An Interpretation of John Steinbeck's *The Pearl*

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1.

The novelette, *The Pearl*, was written by John Steinbeck in 1945. It firstly appeared in *Woman’s Home Companion* of December, 1945, under the title of “The Pearl of the World.” When the novelette was published in a book form by the Viking Press in 1947, it was simply entitled *The Pearl.* Steinbeck took material for *The Pearl* from a real event which happened in a small fishing village called La Paz, California¹.

An Indian boy by accident found a *pearl of great size, an unbelievable pearl.* He knew its value was so great that he need never work again. In his one pearl he had the ability to be drunk as long as he wished, to marry any one of a number of girls, and to make many more a little happy too. In his great pearl lay salvation, for he could in advance purchase masses sufficient to pop him out of Purgatory like a squeezed watermelon seed. ... He went to La Paz with his pearl in his hand and his future clear into eternity in his heart. He took his pearl to a broker and was offered so little that he grew angry, for he knew he was cheated. Then he carried his pearl to another broker and was offered the same amount. ... He took it to the beach and hid it under a stone, and that night he was clubbed into unconsciousness and his clothing was searched.

... Then he went inland to lose his pursuers and he was waylaid and tortured. But he was very angry now and he knew what he must do. Hurt as he was he crept back to La Paz in the night and he skulled like a hunted fox to the beach and took out his pearl from under the stone. Then he cursed it and threw it as far as he could into the channel. He was a free man again with his food and shelter insecure².

What happens to Kino in *The Pearl* is quite similar to what has happened to the Indian boy who has actually found “a pearl of great size.” There is no doubt that the Indian boy serves as the prototype for Kino.

*The Pearl* tells us how Kino, the protagonist of the story, accidentally finds a big pearl, how he reacts to his finding of the pearl, how he loses his canoe, his house, and even his first-born boy baby, and how he finally decides to throw the pearl back into the ocean. Although the surface of the novelette is simple, straightforward, and often very dramatic, *The Pearl* tells us myth — an allegory — which has universal and symbolic meaning.

2.

At the very beginning of Section I of *The Pearl*, we are given a beautiful description of a warm, peaceful, and serene family scene of Kino’s. Kino is a pearl diver. In a brush house in La Paz, he lives with his common-law wife, Juana, and their baby, Coyotito. Kino is an early
riser. He listens to the noises which roosters, pigs, and birds make in the morning. He then listens to the sound of the waves on the beach, which has been his “music.” Juana makes a fire and prepares breakfast. Kino goes out of the brush house and squats at the doorway. He watches the sun coming up. Behind him Juana grinds the corn for making cornbread. The sound of Juana’s grinding becomes a part of “the song of the family.” Kino hears this song when he watches Juana taking Coyotito from the hanging-box and cleaning him. The ancient melody Juana sings to the baby is also a part of “the song of the family.”

Suddenly, however, one danger, an evil thing, disturbs “the song of the family.” After breakfast Kino and Juana notice a scorpion moving slowly and deliberately down the rope of the hanging-box to the baby who is sleeping in the box. At that moment Kino hears “the song of evil” ringing in his ears. He then hears that “Hail Mary” whispered by Juana faintly mix with “the song of evil.” When the laughing baby shakes the box, the scorpion falls in it. Kino tries to catch the scorpion, but it slips through his fingers. The scorpion’s stinging poisonous tail stings the baby’s shoulder. The baby immediately screams. After managing to catch the scorpion, Kino stamps it into the ground with furious rage. Since the poison of scorpion could be fatal to the baby, Juana quickly sucks out as much of the poison as possible from the puncture on the baby’s shoulder.

Kino’s neighbors come to see the screaming baby. They all know how fatal scorpion’s poisons could be to babies. Juana finally decides to send for a doctor. To get one is almost out of question. The neighbors tell her that a doctor won’t come to this poverty-striken and pathetic little village. So she decides to take Coyotito to the doctor in the town. Juana and Kino start walking to the town with Coyotito in Juana’s arm. Kino’s neighbors follow the family as “the thing had become a neighborhood affair” indicates.

