true to actual life, that the novel often sounds much like a memoir, which adds a great deal to the magical quality of the work. Tommo is driven by curiosity, adventure, and a constant need to explore new territories. He does not like limits, and cannot tolerate anything that seems to restrict his freedom of choice, and does not like the harsh, even cruel conditions of the sailing ship, nor does he like being a virtual prisoner of the Typee. Even though his conditions might be pleasant, he knows that his situation is precarious, and he can be captured at any time by the Happers, and also be sacrificed to placate angry gods.

Toby: Tommo befriends his shipmate, Toby, who has a rather mysterious past. He recognized a kindred spirit in the person of Toby: "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." (Chapter 5). According to Tommo, Toby has a rather refined appearance. He is very tall, and he dresses well, and "arrayed in his blue frock and duck trousers, he was as smart a looking sailor as ever stepped upon a deck; he was singularly small and slightly made, with great flexibility of limb, "(Chapter 5). Toby is a darker, more melancholy, saturnine person than Tommo. Toby was a "strange wayward being, moody, fitful, and melancholy—at times almost morose. He had a quick and fiery temper too, which, when thoroughly roused, transported him into a state bordering on delirium," which are attributes that make Toby a

powerful companion at times, but also, unpredictable which often puts the both of them directly in harm's way.

Kory-Kory: He is the devoted islander who protects, intercedes, and acts as a cultural bridge for Tommo and Toby. When they first meet him, they are struck by the elaborate face tattoos, which they consider to be ugly and disfiguring. However, later they come to understand the significance. Kory-Kory is occasionally slow to defend them, which sometimes alarms them (as in the time when the tribal tattooist decided he wanted nothing more than to practice his art on white skin). But, in the end, they recognize him for the kind person that he is. Until they were caught up in battles with the Happars, Tommo was very happy in the company of Kory-Kory and the Typee: "Received wherever I went with the most deferential kindness; regaled perpetually with the most delightful fruits; ministered to by dark-eyed nymphs, and enjoying besides all the services of the devoted Kory-Kory, I thought that, for a sojourn among cannibals, no man could have well made a more agreeable one." (chapter 17)

Fayaway: Tommo spends most of the novel utterly infatuated with the "beauteous nymph Fayaway." Tommo describes her in a way that must have titillated his prim 19th century readers: "her free pliant figure was the very perfection of female grace and beauty. Her complexion was a rich and mantling olive, and when watching the glow upon her cheeks I could almost swear that beneath the transparent medium there lurked the blushes of a faint vermilion. The face of this girl was a rounded oval, and each feature as perfectly formed as the heart or imagination of man could desire. (Chapter 11)." Fayaway has a sweet personality as well, and is always warm, inviting, and according to Tommo's perception, joyous with frequent bursts of merriment. She is a goddess and one who represents unsullied, unblemished nature, and as such, seems to be all that one would expect in Paradise, or in Eden. Fayaway is no temptress, and no Eve. Instead, she is the embodiment of purity and beauty: "Her hair of the deepest brown, parted irregularly in the middle, flowed in natural ringlets over her shoulders, and whenever she chanced to stoop, fell over and hid from view her lovely bosom. Gazing into the depths of her strange blue eyes, when she was in a contemplative mood, they seemed most placid yet unfathomable; but when illuminated by some lively emotion, they beamed upon the beholder like stars." (Chapter 5). Her hands and feet are small, delicate, and soft, and her skin, from "continual ablutions and the use of mollifying ointments," was very smooth and soft.

Mehevi: The chief of the Typee is a calm, considerate person. He makes an effort to communicate, and is the one who gave Thomas the name of "Tommo." He is the one who make sure that Tommo and Toby are attended to by Kory-Kory. (chapter 10) Mehevi's role is to keep balance in the Valley of Typee and to make sure that the Typee do not offend the ancestors, that they do not do anything taboo, and also that they are always prepared to defend themselves from the Happar.

The Typee: While on board the Dolly, Tommo learns of the Typee. He is told that they are cannibals and the cruelest sort of "savages." (chapter 8). As a result, both Tommo and Toby are terrified by the Typee. Later, they learn that the Typee are actually kind, that the supposedly docile Happar are the vicious ones. Both the Happar and the Typee are cannibals. Tommo never quite understands all the reasons for cannibalism, except that he understand that the reasons for eating the enemy is to totally consume their power and dominate them.

