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# An Allegorical Study of Social Revolt, Human Awareness and Philosophy in John Steinback's Novel the Pearl:

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**ABSTRACT:** The Pearl is an anti-corruption social protest in a commercialized and civilized society. The doctor and the pearl buyer brutally abuse the Indian fisherman Kino, exposing the dark side of human nature and the perils of a material world. In the 1940s, Steinbeck focused his attention on studying the marine zoology in the Gulf of California, which is also the subject of The Pearl. As Kino's family is the fishing village's microcosm, the town is the "world's" microcosm. By means of Kino and the town, the relationship between the individual member-unit and the broader group-man unit is expertly accomplished.

The Pearl then introduces the idea of good and evil, which reoccurs frequently in Steinbeck's subsequent writings. According to a parable, the greatest pearl Kino finds transforms from a treasure to a source of torture, and all the joys Kino expects in conjunction with the pearl ultimately result in disappointment. Kino can only get his soul back by tossing the pearl back into the sea. Kino also succeeds in his quest for human decency as he recovers his soul. As a result, The Pearl by John Steinbeck explores on numerous significant themes that reoccur throughout Steinbeck's writings and offers multiple layers of meaning.

**KEYWORDS:** Anti-corruption, Social protest, Human Dilemma, Parable Allegory

The Pearl (1947), one of John Steinbeck's brief novels, has the most significant ramifications. The Pearl reflects the recurrent themes of social revolt, humanistic awareness, and the group-man philosophy that greatly occupied John Steinbeck's thoughts in the 1940s, as did Tortilla Flat (1935), Of Mice and Men (1937), and Cannery Row (1945). In addition to these realistic issues, Steinbeck's love of parable in his postwar fictions is introduced in The Pearl, which also sets the stage for his masterwork, the allegorical novel East of Eden, which was released in 1952. The Pearl actually marks the beginning of a sequence of books that Steinbeck himself declared to be allegorical, including The Wayward Bus (1947), Burning Bright (1950), and East of Eden (1952). The Pearl is as important as a watershed in Steinbeck's work, demonstrating the change in focus from biological and sociological issues to allegorical thematic issues. The Pearl is based on a story Steinbeck heard in the Gulf of California in the 1940s while on expeditions with his lifelong friend Edward F. Ricketts, who was an expert in marine zoology. According to the myth, a Mexican Indian pearl diver discovered a magnificent pearl and dreamed of all the goodies he could get after selling it. But after being defrauded and nearly destroyed, he threw the pearl back into the ocean. According to what Frank W. Watt saw in his book Steinbeck, Steinbeck based on the original happening and enlarged it from two directions, "On the one side, he enriched the realistic background and social context by making the finder of the great pearl the young pearl-diver Kino, and by depicting in greater detail the relationship of the little Indian community with the Mexican town-dwellers, the doctor and the pearl-brokers who despise and exploit the Indians. On the other side, he enlarged the moral implications enormously by making the pearl, not merely a source of wealth and selfish indulgence of various kinds, but a symbol of total material salvation for Kino's family" (85).

On a sociological level, The Pearl is a societal protest against the corruptions in the commercialized and civilized world as well as men's selfish desire for material wealth. The "primitive" Indian fisherman who serves as the main character, Kino, attempts to integrate into and contend with the contemporary industrial and commercialized civilization. The town doctor and the pearl buyer are portrayed as embodiments of the world's vices. Frank F. Watt is right when he





