



### Short Communication

## Negotiating the Textual Structure of the Folktale (The Pearl)

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#### ARTICLE INFORMATION

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#### ABSTRACT

*This paper is basically concerned with simplifying the folktale text of (the Pearl) by John Steinbeck in order to make it accessible to ESL learners who study English and American literature for the first time in their life. My analysis will break down the text into smaller components. My paper will provide a summary of the narrative and character analysis in addition to a critical examination of other structural considerations and technical issues integral to the authorial vision and the underlying moral purposes of the narrative.*

### Introduction

The text of the narrative is inspired by a folk-tale which spread in Baja California. The narrative makes full use of the folk story and creates his narrative which goes further beyond the simple issues of the original tale. The tale starts when the peaceful life of Kino and Juana is disturbed by a scorpion which stings their son Coyotito. Juana could temporarily save her son by sucking the poison out of the injury. Juana and her husband, however take their child to a doctor in town to cure him. The doctor is a bad, ignorant, cruel and greedy man. The doctor who belongs to the wealthier part of society dismisses Kino and his child as well as all the neighbors who go with them to town. The doctor refuses to cure the child because their parents have no money to pay for his treatment. Kino is humiliated and injured in his human feelings. He comes back to his place, then he goes to the beach with his family where they set out in their raft hoping to find a pearl good enough to pay for the doctor's treatment. Kino dives deep in the sea till he reaches the bottom. He finds a very big oyster lying there. He brings it to the canoe, opens it and finds out the most beautiful and perfect pearl in the world. Meanwhile, Juana finds out that Coyotito begins to recover from the scorpion's sting.

Everyone in the town envies Kino, the doctor, the priest, the beggars, the pearl buyers envy Kino because he finds such a valuable pearl. After having the pearl, Kino has become the enemy of everyone in town. The pearl will not bring happiness to him as he expects but it will bring misery and unrest. Kino and Juana are completely unaware of the danger around them. They dream of a happier future. They plan to marry in a church and get fine clothes. Kino plans to buy a rifle and send Coyotito to school. The priest who is Kino's enemy comes to visit him in his house. The doctor himself comes also to Kino's brush house and pretends to examine the baby who is now almost completely recovered. During that night, Kino buries the pearl in the dirty floor of their hut but he is attacked at night by someone who comes to look for the pearl inside the hut. Kino is injured during the clash with the outsider. His wife becomes afraid and tells him to destroy the pearl before it destroys their life.

The pearl provides Kino with a false sense of security and he is determined that a better future is waiting for them. Kino, together with his neighbors goes to La Paz to sell the pearl there. The merchants send four dealers who are rather experienced. They belittle the pearl and offer low prices. Kino becomes angry and he refuses to sell the pearl to the greedy merchants. He will get a better price even if he must go to the capital city itself to sell the pearl there. Kino's brother, Juan Tomas warns him that he will bring disasters to his life by revolting against a fixed pattern of life which lasted for a long time. Kino is threatened, depressed and even afraid of the darkness around his house. Kino comes to a point of no return that he will sell the pearl in the capital city.

In the morning, Kino prevents Juana from throwing the pearl back into the sea. Kino becomes angry with Juana who is about to waste the pearl and he strikes her. Then, Kino is attacked by someone who wants to usurp the pearl. Kino kills the man. Kino becomes a murderer now and he has to escape. He discovers that his canoe is ruined and he finds his brush house in fire. Kino seeks refuge in the house of his brother till evening when Kino and his family will leave for the north. Kino takes his family and escapes with the pearl. Now he discovers that the pearl is an evil thing which makes him beat his wife and kills a man. On their way, they were stopped by three Men one of them was on a horseback and the other two men on foot. Kino wants to surrender to the hunters but Juana tells him that they will be killed by the hunters if they yield. Kino and his family flee towards the mountains.

They hide in a small cave hoping the hunters will miss them. Kino's hiding place is near a pool and unfortunately the hunters stop to rest by the pool. As night approaches, two of the hunters sleep while one watches, holding a gun. Kino is sure that his chance is to kill the men before dawn reveals their hiding place. He works out a plan and tells Juana to go with the baby to Loreto in the north if he is killed. Kino's plan does not succeed. As the watching man fires from his gun, Kino jumps on him, kills him and takes his gun then kills the other two men. Then he hears the hysterical cry of death coming out from the cave. Kino discovered that the watchman shot his son dead when he was firing.