The Happar: Tommo and Toby are told that the Happar are very peaceful and that they abhor violence. Tommo has been told that the Happar "cultivated with its inhabitants the most friendly relations, and enjoyed besides a reputation for gentleness and humanity which led us to expect from them, if not a cordial reception, at least a shelter during the short period we should remain in their territory. (chapter 8)." This information turns out to be absolutely the opposite of reality. The Happar are violent and predisposed to immediately devouring all those captured or killed in battle.

Discussion Questions

Question 1:

One of the defining attributes of the islanders is the fact that they practice cannibalism. However, the Happers and the Typees are very different tribes, with different ideas and attitudes. How are the Happers and the Typee different?

Question 2:

At first, the island of Nukuheva seems to be an island paradise. Later, as Tommo and Toby spend more time, they come to see it as another kind of prison rather than a paradise. What happened? Describe the events that occurred that resulted in the perception of freedom being eroded, and the how the earthly paradise came to be perceived as, in some ways, dangerous, even hellish.

Question 3:

One of the main themes in *Typee* is how one learns about oneself through travel and encounters with other cultures. Tommo is an observant student of human culture, and he is willing to listen and learn about the Typee, especially in his interactions with Kory-Kory, Fayaway, and the chiefs. However, Toby, in contrast, seems to learn nothing, but instead each of his encounters with the Typee seems to reinforce his original prejudices. As a result, his journey has been ultimately nihilistic, and when he disappears, he disappears without a trace until a rumor of his return to New England reaches Tommo's ears. Compare and contrast the encounters that Tommo had with the Typee with the ones that Toby had, and explain where and how Toby's led him to learn nothing.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

TOMME (Curious, Questing, Adventurous)

Character Tommo, the protagonist of *Typee*, writes his story of his adventures in the Marquesas Islands of the South Seas in 1846, three years after his return. He traveled to the South Seas as a sailor, which required a long commitment since to make the journey from New York City required a voyage of six months. Tommo possesses a lively intellect and to satisfy his intellectual curiosity, he studies the natural history of the South Seas before his journey, and he refers to the history and the customs often during his narrative, which provides the reader a great deal of insight.

Illustrative Moments

Analytical: A sailor and a diarist in the manner of Christopher Columbus and other explorers, Tommo keeps very precise records of the details of the journey. As he approaches the South Pacific islands after a long voyage, he writes: "This island, although generally called one of the Marquesas, is by some navigators considered as forming one of a distinct cluster, comprising the islands of Ruhooka, Ropo, and Nukuheva; upon which three the appellation of the Washington Group has been bestowed. They form a triangle, and lie within the parallels of 8 degrees 38" and 9 degrees 32" South latitude and 139 degrees 20" and 140 degrees 10" West longitude from Greenwich. (chapter two)" The specific details lend a great deal of authenticity to his narrative, and give it an impression of reality.

Curious: Tommo expresses his thoughts with a sense of wonder, and one feels a sense of shared discovery as one reads his account. For example, he describes the young women who swam to their ship, "The Dolly" in magical terms: "their appearance perfectly amazed me; their extreme youth, the light clear brown of their complexions, their delicate features, and inexpressibly graceful figures, their softly moulded limbs, and free unstudied action, seemed as strange as beautiful" (Chapter two). In emphasizing the difference between the two locations, he heightens the senses in the readers and they, too, enter into a state of extreme perception.

Anthropological focus on food: In addition to making observations about the landscape and the people, Tommo catalogues the customs of the islanders, including their food. He describes "poe-e-poe-e" which is a staple article of food among the Marquesas islanders. It is manufactured from the fruit of the bread-fruit tree. Tommo states that it "somewhat resembles in its plastic nature our bookbinders' paste, is of a yellow colour, and somewhat tart to the taste" (Chapter 10). It may sound revolting (which is titillating to the American reader), but Tommo has learned to enjoy it. In fact, he's so enthusiastic about tasting it, that

when he is at a dinner, he “eyed it wistfully for a moment, and then, unable any longer to stand on ceremony, plunged my hand into the yielding mass, and to the boisterous mirth of the natives drew it forth laden with the pœe-pœe, which adhered in lengthy strings to every finger” (chapter 10).

