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## Interpersonal Relationships between Sailors: A Critical Study of Herman Melville's *Typee*

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### Abstract

Herman Melville occupies an important place among English and other writers of literature in the world. The novelists of American origin, living in different countries of the world, are now recognized among the literary jewels of the literary work. They have won nearly all literary awards and appreciations. American novels have reflected to the world the colourful and glorious culture and traditions of America and Herman Melville is one of the famous writers of America and made his position by authoring several novels, poems and short stories best known for his sea novel *Moby Dick*. He knew the problems and sufferings of sailor as he had always been a sailor throughout his life and whatever he had experienced during his journey he pen down in the form of sea novels. His novels are based on his personal experiences and adventures. *Typee* was written when he travelled to Marquesas Islands. While at sea for different reasons, many relations build and break. The current paper deals with the interpersonal relationships between sailors that what kind of relations sailors develop with others during their travel. The paper also explores the way and manner in which fellow sailors behave each other.

**Key words:** Nautical fiction; interpersonal relationships; behavior of sailors; bond of friendship; love; care; hospitality; enmity; cannibalism.

When it comes to nautical fiction, we do not find a better novelist than Herman Melville. Being a sailor, Melville has used his potential to its best to bring the life of sailors to the people who are not aware about the difficulties and problems of sea life. Being at sea for different reasons like whaling, cargo or carrying migrants from one place to another, sailors experience the unexpected incidents while at the sea. They have explored the unexplored areas of the world and the stories which a common has only heard and the sailors witnessed and experienced. They have a long list of those stories that might not end.

While at ship, there is a big crew to carry out different routine works of the ship so that it should be able to sail freely. And in carrying out the different works there is a need of team. It is not so that those who are working in the same department should have fine tuning and good relations. There are different types of interpersonal relations develop among the sailors while at sea. Some become friends, some become enemies and some remain neither friend nor enemy.

*Typee: A Peep At Polynesian Life* starts with the statement of the narrator that he was at the sea for six months and had not seen a patch of land. This very beginning of the novel gives the idea that the narrator wants to see the land and is fed up with the life ship at sea for months. He expresses his desires in the following lines as;

“SIX MONTHS AT SEA! Yes, reader, as I live, six months out of sight of land; cruising after the sperm-whale beneath the scorching sun of the Line, and tossed on the billows of the wide-rolling Pacific – the sky above, the sea round, and nothing else! Weeks and weeks ago our fresh provisions were all exhausted. There is not a sweet potato left; not a single yam.”(pg1)

*Typee* is about the experiences and adventures of the two sailors who become friends on the ship. Tom joins the ship for the sake of adventure only and Toby as a sailor. It can be argued that Tom is Melville’s mouthpiece or his fictional identity or representative who goes to sea for the sake of adventure only with Tom. They plan to slip away from the ship as they were fed up with the life of the ship and had not seen the patch of land for months. As they were eating only salt-preserved food wanted to enjoy some fresh food available on the land. To execute their plan they were in need of perfect time to slip from the eyes of captain and other sailors. Here, the interpersonal relationship between Tom and Toby becomes important that they develop the bond of friendship. Tom reveals his plan to leave the ship only to Toby as it seems to Tom that Toby is the one who understands him.

The crew expresses joy when the sailors spotted an island and wanted to enjoy some fresh air and food by spending some time on that island but. But there comes sheer disappointment when the captain clears that they are not going to spend any time on the land as the island is not safe for human beings. He further tells that many white men went there and not returned. He warns that the sailors that they will land there but ask them not to throw their lives in danger. He also gives direction that before sunset, there would be two bells for the sailors to return. Though the crew goes with the captain and follows the orders given by him. But Tom, for whom this journey on the ship is a part of adventure and he decides to defy his captain. It is not so that all the crew members are of same mental state and follow the orders as given by the captain. Toby, another sailor, who becomes friend of Tom, also wants to spend some time on the land. They decides that when the boat will stop for rest and relaxation and after spending some quality time there on an island in the Marquesas, and would catch a boat to the UK.

But nothing happens as is always thought and planned. The same happens with Tom and Toby who defies their captain’s orders and slips from the boat. Their real adventure is going to start on the island in the Marquesas. As other men fell asleep, Tom and Toby escapes from the place and plunges into the depths of an extensive grove that was in its rear. After a wretched over-land haul—including very little food that they had stolen, they shared with each other. Their relationship can be understood by these lines:

... Toby informed me that in the morning he had placed two whole biscuits in his bosom, with a view of munching them, should he feel so inclined, during our flight. These were now reduced to the equivocal substance which I had just placed on the leaf. (40)

Here, the bond of friendship seems so strong when they divide the food into equal portions and motivate each other during the travel. It can be seen in these lines:

...I suggested to my companion that little of it as there was, we should divide the bread into six equal portions, each of which should be a day’s allowance for both of us. This proposition he assented to; so I took the silk kerchief from my neck, and cutting it with my knife into half a dozen equal pieces, proceeded to make an exact division. (41)

With short supply of food they were also deprived of the sleep, somehow pass the treacherous cliffs, and rain that soaks the garments of the Tom and Toby, the men arrive in a valley where they witness the settlement of a native tribe. Tom receives a semi-serious injury to his leg and is happy to find the place to rest. Problems do not end here, another problem for them is to make sure that they are not in the valley of Typees (rumored to be cannibals) and they are at the Happers (who have a safer, more peaceful reputation).