The beggars in the town know how cruel the doctor could be to Kino. Because the doctor’s race has been hostile to Kino’s race, “the pounding music of enemy beats in Kino’s ears” when Kino humbly stands in front of the doctor’s gate. Kino informs the servant that he wants to see the doctor. At that moment the doctor is recalling his happy days in Paris. He asks the servant if Kino has money to pay for the treatment. Then the servant returns to Kino asking him if Kino has money. Kino hands eight mishapen seed pearls to the servant. The servant goes to the doctor. The servant comes back to Kino again to tell him that “The doctor has gone out. . . . He was called to a serious case.” What the servant has told Kino is obviously a lie. Kino is thus rejected by the doctor, because he does not have enough money to pay for the treatment. Kino furiously strikes the doctor’s gate with his fist. The blood oozes from his broken knuckles.

Section II of the novelette begins with a realistic and panoramic description of the beach. Ecology of sea creature is also introduced here.

The beach was yellow sand, but at the water’s edge a rubble of shell and algae took its place. Fiddler crabs bubbled and sputtered in their holes in the sand, and in the shallows little lobsters popped in and out of their tiny homes in the rubble and sand. . . . Spotted botete, the poison fish, lay on the bottom in the eel-grass beds, and the bright-colored swimming crabs scampered over them.
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Later we are given a fantastic and dreamy description of the beach:

Although the morning was young, the hazy mirage was up. The uncertain air that magnified some things and blotted out others hung over the whole Gulf so that all sights were unreal and vision could not be trusted; so that sea and land had the sharp clarities and the vagueness of a dream. Thus it might be that the people of the Gulf trust things of the spirit and things of imagination, but they do not trust their eyes to show them distance or clear outline or any optical exactness. Steinbeck deliberately records these two contradictory views of the beach and the Gulf in order to hint us that “illusion” or “imagination” and “reality” are interlocked in the story.

In the morning Kino and Juana go to the beach. They slide their canoe, “which was the one thing of value Kino owned in the world.” (p. 19) down to the water. Juana puts Coyotito in the canoe while Kino takes a diving rock, his basket, and two ropes. He is going to dive into the sea to find pearls. Juana prays that Kino will be able to find pearls with which he may be able to hire the doctor to cure the baby. About the finding of the pearls the text says “But the pearls were accidents, and the finding of one was luck, a little pat on the back by God or the gods or both” (pp. 21-2). Diving into the sea, Kino rides over the oyster bed carefully so that the water will not be obscured by mud. As he rides over the oyster bed, “the song of pearl” beats in Kino’s ears:

But in the song there was a secret little inner song, hardly perceptible, but always there, sweet and secret and clinging, almost hiding in the countermelody and this was the Song of the Pearl That Might Be.

... And because the need was great and the desire was great, the little secret melody of the pearl that might be was stronger this morning. Whole phrases of it came clearly and softly into the Song of the Undersea.

Kino finally finds the large oyster beneath the overhang on the rock. He notices a ghostly gleam in that oyster shell through its half-opened mouth. Kino’s heart pounds and he hears the song of the Pearl That Might Be. He slowly takes out the pearl oyster and holds it tightly against his chest. He comes up to the canoe. Juna tries to control her excitement, thinking “it is not good to want a thing too much. It sometimes drives the luck away. You must want it just enough, and you must be very tactful with God or gods.” (p. 24). Kino looks at the big oyster and examines it. He hesitates to open it immediately, because he is afraid that this pearl oyster may be a complete illusion, because in this Gulf of uncertain light there are more illusions than realities. Juana’s eyes, however, urge Kino to open it. Kino deliberately opens the shell and lifts the flesh. Finally there comes to view a great pearl: “It was as large as a sea-gull’s egg. It was the greatest pearl in the world.” (p. 25). In Kino’s ears the secret melody of the pearl sounds clearly and beautifully.

Section III begins with “A town is a thing like a colonial animal” (p. 27). This description indicates the idea of the “group organism.” Steinbeck here tries to identify the town with a colonial animal, which has common feet, head, shoulders, and nervous system. The news that Kino has found the Pearl of the World is spreading quickly from the village to the town. The
priest, the shopkeepers, and the doctor hear about the pearl which Kino has found.