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praises the novelette as “a strong critical attack, direct or indirect, on the ways and values of American civilization” (84). The story's exposition makes it clear that the scorpion, which stands for the natural evil, threatens Kino's family's modest and impoverished existence. The scorpion stings Coyotito, Kino's kid. Like his helpless baby boy, Kino suffers severe injuries and is taken advantage of by the town doctor, who won't cure him because Kino can't afford to pay him. The town doctor is a vicious, naive, and greedy monster who represents the height of evil in the civilized world. As Kino discovers the world's most valuable pearl, the village doctor defrauds him by taking advantage of his ignorance. Even though Coyotito recovers almost completely, the doctor makes the infant consume white powder while feigning to combat the scorpion's venom. As he smells the breeze and listens for any foreign sound of secrecy or creeping, and his eyes search the darkness, for the music of evil is sounding in his head and he is fierce and afraid," Kino harbors suspicions about the doctor. Through the town doctor and subsequently the pearl buyer, Kino first experiences the horrors and vices of the civilized and commercialized society. Kino believes he can sell the best pearl for a good price and that the money will improve the family's quality of life since his son Coyotito will be able to go to school. But the buyer of pearls is cunning and malicious. There is a fictitious competitive system in the pearl industry that takes advantage of the pearl divers' ignorance. Kino's human foes are far more terrible than the scorpion, the natural opponent that assaults his son, because humans are able to scheme misdeeds whereas the scorpion cannot. Raymond M. Sargent's condemnation of the pearl buyers as "liars, cheaters, and parasites living off the life's blood of the Indians" is not surprising.

The Pearl's themes of social revolt and group man analysis are prevalent in many of Steinbeck's 1940s novels, but they do not take the stage in this novelette. In a larger context, the Pearl is allegorical and parabolic. In the essay “The Pearl: Realism and Allegory,” Harry Morris calls the novelette as “a work of a professed parabolist” and asserted that “the fable is an art form and that the fabulist as artist has never lacked insight” (152). Morris also examines Steinbeck's strategy for effectively managing the contemporary story with intricate symbolism, in addition to confirming the allegory's thrilling allusiveness of the most intricate symbolism. According to Morris, Steinbeck overlaid “his primary media of parable and folklore with a coat of realism. . . . His description of the natural world is so handled as to do double and treble duty in enrichment of symbolism and allegory” (153). In fact, the novelette can be interpreted on multiple levels due to the ambiguity and multiple degrees of meanings conveyed by the major symbols. At first, Coyotito is stung by a scorpion and the accident compels Kino to hunt for the greatest pearl in the ocean. Later, as the greatest pearl is found, Coyotito is used at once by the town doctor as a means to obtain the greatest pearl. However, the most significant dream Kino sees into the pearl is the aspiration to give his son an education. Coyotito's death is the death of hope. Kino is awakened by the death of his son and eventually he returns to the fishing village and rejects the pearl by throwing it back into the ocean. Hence, with the death of Coyotito, the literal pearl becomes meaningless to Kino. In this way, Coyotito is Kino's pearl of high worth, both metaphorically and allegorically. It goes without saying that at first, when Kino considers all the delights he and his family may have by selling the actual pearl, he views it favorably. But as the assaults and injuries mount, Kino's wife Juana becomes terrified of the pearl and tells Kino, "This is wicked.... This pearl is like a sin! We shall be destroyed by it." As Juana says, "There is a devil in the pearl," Kino's brother agrees. The pearl makes Kino dream of a better life for the family, but when robbery, theft, and murder occur, the dream turns into a nightmare as the joy of good and beauty gradually fades from Kino's existence. "You should have sold it and passed on the devil." His prior innocence is being shattered as he is being introduced into the world's darkness. As a parable of good and evil, Steinbeck tells us through the confrontations of Kino that “life is neither black nor white but a shade in between. Everything in life is relative, and the motive behind one's choice determines the moral value of the act” (Jain 88). The Pearl goes beyond genuine social issues to explore morality from a philosophical standpoint, which becomes increasingly significant in John Steinbeck's later novels. In The Pearl, Steinbeck expertly crafts a style with the quality of simplicity and employs a pattern of symbols to draw the delicate complexity of the parable into a tight design in order to convey the intricate story of good and evil in such a succinct and poignant manner. Therefore, the novelette's primary emblem is the actual large pearl from the ocean.

In contrast, Kino has innocence and purity which are destroyed after he discovers the pearl. The pearl usually signifies purity or innocence which man loses and tries to find. Furthermore, Steinbeck uses songs like Song of the Family, Song of Evil, and Song of the Pearl to represent the fishermen's feelings and their psychological effects on the environment and the world. Moreover, the novelette's subtle use of lighting and darkness conveys the story's overall hazy, ambiguous, and deceptive nature. Finally, the poetic imagery of the sea which serves as the environment of the fishermen gives and takes away like a superbly indifferent minister of destiny.