In the fifth day of the narrative, Kino and Juana come back to La Paz. Kino carries a rifle across his arm and Juana is carrying the dead body of Coyotito in her shawl. Kino and Juana are in a state of absolute misery and sadness. They go down to the beach. Kino looks at the ugly pearl which almost destroys their life. In the pearl he sees the image of Coyotito with the top of his head shot away. Kino flings the pearl into the sea and it sinks down through the water. After getting rid of the pearl, Kino is able to live his normal life.

**The Character of Kino:** Kino's physical and spiritual traits are emphasized in the opening chapters of the story. He is an ignorant fisherman and pearl diver but he is not stupid or simple-minded. Kino has a close relation with Juana, Coyotito and his brother Juan Thomas. Juan hides Kino's family from the hunters. Nino is fierce to defend his family especially when they are in danger. He is the husband, the father, the provider and the protector. After he discovers the pearl, Kino is changed and he becomes cautious and suspicious of everyone. The possession of the pearl alienates him from his society. When he lost his son, he got rid of the pearl and came back to La Paz.

**Critical Commentary:** The story is interesting because it comes out of the writer's experience during his personal visits to Mexico. The author develops the original tale and gives it new sociological dimensions. The narrative takes place in the closed community of La Paz. Such a society is known for its racial and economic hostilities between wealthy Spaniards and poor Indians.

The Indians who are pearl fishers could not change their society. They attempted many years before Kino to sell their pearls in the capital but their agents did not come back. They had to give up and live under the mercy of the greedy merchants in La Paz. The priest who plays a role in the social corruption in La Paz is against any change in his society. The priest, thus, sermonizes that leaving one's own town and going to another place is against religion. The priest belongs to the richer class and he is against rebellion or change.

The narrative mirrors a community which is based on inequality. The Indians are inferior in terms of race and religion. The Indians are economically exploited by the other class which aims at keeping them subordinate in their ignorance, fear and superstition. Education is the only way of liberating the Indians of their ignorance. Kino wants to educate Coyotito because his kid will be educated then he will educate the Indians.

The Indians are uneducated, thus, they are easily deceived by the corrupt priest who has sold his religious faith out in order to keep his social position. The wealthier class will not allow Kino to educate his son because education on the part of the Indians will threaten the existence and superiority of the other class.

In the narrative we have two ways of life adopted by two types of people. We have the poor Indians who live in the village and we have the richer class represented in the doctor and the priest who live in town. The village and town are two symbols which represent two opposite ways of living and thinking. Indians like Kino and Juana live in poor houses, dressed in rags and live difficult life. However, these Indians are happy because they are close to nature.

Kino and Juana are happy despite their difficult circumstances whereas the doctor is dissatisfied with his way of living. Kino's canoe is important because it represents the remains of the Indian traditions, the glory of the past. Kino, like the Indian-Mexicans, hates the Spanish-Mexicans who control them. Kino and his folks do not like the Spanish-Mexicans because they are their oppressors, yet, they hide their hate because their enemies are aggressive and savage. Kino's feelings of hate towards the doctor and the priest represent the feelings of his folk towards such a class. The Indians are poor and weak, thus they cannot resist or revolt against the Spanish-Mexicans.

The people who live in the village are rather simple and poor. On the other hand, the town dwellers represent the wealthier section of society. They are represented by the doctor, the priest and the pearl buyers. In town, we see a lot of beggars lazing in the shadow of the church all day. In the poor section of La Paz we have a sense of community. The Indians are forming a unified community. They are living like one family. When Kino's son is stung, all the neighbors rush to help. The Indian neighbors go with Kino and his family to the doctor in town.

The Indians feel sympathetic with Kino's son and do their best to help. The people of La Paz of both sections (the poor and the rich) form one community which is affected by any sudden change. The appearance of the pearl has an influence not only on Kino but on the whole population of La Paz. Its appearance affects the doctor, the priest, the shopkeepers, the beggars "every man suddenly became related to Kino's pearl". The narrative ist's criticism is directed towards the wealthier part of La Paz which is Wind to the needs of the other section of society. In La Paz, the town and the village are connected with each other. The town depends entirely on the village. The main economic activities in La Paz depend on fishing and pearl diving. These activities are performed by the Indians. The other jobs are done by the doctor and the priest who are corrupt people. The pearl traders in town are monopolizing the pearl market secretly and they exploit the Indians. The exploitative community of La Paz shows the drawbacks of the Spanish conquest. The Indians, the native dwellers live in brush houses outside the city walls. This shows that

they have no place in their motherland.