The doctor immediately recognizes that it (Kino) is his client who has found unbelievably big pearl, saying "I'm treating his child for a scorpion sting" (p. 28). Almost all of the people in the town—the doctor, the priest, shopkeepers, pearl dealers, and even beggars—speculate on possibility of getting some profit from Kino's pearl. Here we see man's greed in their reaction toward the fortunate accident:

Every man suddenly became related to Kino's pearl, and Kino's pearl went into the dreams, the speculations, the schemes, the plans, the futures, wishes, the needs, the lusts, the hungers, of everyone, and only one person stood in the way and that was Kino, so that he became curiously every man's enemy.  

The news that Kino has found the pearl of the world eventually stirs up "something infinitely black and evil in the town" (p. 30). On the contrary to people's speculations and curiosity, Kino and Juana stand apart from people and they do not notice people's hostile attitude toward them. In Kino's heart the music of the pearl mixes with the music of the family. Kino sees some good dreams being realized by the pearl. He will have a wedding ceremony in church. He will have new clothes and a rifle. He will see Coyotito sitting in the classroom and reading books:

My son will read and open the books, and my son will know writing. And my son will make numbers, ... he will know and through him we will know.

Thus the pearl means for Kino the welfare of his family. With the pearl Kino hopes to purchase peace and happiness for Juana, Coyotito and himself.

Along with the fortune, there also comes evil or bad luck to Kino's family. The priest visits Kino's home without warning. He asks Kino to thank God for having given him a fortune. Although Juana seems to be happy to meet the priest, Kino hears the evil song while the priest is in his house. Kino can guess why the priest visit. He becomes aware that the priest visits him to have an opportunity of getting some profit from Kino. Now Kino realizes that he must protect himself and his family against the world: "Kino was already making a hard skin for himself against the world" (p. 38). Besides, he recognizes how he should deal with this fortunate accident: "the gods do not love success unless it comes by accident. God takes revenge on a man if he be successful through his own efforts." (p. 38).

After having heard about Kino's pearl of the world, the greedy doctor willingly comes to Kino's house to take care of the baby. Since Kino and Juana are uneducated people, they are ignorant of medicine. The greedy doctor comes to the house with the intention of cheating Kino and getting some profit from the pearl by taking advantage of Kino's ignorance. The doctor says that the baby is seriously ill. The doctor gives the baby poisonous white powder in a capusle, which actually make the baby's health worse. The doctor leaves Kino's house, telling Kino that he will come back again in an hour. Because he thinks that the pearl might be stolen by the doctor, Kino hides the pearl quickly in the hole at one corner of the brush house while the doctor is away. Then the doctor comes back to give the baby three drops of
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amonia. Being given amonia, the baby gets well. The doctor asks Kino when he pays the bill. Kino answers that he will pay when he sells the pearl. The doctor pretends as if he has never heard of the news that Kino has found the big pearl. The doctor immediately notices that Kino timidly looks at the corner of the house where Kino has hidden the pearl in the hole. After the doctor has left, Kino feels fear for everyone. The evil music sounds in his ears. He removes the pearl from the hole in the corner of the house to a safer place—a hole under his sleeping mat.

At night Kino hears the evil song and soft footsteps. He senses that something is moving in the corner of the house. Someone has invaded in his house to steal the pearl. Kino tries to catch the dark thing in the darkness. He, however, misses it. He is hurt on the forehead. Juana foresees that the pearl may bring evil to their life rather than welfare, security, and happiness: “It will destroy us. Throw it away, Kino. Let us break it between stones. Let us throw it back to the sea. It will destroy us all. . . . Even our son”13 (p. 50, italics mine). Kino, however, soothes her, saying that the evil will be gone away and only good remains. Looking at the pearl together, Kino and Juana hear that “its music of promise, delight, guarantee of the future, of comfort, of security” (p. 51) comes out of the pearl. Kino and Juana anticipate that the pearl may bring hope to them:

He could see the little image of consecrated candle reflected in the soft surface of the pearl, and he heard again in his ears the lovely music of the undersea, the tone of the diffused green light of the sea bottom. Juana, glancing secretly at him, saw him smile. And because they were in some way one thing and one purpose, she smiled with him.14

Section IV tells us that Kino decides to sell the pearl. Because it will be an important and central day through the following years for Kino’s family, Kino and Juana are all dressed up on the day they go to town to sell the pearl. The neighbors again follow them. Kino’s brother, Juana Tomás, warns Kino not to be cheated by the pearl dealers. Kino attempts to redeem the pearl for a great price. When the procession—consisting of men, women, and children—comes to the pearl-buyer’s office, a jolly-looking fat man, a pearl-buyer, has been playing with a coin in his right hand. His eyes become cruel and stately when he sees Kino come into his office. Kino rolls his great pearl into the velvet plate—this is the most dramatic moment in Kino’s entire life. Kino eagerly waits for the buyer’s judgment. He, however, sees no change in the buyer’s poker face and his attitude. Finally the buyer says, “This pearl is like fool’s gold15. It is too large. Who would buy it? There is no market for such things. It is a curiosity only. I am sorry. You thought it was a thing of value, and it is only a curiosity.” (p. 64).

The buyer tells Kino that he will offer Kino a thousand pesos. Kino cannot believe what the buyer has just told him because he thinks that his pearl would cost at least fifty thousand pesos. Kino meets three other pearl-buyers. The first one says, “This is not a pearl—it is monstrosity” (p. 66). The second one says, “This is soft and chalky, it will lose its color and die in a few months” (p. 67). The third one finally says, “I will offer five thousand pesos” (p. 67). All of them try to cheat Kino, although they know that Kino’s pearl is really valuable. They try to buy it at the cheapest cost and try to sell the pearl at the highest cost.
Being cheated, Kino refuses to sell his pearl in the town. He now decides to sell the pearl in the capital. At night Kino again notices some dark thing trying to attack him to take the pearl from him. Kino then takes the knife and walks to the doorway to catch the dark thing. Again he is cut by the dark unknown thing. Because of darkness, this time again we cannot know who attacks Kino. Juana asks him, “Who?” (P. 73). To her Kino answers, “I don’t know. I don’t see” (p. 73). Kino is now restless, helpless, and hopeless. Again the idea of throwing the pearl back into the sea comes to Juana’s mind. She says to Kino, “Let us destroy it before it destroys us” (p. 74). Kino, however, assures her, saying “In the morning we will take our canoe and we will go over the sea and over the mountains to the capital, you and I. We will not be cheated. I am a man” (p. 74).

Section V begins with a tension between Kino and Juana. Juana gets up quickly next morning. She secretly takes the pearl from the hole. She goes to the beach with a pearl in her hand with an intention of throwing the pearl, which is the source of evil to Kino and Juana, into the sea. Kino, however, notices this. He furiously follows her, kicks her, and takes the pearl from her. Juana submits to Kino, thinking “Kino will drive his strength against a mountain and plunges his strength against the sea. The mountain will stand while the man broke himself; the sea would surge while man drowned in it. And yet it was this thing that made him a man, half-insane and half god” (p. 77). Juana recovers herself and she starts walking toward home.

On her way home she notices that two men are lying in the pathway. The one is Kino. The other is a stranger who has attacked Kino and has been killed by Kino in the struggle. Juana picks up the pearl from the pathway. She hands the pearl to Kino. Juana warns Kino to flee. Because of the pearl of the world, Kino finally commits murder. While Juana goes back home to fetch Coyotito and corn, Kino goes down to his canoe. He finds that the canoe has been destroyed by someone. When he comes up to his house, he sees the fire. It is his house that is burning. Juana comes out with Coyotito in arms, saying “the dark ones” (p. 82) have set fire on the house. Now Kino becomes a furious animal: “for hiding, for attacking, and he lived only to preserve himself and his family” (p. 80).

Kino and Juana go to Tomás’s house to ask the shelter for a moment. Tomás gives them a knife, a small ax, and corncake which his wife Apolonía made. Kino tells his brother that he has murdered the man. Kino tells him that he and Juana are now fleeing to the north. When Tomás asks Kino if he is going to give up the pearl, Kino answers, “This pearl has become my soul. . . . If I give it up, I shall lose my soul” (p. 87, italics mine).