Criticized Christianity: A theme that emerges in *Typee*, but can be found in all Melville’s work is the idea of criticizing Christianity. Instead of bringing salvation, Melville often states that Christianity brings domination, slavery, and humiliation to the peoples it encounters. The Christian missionaries encountered by Tommo are destructive to the culture and the dignity. They are viewed by the Typee people as essentially duplicitous -- for example, they consider the missionary woman they encounter to be absolutely disgusting for her duplicity. They were fascinated by her long, flowing, long-sleeved dress, and they considered her to be a different type of being.

Modest: Unlike his islander counterparts, Tommo is modest. He is not eager to be seen in the company of others in a state of nudity. For example, when he must bathe with the women in a little bathing area in a pool of a stream, under a waterfall, he feels embarrassed in the presence of women. He stands in the stream and does not remove his clothes at first, and when he does, it’s only his waist up. His companion, the islander, Kory-Kory, is horrified and pours out a “torrent of words in eager deprecation of so limited an operation, enjoining me by unmistakable signs to immerse my whole body” (chapter 11).

Finds Polynesian women beautiful: Tommo finds all the women of Nukuheva to be beautiful, and is most enchanted by Fayaway. He describes her in terms that would be very appealing to the English and American readers, whose ideas of decency would not allow explicit or graphic descriptions. He describes Fayaway in almost erotic terms: “Her free pliant figure was the very perfection of female grace and beauty. Her complexion was a rich and mantling olive, and when watching the glow upon her cheeks I could almost swear that beneath the transparent medium there lurked the blushes of a faint vermilion. The face of this girl was a rounded oval, and each feature as perfectly formed as the heart or imagination of man could desire” (chapter 11). He describes all the women with the same sense of wonder, including those who swam up to the Dolly to meet them when their ship approached the port at Nukuheva. “ their appearance perfectly amazed me; their extreme youth, the light clear brown of their complexions, their delicate features, and inexpressibly graceful figures, their softly moulded limbs, and free unstudied action, seemed as strange as beautiful” (Chapter two). One has to smile when one considers Tommo’s description of the tattooed Typee men such as Kory-Kory. He finds the men to be hideous, and never fails to mention that they are cannibals, although it is fairly likely that the women are cannibals, too (unless, of course, there is some kind of taboo against women eating men).

Acculturation: Tommo’s approach is actually quite humorous: “When at Rome do as the Romans do, I held to be so good a proverb, that being in Typee I made a point of doing as the Typees did. Thus I ate pœe-pœe as they did; I walked about in a garb striking for its simplicity” (chapter 28). Tommo described how he finally decided to try raw fish, and described how they are in reality “remarkably tender and quite small,” and at the end of the day, he came to like them, and even look forward to eating them.

Question 1: For all of Tommo’s quests for a better world and for a better understanding of the world at large, he never actually learns anything profound. Instead, the more he explores and the more he wanders, the more he sees that there is no actual paradise and there is no perfection, except perhaps in the form of Fayaway. Describe Tommo’s vision and views of Fayaway, and describe how they posit that there may be hope and a possibility of perfection in a flawed world.

Question 2: Tommo learns the language of the *Typee* and eventually is able to communicate with them in a surprisingly sophisticated way. Describe how the acquisition of language results in mutual comprehension and a better sense of identity, both in terms of self, culture, and identity.

Question 3: Tommo opens his narrative with a brief history of the natural history of the South Pacific Islands of the Marquesas and the Sandwich Islands. He then discusses the culture and traditions, along with a history of exploration and settlement by European explorers and missionaries. Through it all, he maintains a firm sense of the “exotic” as describes from his own experience and that of others. Please find examples of how Tommo shapes his descriptions of the island’s geography, the people, their

traditions, and the flora and fauna in ways that make it seem “exotic.” What are some of the implications of making Nukuheva “exotic”? How does it affect concepts of identity and reality?

TOBY (Restless, Impatient)

Character Toby is a dashing, quintessential figure of a sailor who looks very handsome in his blue jacket, white duck pants, and striped cotton shirt. He’s very athletic and eager to be recognized for his accomplishments. Toby is restless, even headstrong, which makes him rather reckless. He is a good friend, however, to Tommo, and they help each other survive their journey through the jungle, and also their encounters with aggressive islanders. Toby is more than a foil or a companion for Tommo. He is a change agent, and his actions precipitate change.