The place they reached was full of natural beauty and they cast their eyes into those dim-looking shades. They moves forward and after going through the thicket, they reach the place of the natives who were found naked. Tom and Toby tries to communicate with them and it can be seen as:

The frightened pair now stood still, whist we endeavoured to make them comprehend the nature of our wants. In doing this Toby went through with a complete series of pantomimic illustrations – opening his mouth from ear to ear and, thrusting his fingers down believe the poor creatures took us for a couple of white cannibals who were about to make a meal of them. When, however, they understood us, they showed no inclination to relieve our wants. At this juncture it began to rain violently, and we motioned them to lead us to some place of shelter... (68)

There was problem in communicating with the natives and it is a barrier for the natives as well as Tom and Toby to interact with the natives who they are. Tom and Toby, on reaching the place, were tired and hungry and wet, and they decide to risk their lives and accept the warm welcome of the natives. At first, they received hospitality and offered delicious food called ‘Poee- Poee’ by the natives. Tom is now called Tommo as natives were unable to pronounce his name. Though it was said that this island belongs to cannibals called Typee, but the way Tom and Toby receives warm welcome changes their way of thinking for the tribes.

They found women of the tribe very polite. There is grace in their behavior. Sailors find that women are beautiful, the men respectful, and, with careful pantomiming or with the use of gestures, the sailors and the natives are trying to understand each other and even got success in doing so. Weeks passed and they are not having any problem in living. Fayaway, can be called the tribal beauty, takes care of the sailors and Kori-Kori takes Tom on his shoulders to the fountain and other places as Tom’s leg is not in working condition till now. Here, Tom falls in love with Fayaway and a kind of relationship that develops is love. Katelyn Quigley argues that the place seems like Garden of Eden to Tom as he feels about the place and natives. She says:

The perception of Nukuheva as possessing Eden-like qualities emphasizes and reinforces the themes that Melville asserts throughout the narrative. The unblemished beauty of the physical surroundings and, thus, the people who inhabit them is starkly contrasted by the actions and resulting consequences brought about by the arrival of white crews. (Katelyn 6)

However, it becomes clear to Tom and Toby that the people are not Happers as they thought, rather they are Typee. As already heard by other sailors, those Typee are not looking cannibals by their behavior and appearance, they seem nice enough for the time being, so the two men decide to proceed cautiously as Tommo's leg worsens. Tom and Toby make a plan for Toby to head to the French-occupied bay nearby, so they gather first aid supplies, and Toby makes departure as soon as possible. At this instance, their relationships come to front as in this stage and condition when Tom needs first aid as well as Toby’s support; he asks Toby to go but at the same time needs him. First Toby denies going but accept later because Toby wants to escape from the valley of cannibals as he knew that they can grow harsh any time. So it is better to leave the place as soon as possible

At early dawn, Toby starts his journey to the bay, and till noon everything was fine, Tom taking rest in the hut and at once he hears the shouting of the natives. Within no time, the valley starts echoing with the wild cries of the natives. It seems to Tom that something has happened to Toby and he finds that girls are lamenting and crying that Toby is dead. When Toby is taken to the hut by the natives, Tom checks him and finds that his heart is beating, and at this instance feels satisfied that he is alive. Tom wipes away the blood, examines his wound, cut the clotted hair and finds that the injury is something three inch long. He washes the wound with water and in few moments Toby come into senses and narrates the whole incidents as how he receives the injury from the hands of the Happers. At this point again, there relationships appear as how Tom takes care of Toby. Although there seems that Toby is reluctant to

escape from the place, but it doesn't matter much. Tom performs his duty as a friend and companion by taking care of Toby in this crucial injury.