In Section VI Kino and Juana begin their desperate journey “into the world” (p. 89).” The sky is still dark and stars twinkle in the sky. The two walk along the beach-side, to the town. They are heading for Loreto16. In Kino’s ears the music of the pearl is again strong. The music of the family softly underlies it.

When Kino seeks dreams—Visions—in the pearl, these visions, however, become distorted and dark. When he dreams of a wedding ceremony, in the pearl he sees Juana “with her beaten face crawling home through night” (p. 93). When he dreams of his new rifle, he sees “only a huddled dark body on the ground with shining blood from throat” (p. 93). When he dreams of Coyotito learning at school, he sees “thick and feverish face from the medicine” (p. 94). The
pearl is not the symbol of happiness and peace for Kino’s family anymore: “the music of the pearl had become sinister in his ears and it was interwoven with the music of evil” (p. 94). The pearl now becomes the source of all evil things rather than the symbol of happiness. Kino notices that three trackers are after him. It seems there is no way out for Kino. Feeling helpless, Kino decides to go into mountain. He asks Juana to leave him alone. He demands her to flee to the north with Coyotito. She, however, refuses Kino’s proposal. Kino and Juana climb steep slope, seeking the water. They come to the spring to take a rest. Kino says that the trackers will come by evening. He finds a large cave, in which Kino, Juana, and Coyotito hide themselves. When it gets dark, three trackers finally come to the spring. Two of them begin to take a nap, but one keeps a vigil. Kino cannot help killing the trackers, for there is no escape for him: “There is no choice” (p. 109). While Kino walks stealthily and carefully toward the trackers, Juana whispers her prayer of Hail Mary and ancient intercession. In Kino’s ears the song of family becomes strong. The song motivates him as he goes down to the trackers.

*Coyotito* murmurs in the cave. The man who has been keeping vigil thinks that it is a *coyote* that is howling. The watcher fires toward the cave from which the crying comes. He actually shoots the baby, Coyotito, not a coyote. Kino rushes on the watcher to kill him. Kino now has become as hard and cold as steel. He deliberately shoots the other two men to death.

Kino, however, notices that something is wrong. He hears a hysterical cry which comes from the cave. Kino has found out that his baby has been shot by the watcher. Because of the pearl, Kino has murdered four men, he has lost his canoe, his house, and his first born baby.

In the afternoon Kino and Juana return to their village. Juana is carrying her dead baby in her shawl. Kino and Juana look straight ahead. They do not look back. In Kino’s ears the music of the family ringing strongly. Kino now realizes that the pearl has become ugly and gray. Kino and Juana walk to the beach. Kino holds out the pearl to Juana. She looks at the pearl in his hand. She then looks at Kino’s eyes. Kino tries to let her throw the pearl back into the sea, but she refuses to do so saying, “No, you” (p. 117). Peter Lisca interprets that Juana gives Kino his last pride and dignity as a man to throw the pearl back into the sea.

Image — Songs

Throughout the story we notice that “the Song of the Family,” “the Song of the Evil,” “the Song of the Enemy,” and “the Song of the Pearl” appear recurrently and continuously. These songs are interwoven with the events of the story. Particularly there is a close connection between Kino’s action and these “songs.”

“The Song of the Family” symbolizes warmth, love, safety, satisfaction, and protection which any family can provide with its family members. This story begins with the serene Song of the Family. Kino hears it when he watches Juana cooking breakfast, taking care of Coyotito, and when Juana sings softly an ancient melody to Coyotito. When Kino comes back
home with the pearl of the world, he hears the Song of the Family mix with the Song of the Pearl. When he attempts to kill trackers in his strife, the Song of the Family drives him down to the enemies. After the other two songs — Song of the Pearl and the Song of the Evil fade away, only the Song of the Family remains in Kino's ears at the end of the story. Thus we may say that this story begins with the Song of the Family and ends with it. It shows how important a family could be.