The church does not help the Indians to overcome their suffering but it helps to keep them down. So, the narrative is concerned with certain human dimensions, yet, it is not an analytical narrative. The narrative revolves round materialistic greed and it has a moral lesson to deliver. The book has some characters corrupted by greed such as the doctor and the priest in particular and the pearl traders in general. La Paz is a society in which man kills his fellows in order to go on living. However, it is not only man who is responsible for the dilemma in La Paz but there are other forces which control man's fate.

The narrative's action is influenced by Juana's concept which is in fact the Indian belief that man's fate is fully under the control of hidden forces beyond the human realm. According to such a belief, chance and luck dominate life in La Paz. The gods will punish Kino because he attempts to violate the fixed order of the universe. The gods are hostile to Kino who tries to revolt against them by changing the rhythm of his life. By the end of the narrative, Kino and Juana have learnt the moral lesson.

**Stylistic and Narrative Devices:** The author employs descriptive and lyrical style during his narration. He also introduces the songs as a new technical device. The songs are connected with the Indian folklore. The Gulf people of La Paz have a great folklore tradition. The songs remind them of their past glory and reflect their thinking. The songs, therefore, have been absorbed in the racial memory of the Indians in La Paz. The songs have many functions. For example, the song of the family signifies domestic happiness and the song comes out the sound of the waves breaking gently on the shore. When Juana sings such a song, we have an impression of safety and warmth.

The song of the Enemy or the song of Evil appears as a savage music and a dangerous melody. It is associated with the approaching evils. Thus, it is associated with the doctor, the priest, the scorpion, the pearl dealers, the night intruders, the ruined canoe and the hunters. The music of evil becomes associated with the pearl when it brings harm to Kino. The music of evil brings about the moments of danger which threaten the family's existence. The song of the pearl is beautiful because it promises a brighter future for the family. The songs unify the separate parts of the narrative and introduce new thematic motifs to the narrative.

**Structural and Thematic Issues:** The text of the narrative in terms of structure can be divided into three parts. Part one, which covers the first three chapters, introduces the village, the gulf and the fishermen's way of living with all its simplicity and dangers. The coming dangers are shown in the scorpion and the pearl. The second part covers chapters four and five. Here, the incidents of the narrative get gradually complicated. We have the pearl and the dangers which come after its appearance embodied in the pearl traders and the attackers. The last part which covers chapter six marks the climax and the denouement of the narrative. This chapter includes the mountain and the cave episode. It shows the confrontation between Kino and the hunters and the eventual death of Coyotito. This chapter marks the subsequent resolution and the return of Kino and his wife to La Paz.

The theme of the narrative goes around the idea of good and evil. Kino and his family were living in peace till they confronted the coming evil. Evil appears in the form of the scorpion and in the shape of the pearl. The introduction of evil in the life of Kino and Juana increase their moral education, opens their eyes to the world around them and develops their characters. Kino becomes aware of the meaning of loneliness, hate, suspicion and forms of evil inside him (he beats his wife when she attempts to throw the pearl back into the sea). The price Kino and Juana pay for their development and for their moral awareness is the life of their son Coyotito. In the light of this view, the narrative deals with the fall of man, a theme, which is inspired by the biblical parable.

**An Overall Summary:** In the narrative, we meet with Kino, a poor fisherman, who lives in peace with his wife Juana and their son Coyotito in a house near La Paz which is a name of an ancient city located on the southern end of Baja (Lower California), which is a narrow peninsula of land separated from mainland Mexico by the Gulf of California. Steinbeck visited La Paz which was once a pearl trading center. In this area, Mexicans of native Indian origin live in isolated communities. They live in a state of abject poverty. Mexicans who come from Spanish origin, the conquerors of Mexico, generally live in the richer sections of town. In the narrative, we find a deep-rooted hostility between the poor Indian pearl divers and fishermen on one hand and the Spanish-Mexican classes which are represented by the characters of the doctor and priest.

#### **Works Cited**

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