After healing from the injury, Toby attempts to execute the plan again and this time he got success in escaping from the valley of Typees. The natives help him getting the boats arriving to the bay. The natives narrate different conflicting stories of Toby to Tom. On the pretext of bringing first aid box he leaves the place and never returns. After waiting for a long time, Toby does not return, and Tom must make his mind to live without Toby and with the lame leg surrounded by the natives alone. But he is not ready to believe what the natives informed him about Toby, as a good friend he is not ready to believe that Toby has left, and he has faith in his companionship and expecting the return of Toby. At the same time he is also considering this act of Toby as betrayal in the friendship. It can be summed up in the following lines:

... At first I accused him of perfidiously deserting me; but as I grew more composed, I upbraided myself for imputing so cowardly an action to him, and tranquillized myself with the belief that he had availed himself of the opportunity to go round to Nukuheva, in order to make some arrangement by which I could be removed from the valley. At any rate, thought I, he will return with the medicines I require, and then, as soon as I recover, there will be no difficulty in the way of our departure. (108)

After waiting for some days and making enquiries with the Typee, Tom consoles himself that Toby is not going to return. And with the passage of time, Tom or Tommo somehow manages to live a pleasant life with the natives; he develops good relations with Kory-Kory – his manservant and Fayaway - the beauty of Typee valley. As he is getting his lame leg in better health, he moves here and there in the valley and able to learn many things about the customs and traditions of the Typee. He fell in love with the natural beauty over there. He develops relations with the natives in many ways. Gradually, he comes to terms with the life of Typee. He enjoyed the food of the valley and also learns the recipe. He submits himself to the place and considers him as the native of the valley. This relationship of Tom that he develops with each and every thing of valley reveals much about his life and the society in which he lived. It shows that how much he had been fed up in his life. It can be understood in the following lines:

...When I looked around the verdant recess in which I was buried, and gazed up to the summits of the lofty eminence that hemmed me in, I was well disposed to think that I was in the "Happy Valley," and that beyond those heights there was naught but a world of care and anxiety. (124)

Not only this, he learns about the architecture of the Typee, how they build houses. He also learns their temple grounds, the system of taboos or code of conduct of the natives. He also differentiates and compares civilized and uncivilized cultures. And finds that so called uncivilized are much better than civilized.

As Tom's leg is improving, he is able to enjoy the place and his desperation to escape is becoming more and more. He is continuously planning as how to escape and trying to get as much knowledge of the routes. While, on the other hand Typee seems to keep him with them. Tom also feels that he is being given special kind of treatment and he starts enjoying the time over there. But one thing is still floating in his mind as what would be the plan of Typee and why he is being kept and treated as a person of importance. On the other hand, he is anxious about Toby also, as what happened to him and he also should try to escape as early as possible. Where ever he goes, whether for taking bath or for any errand, Kory-Kory is always there with him like his shadow, nobody left him alone. Pretending to go to drink water and trying to escape, Tom couldn't get success in slipping out from the place. There comes the angle of trust among the people. Tom has question in his mind regarding the cannibalism of the Typee and at the same time Typee seems to have doubtful regarding the Tom. After spending months over there, although relationships develops between Typee and Tom, but not able to build trust and gain faith.

The day comes for which Tom has been waiting for a long time. He comes to know that a boat on the beach has come and now nothing is going to stop him. At this time when Tom asked them to leave, some of the Typee blocked his way and asked him to take his seat. At this time he also faces the fierceness in the looks of Typee, as expressed in the following lines:

This convinced me that strangers – perhaps some of my own countrymen – had for some cause or other entered the bay. Distracted at the idea of their vicinity, and reckless of the pain which I suffered, I heeded not the assurances of the islanders, that there were no boats at the beach, but starting to my feet endeavoured to gain the door. Instantly the passage was blocked up by several men, who commanded me to resume my seat. The fierce looks of the irritated savages admonished me that I could gain nothing by force, and that it was by entreaty alone that I could hope to compass my object. (247)

Only the chief seems in favour that Tom should leave. At this point, two groups are formed in Typee, one in Tom's favour and second are to keep him as a captive. But Tom is stubborn and loud here, he tried his full force to make it to the shore. After struggling very much, he is able to make it to the shore. He is supported by Marheyo, Kory-Kory and Fayaway, who clang with him and sob indignantly. It is described in these words

It was at this agonizing moment, when I thought all hope was ended, that a new contest arose between the two parties who had accompanied me to the shore; blows were struck, wounds were given, and blood flowed. In the interest excited by the fray, everyone had left me except Marheyo, Kory-Kory, and poor dear Fayaway., who clung to me sobbing indignantly. I saw that now or never was the moment. Clasp my hands together, I looked imploringly at Marheyo, and moved towards the now almost deserted beach. (250)

At this point again, there is instance of relationships that Tom developed during his stay at the Typee valley. On the one hand some natives say good bye while on the other hand some natives swim in the sea to catch Tom and in a little strife with natives he is able to get to the Australian ship.

To sum up, it can be said that Tom and Toby spent their tough time together at the valley and they remained there for a considerable time and when the time come to save the life, there comes the time to save own's life first. Hesitatingly Toby leaves his friend and somehow he manages to save his life leaving his friend among the so called cannibals. Here, in this narrative, relationships seem strong but when the time comes to fulfill the needs, there comes change in relationships. Though the natives of Typee valley takes care of Tom and when the time comes of his departure, except few natives most of the natives want him to stay there. Hence, relationships grew and with the passage of time, it changes.

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