CHAPTER IV

STUDY OF THE NOVELLETES
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*Of Mice and Men* (1937)
*The Moon is Down* (1942)
*Cannery Row* (1945)
*The Pearl* (1947)
Apart from his major novels Steinbeck wrote four novelettes which dealt with the atmosphere of American Depression.

After the publication of *In Dubious Battle* in 1936 Steinbeck brought out his first novelette *Of Mice and Men* in February 1937. The new novelette made the author very popular at the national level. Incidentally, when, *In Dubious Battle* was free from sentimentality, *Of Mice and Men* was, in some way tender and loyal making the reader to sympathize. This novelette reminds one of a pastoral poem written by
Robert Burns in 1785 as quoted by Peter Lisca in his book the Wide World of John Steinbeck:

But, Mousie, thou art no thy lane,
In proving foresight may be vain:
The best laid schemes o' mice an' men
Gang aft a-gley
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain
For promis'd joy,

—from which the novel has derived its title. Writing about the book he mentions that the book, was a “thin, brittle book, and an experiment, but at least it was an honest experiment”.

He further states that his aim was not to write novels but a play in 3 acts, treating descriptive passages as an extended stage direction avoiding deep penetration into the characters’ thought, and restricting the problems of time and place. There was hardly any thing very revolutionary like labour problem, strikes and communist agitations, because of this reason, the novel has been called a play-novelette.

The novel deals with men working on the large grain farm or on a ranch, managed slowly by its owner, who hired hands at 50 dollars a month. To this ranch came George and Lennie on whom the entire story *Of Mice and Men* drifts. These two were rootless and who dreamt of owing a piece of land which they could call their own. The author’s delineation of
character is very lucid. Describing George's physical and mental features, he wrote:

The first man was-small and quick, dark of face, with restless eyes and sharp, strong features. Every part of him was defined: small, strong hands, slender arms, a thin and bony nose.\(^2\)

Again Lennie was just his opposite, a huge man, shapeless of face, with large, pale eyes, with wide, sloping shoulders; and he walked heavily, dragging his feet a little, the way a bear drags his paws. His arms did not swing at his sides, but hung loosely. He was powerful, a good worker but mentally retarded. George was always worried that Lennie might misuse his massive strength in a harmful way. The only thing they had in common was the 'dream' of owing a plot of land of their own. Lennie went wherever with George and did anything that George asked him to do. He had the passion to irritate and create fury among animals like mice and rabbits. His strength was so great that when he lovingly stroked them he incidentally killed them. In Weed, just before the story begins he was attracted by a girl's red dress. He instinctively put his hand on the garment, and said (as George mimicked) "Jus' wanted to feel that girl's dress-Jus' wanted to pet it like it was a mouse"-\(^3\) but the girl misunderstood Lennie's intention and began to scream. This incident angered the citizen of Weed, for which George and Lennie had to run to save their lives.
It was the dream which they always thought and narrated to each other frequently. This narration became some kind of a ritual which Lennie wants to hear again and again. And George said:

'O.K. Someday-we're gonna get the jack together and we're gonna have a little house and a couple of acres an' a cow and some pigs and-' "An' live off the fatta the lan'.," Lennie shouted. 4

Inspite of their dream to own a piece of land of their own, they never were able to save money and were spendthrift, so much, so that the dream remained a dream till they arrived at the ranch at Soledad. This dream of Lennie and George reflected the hope and aspirations of the common people of America during the 'depression' years.

George was always paranoid with Lennie because his nature was destructive. Unfortunately, in spite of George protecting him, a scrappy young man, Curley, who was the son of the boss, made the mistake of picking on Lennie. The result of this incident was that finally Lennie crushed Curley's hand with his huge and powerful 'paws'. As the pages moved on, there came an old hand called Candy who, in the long run, was a little hope, or master, in fulfilling the dream. Candy had saved some money and the three of them could possibly collect enough cash in the near future to translate the dream into action. But the plan was shattered. On the other side Curley's wife who was a stupid young woman and hated her husband, was happy that Curley's hands were crushed. She goes looking for Lennie everywhere in the farm particularly where the farm-labourers
live. One Sunday afternoon on finding Lennie at the barn she easily enticed him.

This incident was a tragic development again because once Lennie started he could not stop and control his passion. She became frightened and started to scream. Lennie, who was also a timid, docile man with the massive strength, became frightened in turn. On this he hung on to her hair and gave her a shake which broke her neck. Thus the woman died instantly and Lennie ran to the thicket of willows and sycamores by the river, where George had told him to hide who said:

‘Lennie - if you jus’ happen to get in trouble like you always done before, I want you to come right here an’ hide in the brush’.5

George, immediately arrived at the appointed place and, sitting behind Lennie entertained him for the last time with the recital of their dream and finally shot Lennie with the fellow-worker’s pistol at the back of his head, to prevent from lynching him by the move or life imprisonment. Lennie’s death symbolized the many deaths in America during the great depression where life became cheap and future was uncertain.

The plot Of Mice and Men is quite simple. There are similarities between this novel and In Dubious Battle. In fact both the novels are non-teleological in their point of view. Steinbeck assures that there is ‘no final cause or ultimate purpose in the universe’. This has been supported by the
original title of the novel “Something That Happened”. Steinbeck used a kind of dramatic method of presentation, including stage convention and the unity of time and place in both the novels. This method is very much pronounced in Of Mice and Men. George and Lennie of the novel are typical characters representing the ‘Age of Depression’.

This was George’s dream of freedom and both their relationship which according to Peter Lisca, has a significant similarity between In Dubious Battle and Of Mice and Men.