Illustrative Moments

Attractive: Toby is more of the classic sailor, and he looks the part. He’s described as tall, muscular, brooding, dark-haired, and dark-eyed, with a rather hidden past. He impresses all with his good looks, although the fact that he is so temperamental and moody means that he does not endear himself to everyone. In contrast, although Tommo does not describe himself, it’s pretty evident that he is rather unexceptional in terms of looks.

Does not mince words (eating “a morsel”): Toby is very blunt and direct. He tends to say what he means and does not self-censor in the least. Tommo, in contrast, is more diplomatic. For example, when the Typee invite them to a feast and Kory-Kory gives Tommo a bit of meat to eat, Tommo immediately praises it: “By tasting it, to be sure,’ said I, masticating a morsel that Kory-Kory had just put in my mouth, ‘and excellently good it is, too, very much like veal.” Toby scoffs and begs to differ: “‘A baked baby, by the soul of Captain Cook!’ burst forth Toby, with amazing vehemence; ‘Veal? why there never was a calf on the island till you landed. I tell you you are bolting down mouthfuls from a dead Happar’s carcass, as sure as you live, and no mistake!’” (chapter 12). Albeit grotesque, Toby provides comic relief here. He is blunt and will not go along with everything suggested to him. He is willing to resist small things, whereas in the case of Tommo, it takes a lot to get him to resist and say “no.” It took the prospect of having dark, black lines tattooed across his white face for him to give the kind of resistance that Toby offers right at the suggestion of anything conflicting with his values.

Mutinous: Tommo and Toby jump ship after a failed mutiny. The voyage before they landed in the Marquesas Islands had been long and very hard, and they considered the captain to be a dangerous tyrant who had no regard for the feelings or safety of the sailors. They decide that it will be better in the long run to jump ship and try to make it on their own in the islands than to endure the abuses of the captain. Mutiny does not seem mutinous -- it seems to be a matter of common sense and survival. Tommo only decides to become mutinous after they ran out of food except for moldy biscuits. Toby, however, rebels against almost anything.

Courageous: Although we do not know Toby’s real name, and never have much of a sense of his personal history, except to understand that he was leaving a past he did not care for, we come to know Toby was “active, ready and obliging, of dauntless courage, and singularly open and fearless in the expression of his feelings” (chapter five). Toby is courageous to the point of being rash. He is the one who wanted to set out from the ship and explore the valley of the Typee, and he is the one who continually wants to lead the way in any kind of journey, escape, quest, or fight.

Restless: Toby easily comes to feel himself a prisoner, and finds himself overwhelmed with irresistible desires to escape, even if he is not a prisoner at all, just the guests of rather oversolicitous hosts. “The truth was, he felt impatient to escape from the place, and wished to avail himself of our present high favor with the natives to make good our retreat, before we should experience some sudden alteration in their behavior. As he could not think of leaving me in my helpless condition, he implored me to be of good cheer; assured me that I should soon be better, and enabled in a few days to return with him to Nukuheva” (chapter 13). Unlike Kory-Kory, Toby’s not very loyal. We do not see Toby again until the very

end of the novel, when we hear “Toby’s Story” and that he had hidden with a new group of people, who also held him as their “guests.” He escaped from them, but Tommo is never sure of the details.

Impulsive: his nature (passionate, moody): Toby is very handsome in a dark, brooding way, and the reader thinks of him as a kind of romantic hero, except that he does not do enough in the novel to cause the reader to relate to him. He is a foil for Tommo, and also his impulsiveness is what propels the novel forward. He wears a blue frock and duck trousers, and Tommo observes that he is “as smart a looking sailor as ever stepped upon a deck” and that his saturnine temperament is complemented by his looks: “his naturally dark complexion had been deepened by exposure to the tropical sun, and a mass of jetty locks clustered about his temples, and threw a darker shade into his large black eyes.” Toby’s looks complement his temperament: “He was a strange wayward being, moody, fitful, and melancholy—at times almost morose. He had a quick and fiery temper too, which, when thoroughly roused, transported him into a state bordering on delirium” (chapter 5). Toby’s temper and moodiness lead to rash decisions, many of which bear along Tommo.