"The Song of the Evil" and "The Song of the Enemy" symbolize danger, a dark thing, and a bad thing which threatens security, love, and peace of the family. When Kino and Juana see a scorpion move deliberately down to the baby in the hanging-box, Kino hears this song. Kino hears the Song of the Evil when he stands before the doctor's gate. When the doctor and the priest visit Kino, he hears this song. He hears this song again when he is attacked by some dark thing and when he tries to kill trackers in fight.

"Song of the Enemy" is similar to the "Song of the Evil." Kino hears this song whenever he confronts with his enemies. He hears it when he is cheated by pearl-buyers: when he is sitting helplessly in his brush house; and when he is pursued by the trackers. So "the Song of Evil" and "the Song of the Enemy" are ominous dark songs contrary to "the Song of the Family."

"The Song of the Pearl" is supposed to symbolize promise, delight, guarantee of the future, comfort, and security. The pearl means to Kino the education of Coyotito, his own wedding ceremony in church, the welfare of the family — new dresses and new rifle. Kino hopes to gain peace and happiness for himself, Juana and Coyotito with this pearl. Ironically, however, the pearl, which is supposed to bring him peace and happiness, becomes the source of every evil — the cause of greed and cheating of the doctor and pearl-buyers, the cause of losses of his canoe, his house, and his first-born baby. Finally the Song of the Pearl becomes distorted and insane. When Kino throws the pearl back into the sea, this song disappears:

And the pearl settled into the lovely green water and dropped toward the bottom. The waving branches of the algae called to it and beckoned to it. The lights on its surface were green and lovely. It settled down to the sand bottom among the fern-like plants. Above, the surface of the water was a green mirror. And the pearl lay on floor of the sea. A crab scampering over the bottom raised a little cloud of sand, and when it settled the pearl was gone. And the music of the pearl drifted to a whisper and disappeared.18

Image — Juana

In the novelette, we can find striking contrasts between Kino and Juana as well as beautiful and affectionate relations of the husband and the wife. Ironically, Juana often seems to be stronger than Kino: "She, who was obedient and respectful and cheerful and patient, she could arch her back in child pain with hardly a cry. She could stand fatigue and hunger almost better than Kino himself. In the canoe she was like a stong man" (p. 9, italics mine).

It is Juana, not Kino, who, immediately does her best to suck out the scorpion's poison from the puncture on Coyotito's shoulder. Again it is Juana, not Kino, who insists on taking the

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scorpion-stung-Coyotito to the doctor. It is again Juana who makes a flat damp poultice of brown seaweed and applies it to Coyotito’s swollen shoulder.

These facts show clearly that Juana has maternal strength which is intrinsic to her. Even Kino seems to gain strength from Juana: “He looked then for weakness in her face, for fear or irresolution, and there was none. Her eyes were very bright. He shrugged his shoulders helplessly then, but he had taken strength from her” (p. 102). When trackers are after Kino, Juana cannot leave Kino who faces danger. She decides to stay with him, because she loves Juno. Juana whispers her prayers and ancient magic to guard Kino against evil when he tries to kill the trackers.

Although tension occurs between Kino and Juana in Section V, Juana recognizes that she cannot live without Kino. In the last section of the book Juana respects Kino’s last pride and dignity in bestowing Kino the chance to throw the pearl back into the ocean. Unlike Mrs. Macomber of “Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber,” Juana is not a domineering wife. Like Linda in Death of a Salesman, Juana fully understands her husband, Kino and shows her affection to him.

### Image — Colonial animal

Although the idea of the group organism is not so strong as it is in The Grapes of Wrath, and Tortilla Flat, we still find the idea in this story as Section III begins with “A town is a thing like a colonial animal. A town has a nervous system, and a head and shoulders and feet.” (p. 20). Here Steinbeck identifies the town with a colonial animal. In section IV we notice: “It is wonderful the way a little town keeps track of itself and of all its units. . . . Then every unit communicates to the whole” (p. 53). In the attitudes of Kino’s neighbors, we also notice the idea of group organism. The matter for Kino is the matter for all men in the village: “There was no self-consciousness about their joining Kino and Juana to go pearl selling” (p. 57). The matter for one individual becomes a matter for all. And sometimes matter for all becomes a matter for one individual. We may say that the pearl-buyers also symbolize group organism, because they coordinate each other and they are a part of a system and “there was only one pearl buyer with many hands” (p. 54, italics mine).

