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Typee: Classroom Edition

Herman Melville



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* This Classroom Edition of Melville's classic first novel contains questions for discussion to help students with reading comprehension, critical thinking, and a close reading of the text. "Melville has the strange, uncanny magic of sea-creatures, and some of their repulsiveness. He isn't quite a land animal. There is something slithery about him. Something always half-seas-over. In his life they said he was mad — or crazy. He was neither mad nor crazy. But he was over the border. ... There he is then, in Typee, among the dreaded cannibal savages. And they are gentle and generous with him, and he is truly in a sort of Eden. Here at last is Rousseau's Child of Nature and Chateaubriand's Noble Savage called upon and found at home. Yes, Melville loves his savage hosts. He finds them gentle, laughing lambs compared to the ravening wolves of his white brothers, left behind in America and on an American whaleship. The ugliest beast on earth is the white man, says Melville. In short, Herman found in Typee the paradise he was looking for. It is true, the Marquesans were 'immoral', but he rather liked that. Morality was too white a trick to take him in. ... There they are, these South Sea Islanders, beautiful big men with their golden limbs and their laughing, graceful laziness. And they will call you brother, choose you as a brother." - D.H. Lawrence Typee, a semiautobiographical work, is Melville's first novel. Like all his work, it is infused with a latent homoeroticism and is important not only as literature but as philosophical, psychological, and anthropological commentary. Most of all, however, it is a fine story that captured the public's imagination and remained one of Melville's most popular works throughout his lifetime.

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