A heart, a sailor: While Tommo is an adventurer, Toby is at heart, a sailor. They soon descended towards the beach, and found themselves in Jimmy’s house before it was well dark. Here he received another welcome from his Nukuheva wives, and after some refreshments in the shape of coconut milk and poee-poe, they entered a canoe (the Typee of course going along) and paddled off to a whaleship which was anchored near the shore. This was the vessel in want of men. Our own had sailed some time before. The captain professed great pleasure at seeing Toby, but thought from his exhausted appearance that he must be unfit for duty. However, he agreed to ship him, as well as his comrade, as soon as he should arrive. (“Toby’s Story”).

Question 1: Toby is something of a rebel. He’s not bad enough to be an anti-hero, but his rebelliousness definitely functions in a positive way in the narrative as it triggers actions that lead to other actions. For example, if Toby had not decided to press on in the jungle, he and Tommo would never have visited the Typee Valley. Describe other examples of when Toby precipitated narrative action.

Question 2: In many ways, Toby is the quintessential romantic hero. However, Melville is much too nihilistic to fully embrace romanticism as something that leads to transcendent, higher knowledge. Demonstrate how Toby’s romanticism leads to destructive behavior and the loss or spoiling of paradise, rather than the ascent to a higher realm of consciousness in a perfect paradise.

Question 3: How does Toby react to cannibalism and the other customs and traditions of the Typee and also the Happers? How does his attitude differ from that of Tommo? Does Toby learn to speak the language? What are Toby’s attitudes and underlying prejudices towards the islanders?

KORY-KORY (Loyal, Persistent)

Character An often comical but always sympathetic character, Kory-Kory is the islander that Tommo comes to appreciate, respect, and love more than any others during his adventures on the island of Nukuheva. Terrifying to the Europeans, who see his tattoos and hear about the cannibal feasts, Kory-Kory does present a fearsome aspect. He is, however, always solicitous and kind, and he takes the time to teach Tommo his language and to share the history and traditions of the island.

Illustrative Moments

Persistent: Kory-Kory is our bridge to the islander culture, and through him, we see the essential beliefs and qualities of the Marquesas people in general, and the Typee in particular. He also shows us the level of technology that the islanders possessed. For example, they did not have matches, but they did have a need for fire, since they used it to cook meat and also to prepare poee-poe. The technology used required persistence, which we see in the example of starting a fire using sticks. Melville uses it as a chance to contrast the Typee with the Europeans: “what a striking evidence does this operation furnish of the wide difference between the extreme of savage and civilized life. A gentleman of Typee can bring up a numerous family of children and give them all a highly respectable cannibal education, with infinitely

less toil and anxiety than he expends in the simple process of striking a light; whilst a poor European artisan, who through the instrumentality of a lucifer performs the same operation in one second, is put to his wit's end to provide for his starving offspring that food which the children of a Polynesian father, without troubling their parents, pluck from the branches of every tree around them" (chapter 14).

Generous: Kory-Kory is energetic and he shares everything without a second thought. He is the embodiment of the kinds of personalities required for harmonious living, and he reinforces the feeling that Tommo and Toby truly are in a kind of Edenic, prelapsarian world, where there is no sickness or anger. Kory-Kory observes Tommo and proactively takes it upon himself to make him comfortable: "Sometimes in the cool of the evening my devoted servitor would lead me out upon the pi-pi in front of the house, and seating me near its edge, protect my body from the annoyance of the insects which occasionally hovered in the air, by wrapping me round with a large roll of tappa. He then bustled about, and employed himself at least twenty minutes in adjusting everything to secure my personal comfort" (chapter 14).

Adheres to tradition & hospitality: The Typee were very hospitable, to the point of eventually making Tommo and Toby feel like prisoners. At first, it seemed to be due to a profound kindness and concern for their welfare. Later, however, it seemed clear it was somehow connected to their beliefs and the need to avoid the taboo -- and, the guest refusing hospitality would commit some sort of taboo and bring dishonor (and disapprobation of the ancestors.) Tommo observed it when he expressed the wish to leave the valley and go back to the ship: "The mere suggestion of my departure had estranged from me, for the time at least, Mehevi, who was the most influential of all the chiefs, and who had previously exhibited so many instances of his friendly sentiments. The rest of the natives had likewise evinced their strong repugnance to my wishes, and even Kory-Kory himself seemed to share in the general disapprobation bestowed upon me" (Chapter 13).