4

### Techniques

In the story we find some realistic and panoramic descriptions of nature, animals, and attitudes of men. As I have mentioned before, Section II begins with an objective, and beautiful description of beach, animals, and plants in the sea. On the other hand, in Section VI we find the descriptions of the animals and plants on the mountain. We come across such names of animals as “deer,” “wild sheep,” “pumas,” “raccoons,” “mice,” and “coyote.” We find such names of plants as “maidenhair fern,” “wild grape,” “little palms,” “hibiscus,” and “pampas grass.” In these descriptions of animals and plants of the sea and of the mountain,
we can see Steinbeck’s deep interest in and knowledge of biology. He does not merely emphasize naturalistic meanings of these animals or nature, but he tries to put symbolic meanings in his descriptions of nature. For instance, Steinbeck’s use of “water” and “spring” is one of such good examples. In Section VI we encounter a description of the spring:

Everything that loved water came to these few shallow places. The cats took their prey there, and strewed feathers and lapped water through their bloody teeth. The little pools were places of life because of the water, and places of killing because of the water, too.¹⁹

Like in *The Red Pony*, Steinbeck again tries to use the water as a symbol of the two inevitable elements for living things—life and death.

In Section I we also encounter a symbolic description of nature. Kino squats in the doorway and he watches a small ant trying to escape the sand trap an ant lion has dug:

The ants were busy on the ground, big black ones with shiny bodies, and little dusty quick ants. *Kino watched with the detachment of God while a dusty ant frantically tried to escape the sand trap an ant lion had dug for him.*²⁰

We may say that a dusty ant symbolizes Kino while an ant lion symbolizes the doctor, the priest, and the pearl buyers. As the dusty ant is trapped by the ant lion, so is Kino trapped by the doctor, the priest and pearl buyers.

As Peter Lisca says, we find a technique of the camera-eye in the description of the trackers in Section VI:

When the trackers came near, Kino could see only their legs and only the legs of the horse from under the fallen branch. He saw the dark horny feet of the man and their ragged white clothes, and he heard the creak of leather of the saddle and the clink of spurt. ... Then the dark trackers turned and studied the horse and watched his ears.²¹

We also find some descriptions of the character’s inner feeling in such descriptions as when the pearl buyer sees Kino’s pearl of the world. Although we cannot see the change in the pearl buyer’s face when he sees the pearl of the world, we can see that his hidden action reveal his inner psychological change and his latent surprise:

But there was no sign, no movement, the face did not change, but the secret hand behind the desk missed in its precision. The coin stumbled over a knuckle and slipped silently into the dealer’s lap. And the fingers behind the desk curled into the fist.²²

The dealer is so surprised to see Kino’s pearl of the world that his right hand which has had a coin in it trembles and the coin falls from the hand.

We also notice that Steinbeck deliberately makes a close relation between *darkness* and *evil* things in the story. Kino is attacked several times by dark things at *night*, not in the daytime. Neither Kino nor we know for sure who they are, because of darkness. We vaguely
can suppose that these are killers sent by the doctor or maybe by the priest. When Kino kills the man, it is night. When Kino's house is burnt down, it is night. When Kino kills the trackers in the mountain, it is again night.

**Conclusion**

The end of the story seems to be hopeless, for Kino has lost his canoe, his house, and his baby. Then he finally throws the pearl back into the sea. Some critics say that this is a destructive story. I, however, think that we may say we can see hope at the end of the story, for Kino finally recognizes that the pearl is an unattainable and illusory paradise. The pearl may symbolize fool's paradise. Fontenrose states that “It: (the pearl) was an ambiguous treasure, both Grail and Nibelung gold.” Kino throws the pearl back into the sea by his own choice — with his free will. Thus we may say that Kino becomes a real and free man from his ignorant and innocent beginning through his bitter experiences with the greedy doctor, the priest, pearl dealers, and the trackers. In this respect this story can be read as an “initiation story.” It is wise of him to find the pearl worthless in attainment. Kino seems to go back to the beginning: for he lives first in the village, then he leaves the village, and finally he returns to the village with his wife. So we see the full circle here. Kino, however, begins new spiritual life. There is not bitterness only. I think we can find a Kino who is going to begin his new spiritual life — not life filled with material success and dream — at the end of the story. Peter Lisca says:

> Part of Steinbeck’s success in creating *The Pearl* lies in all parables, suggestive of underlying plans of meaning. The surface story of finding of the pearl, the attempt to sell it for a fair price, and the final resignation in which there is also a tragic triumph is told in a manner which urges the reader to look beyond these physical events into the spiritual significance.

Thus Steinbeck is more than a mere naturalistic writer. For he puts deep symbolic meaning even in such a short story as *The Pearl*.

As Fontenrose puts *The Pearl* in the chapter entitled, “The Moralities,” in his book, *John Steinbeck*, we encounter some sentences which tell us the morals in *The Pearl*. In Section II we find the passage: “It is not good to want a thing too much. It sometimes drives the luck away. You must want it just enough, and you must be very tactful with God or gods” (p. 24). This paragraph tells us that we must not want a thing too much. We must know the limitation of our desires. We must be satisfied with what is given to us. In Section III there is a passage which tells us another moral: “And this Kino knows also that the gods do not love man’s plan, and the gods do not love success unless it comes by accident. He knew that gods take their revenge on a man if he be successful through his own efforts.” (p. 38). This paragraph tells us that gods punish man’s plan. Again in Section III we come across a moral: “For it is said that humans are never satisfied, that you give them one thing and they want something more” (p. 32). This paragraph tells about human being’s unlimited desires, lust, and greed for material things. There are also morals in Kino’s neighbor’s warnings and anxieties: “There it started. A
foolish madness came over him so that he spoke foolish words. God keeps us from such things. Yes, God punished Kino because he rebelled against the way things are "(p. 34). Thus neighbors begin to see Kino being corrupted by his illusory Paradise — the pearl. The neighbors warn us that we must commit everything in God's hand and we must not think too much about our plans.

In conclusion I may say that this story is a parable. The Pearl tells us the vanity of human wishes and human desire for material success. As John Steinbeck says in his prologue of The Pearl that "If this story is a parable, perhaps everyone takes his own meaning from it and reads it his own life in it." Experiences in the life of Kino can represent experiences of our daily life. Kino is one of us. Kino is Everyman.

Notes

1. La Paz is a small fishing village in Lower California. The village faces the Gulf of California.
3. This novelette is strewn with images of "songs." Later I would like to discuss how these images function in the book.
4. The doctor can be considered as a Spanish man.
5. Kino is a paisano, which is a misixture of Spanish, American Indian, and Mexican blood.
6. Ibid., John Steinbeck, p. 18.
7. Ibid., John Steinbeck, p. 18, italics mine.
8. Ibid., John Steinbeck, p. 23.
9. Colonial animal is as same as compound animal. About compound animal, Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language says "any animal, such as most hydroids, corals, and bryozoans, composed of a number of individuals produced by budding from a single parent and usually so fused together that no demarcation is clearly distinguished."
10. Ibid., John Steinbeck, p. 30.
11. Ibid., John Steinbeck, p. 33.
12. What the doctor has told Kino is obviously a lie. We know that the baby has actually recovered when "The Pearl of the World" is found in Section II and Coyotito is not sick any more.
13. Later we, however, know that Juana's worries come true.
15. Fool's gold is "iron pyrites or copper pyrites, like gold in color" (Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, College Edition, p. 563).
16. Loreto is a town in the Southern Territory of Lower California, and is a port on the Gulf of California. It is 145 mile NW of La Paz.
17. Coyote is a small wolf of the western prairies of North America.
20. Ibid., John Steinbeck, p. 104.
21. Ibid., John Steinbeck, pp. 3-4, italics mine.
22. Ibid., John Steinbeck, p. 97.
23. Ibid., John Steinbeck, p. 63, italics mine.
An Interpretation of John Steinbeck's The Pearl

Reference

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