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Steinbeck's developing belief of the ever-increasing nature of man's quest of riches and power in *The Pearl* is shown by this assessment of Kino's transformation from a basic good fisherman to a sophisticated corrupted dreamer of world achievements. As the narrative progresses, Kino's finding of the amazing pearl agitates everyone's dreams, speculations, schemes, plans, futures, wishes, needs, lusts, and hungers.

The Pearl as an Everyman Allegory Both Kino and the greatest pearl have acquired metaphorical connotations up to this point, as we can see when we reevaluate the events from Kino's discovery to his protection of the pearl against all the threats and attacks. In his rudimentary simplicity, Kino is excellent before he finds the pearl. However, the pearl, which has been overburdened with multiple symbolic equivalence "stands for greed, for beauty, for materialism, for freedom from want, for evil, for good, for effete society, degenerate religion, and unethical medicine, for the strength and virtue of primitive societies—the pearl, with these words of Kino, stands for Kino's soul" (Morris 159). Kino has endured physical and spiritual suffering while protecting the pearl. From a spiritual perspective, Kino represents the average person who makes mistakes on his path to soul redemption. Kino encounters disasters and descends deeper and deeper into the dark night of the soul as he confronts the commercialized and civilized world that glitters with false wealth and power.

As the cottage burns down and his canoe is ruined, Kino is physically defrauded, taken advantage of, and harmed. Furthermore, Kino turns vicious, hitting his wife once and killing the dark attackers as they are after him. The death of his son Coyotito marks the end of the misery. Ironically, this means that all of his hopes for the future are dashed. As Kino struggles to resist the pearl and reject the world's injustices, he realizes the folly of human desires and starts to view the pearl as a gray, ulcerous object rather than a symbol of luck and the future.

The story's climax is reached in the conclusion when the pearl, for which Kino battles all the destructions, is disposed of. The act of throwing the pearl back into the ocean represents the necessity for humans to make a decision between the frenzied, self-centered modern world and the fundamentally harmless natural life that is between luxury and simplicity. Having gone through the bitterness, the pain and the agony by losing his home, his canoe, and his son along with tolerating the dreadful night flight, his pursuit and desperate struggle in the barren hinterland, Kino sees the pearl with a transformed meaning, "the pearl was ugly; it was gray, like a malignant growth. And Kino heard the music of the pearl, distorted and insane. . . . Kino drew back his arm and flung the pearl with all his might" (527). Additionally, we observe that Juana gives Kino the chance to return the pearl to the ocean out of understanding and compassion.

Three facets of significance are revealed by the pearl's ultimate disposal. The novelette's irony is comprehensive on a realistic level. The pearl that should have helped Kino realize his goal of prosperity has instead become a catalyst for catastrophe, resulting in nothing but misery, resentment, suffering, and ultimately death. Second, like a parable, Kino learns about good and evil by facing, identifying, and then purposefully rejecting the powers of evil. On the other hand, we observe from the symbolic level that Kino's journey from innocence to awareness is completed; in other words, Kino is introduced from a simple and innocent young man to a sophisticated "man."

The Pearl encompasses a multitude of meanings. As a social critic, Steinbeck uses figures like the town and the doctor in *The Pearl* to criticize the corruptions of a commercialized society, human greed, and materialism. Steinbeck transforms the initial straightforward and archaic folklore into a complex tale by enhancing the moral implications and broadening the social setting. The Pearl maintains the framework of a social protest and a study of the group-man, but the tone changes from humor to melancholy despite the short books' relationship. Furthermore, we feel that *The Pearl* exhibits clear thematic shifts through the parabolic and allegorical aspects that undergo and integrate with the realistic elements.

The greatest pearl in *The Pearl* serves as a metaphor for both virtue and evil. The paradox demonstrates how something that looks simple and archaic may actually be complex, while something that seems lovely and pure may actually be terrible. As an allegory of the common man and a fable of good and evil, *The Pearl* foreshadows the main themes of Steinbeck's masterwork *East of Eden*. The Pearl is brief and straightforward, yet it has many meanings. Readers of all ages, colors, and genders might identify with Kino's experiences and hardships. Thus we can say that such as the literal meaning of the term "pearl" *The Pearl* is a valuable gem that readers everywhere should treasure and hold onto.



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