Not Attractive from an American or European view: Tommo is rather harsh when he describes Kory-Kory. It is interesting to see how his descriptions of Kory-Kory differ from those of Fayaway. While he makes Fayaway the ideal of feminine beauty, and both sexualizes her while making her an eternal innocent, his treatment of Kory-Kory is quite harsh in comparison. Instead of being attracted to him, Tommo is revolted and fearful of Kory-Kory, and never fails to remind the reader that the Typee are cannibals (even though he does mention that they are kind and generous). Kory-Kory is depicted in paradoxical terms: "Hideous aspect? though the most devoted and best natured serving-man in the 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" (chapter two).

Proud of Typee values: Kory-Kory is patient and prides himself on being able to develop a system of communication with Tommo and Toby. Part of his desire to communicate comes from his belief in the superiority of the Typee over the Happar, their enemies. He wants Tommo and Toby to know that the Typee are kind, fair, decent and loyal people, who honor their ancestors and observe ancient traditions. He does avoid the issue of cannibalism because he knows that Tommo is averse to it. When it came to communicating their values, "Kory-Kory seemed to experience so heartfelt a desire to infuse into our minds proper views on these subjects, that, assisted in his endeavours by the little knowledge of the language we had acquired, he actually made us comprehend a considerable part of what he said. To facilitate our correct apprehension of his meaning, he at first condensed his ideas into the smallest possible compass" (Chapter 4)" Knowing that the Europeans are horrified by cannibalism, Kory-Kory never fails to tell Tommo that the Happers are voracious cannibals: "'Happar keekeenoo nuee,' he exclaimed, 'nuee, nuee, ki ki kannaka!—ah! owle motarkee!' which signifies, 'Terrible fellows those Happers!—devour an amazing quantity of men!—ah, shocking bad!'" (chapter 13).

Body Art: When we first meet Kory-Kory, we do so through the eyes of Tommo, who perceives him through the eyes and aesthetics of Americans and Europeans (not through the islanders' own lenses). In doing so, the novel creates a fascinating portraiture of difference and takes the "exotic" into a different realm which hints at rituals and beliefs that lead to the outward expression of art and especially body art.

Although Kory-Kory has tattoos on much of his body, Tommo focuses on the face: "His countenance thus triply hooped, as it were, with tattooing, always reminded me of those unhappy wretches 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 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.'" (Chapter two). What is interesting about this description is that Melville openly refers to a museum of natural history and also books of anthropology, which suggests that Melville is also engaged in a scientific inquiry, even as he is also seeking adventure.

Kory-Kory's Mother: Kory-Kory's mother, Tinor, was very kind-hearted and generous. She, like the other Typee, treated Tommo and Toby quite well. In fact, the Typee were extremely kind to Tommo, and the reader starts to wonder why anyone would want to leave the island, except for two factors: taboo and cannibalism. If the outsiders unwittingly commit a taboo act (which undoubtedly, they eventually would), the islanders would be forced to torture, kill, and potentially cannibalize them, depending on the tradition. Further, the outsiders, with their white skin, were prize catches for the marauding Happers, and once captured, they would be slowly tortured, killed, and eaten. If it were not for cannibalism, Tommo would have stayed, enjoying fantasies about the lovely Fayaway, being pampered as he was by Kory-Kory's mother: "she had the kindest heart in the world, and acted towards me in particular in a truly maternal manner, occasionally putting some little morsel of choice food into my hand, some outlandish kind of savage sweetmeat or pastry, like a doting mother petting a sickly urchin with tarts and sugar plums. Warm indeed are my remembrances of the dear, good, affectionate old Tinor!" (chapter 11).

Questions:

Question 1: Kory-Kory is an intimidating presence and his appearance. With his tattoos and hair arrangement, he tends to intimidate Tommo and Toby. However, Kory-Kory is one of the kindest and most generous characters in the novel. What are some of the ways in which Kory-Kory shows his generosity? What are the implications? How does Melville suggest that Kory-Kory is part of a purer race of people than the Europeans?

Question 2: When Kory-Kory expresses his desire to continue to be as kind as possible to the outsiders, Toby and Tommo, how might his behavior be motivated as much by kindness as by his fear breaking a taboo. Please describe taboos and how Kory-Kory relates to them.

Question 3: Kory-Kory's tattoos have a deeper significance than just fashion or decoration. What is it? How do the attitudes about cannibalism tie together with the underlying reasons for and beliefs about face tattooing?

Works Cited

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