The age was such one of horror and the grief-stricken characters of In Dubious Battle and Of Mice and Men stand always defeated by something within themselves. The cause of all these was leading the folks of the period to disasters. Keeping this in mind Peter Lisca, the critic comments that the very essence of these two novels becomes the centrifugal face of Steinbeck’s experiment.

The age also led the suffering people to end their lives as suffering was beyond control. Steinbeck, very vividly, knits these ideas through the story and the characters, such as the dog of Candy. Carlson’s shooting of the dog at the back of the head, is symbolic. Not only that even Lennie was killed ‘at the back of his head’. Therefore both these deaths were the results of ‘the depression’ in their mind and the age. So, depression plays an important role in the lives of the inhabitants whose ultimate end was death. With reference to this context, it will be proper to mention here A.C. Bradley’s definition of tragedy in his book A Shakespearian Tragedy;
where he defines a tragedy as a ‘long tale of woe and suffering which ‘leads men to death’. The deaths in Steinbeck’s book *Of Mice and Men* are indirect approach to Bradley’s view.

Steinbeck wrote:

Carlson said, “The way I’d shoot him, he wouldn’t feel nothing. I’d put the gun right there”. He pointed with his toe, ‘Right back of the head. He wouldn’t even quiker.’

Afterwards Candy felt that and said:

“I ought to of shot that dog myself, George. I shouldn’t ought to of let no stranger shoot my dog”.

Such kind of illustrations are very well portrayed by Steinbeck in his novelette and that is why *Of Mice and Men* is an “experimental play-novelette”.

The entire novel is overcast with darkness and loneliness, the true characteristic of the age – Age of Depression. The story is set “A few miles south of Soledad”, a place in California. The name suggests both loneliness and a lovely place. As the story starts George said:

“Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loveliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don’t belong no place. They come to a ranch an’ work up a stake and then they go inta town and blow their stake,
and the first thing you know they’re poundin their tail on some other ranch. They ain’t got nothing to look ahead to” \(^{10}\)

Like the age, loneliness is a constant threat and it becomes the central theme of the novel. To be precise loneliness is an important aspect of the lives of the workers in the ‘depression age’ which is represented by Candy, Carlson, Slim and even Curley’s wife.

**The Dust Bowl**, which is the chief cause of depression left the inhabitants without land and property. This caused a long desire for the men to have his own land and subsequently possess a few acres of land as his property.

This kind of explicit expressions of Steinbeck showed a strong yearning for land and properties in the hearts of men. The pioneers of America had the same yearning and had the same dream, a dream for freedom and possession of some land of their own. The same, was that of George. The dream of George and his partner Lennie regarded to be a form of dream of the ‘American Adam’.

The important thing to be noted here is that dreams always remained as dreams because, they were never successful and were filled with despair and disillusionment. Life for the inhabitants of California was like ‘a broken heap of sordid images’. (T.S. Eliot’s The Wasteland)
THE MOON IS DOWN ((1942))

The book was published in March, 1942. The story is about life in an occupied town. The whole scene is the deprivation of rights of legal citizens by a bigger force. During the occupation which resembles ‘the age of depression’, the people suffered maximum in the hands of the dominant forces which is like the ‘Dust Bowl’ in Steinbeck’s another novel The Grapes of Wrath. Mayor Orden is a father figure in the novel like a patriarch. Like London in In Dubious Battle, Mayor Orden is the symbol of authority in the small world depicted in the book The Moon is Down. Doctor Winter, another character is like Tom Joad in The Grapes of Wrath.
The story begins with Mayor Orden and Doctor Winter discussing about the military officers who would be arriving soon in the room of Mayor Orden. Mayor Orden is the main character who is present throughout the story in the book. As the story continues, there is a scene of a military trial of a coal-picker, namely Alex Mordem who had hit a military officer with a shovel on the previous day and killing him on the spot.

In another scene, the widow of Alex Mordem, namely Molly Morgan, is revealed talking to Lt. Tondon. In the course of the talk Molly Morgan said:

My price is two sausages.  
What about your own girls, Lieutenant, after the last war? A man could choose among your girls for an egg or a slice of bread. Do you want me for nothing, Lieutenant? Is the price too high?

Molly’s words expressed the whole suffering of the people in the occupied town i.e. the depression years. The coal-miners were forced to work for food and cheap wages. The social and economic condition of the people in the occupied town in *The Moon is Down* represents life in the depression era.

In spite of all the hardships during the occupation period, the citizens kept their moral high. The conquering forces failed to subdue the spirit of the citizens inspite of all the strict discipline imposed upon them.
There were instances of subdued revolts by the citizens against the military rulers. On one side the military rulers tightened their grip over the civilians in the town. On the other hand the people co-ordinated more and more among themselves to resist the military rule. At one stage the civilians denied the orders of the military rulers and refused to pick coal for the foreign conquerors. The military rulers imposed law that every able-bodied male member of the family should work to extract coal for export to the foreign country.

The story ends with the military personal taking out Mayor Orden for execution. The last words of Mayor Orden reminds one of Socrates’ last words to Cryto to pay for the cock which he bought the previous day without payment. It shows how the people died with unpaid debts which reflects life in the ‘Age of Depression’. The novelette *The Moon is Down* is a small book but it seems to represent the agonies of the people during the depression years in America. The freedom loving people of the occupied country never yielded to the bigger forces just like the migrant people in *The Grapes of Wrath* who did not loss heart inspite of the difficulties and miseries they experienced in the journey from Oklahoma to California in ‘the Great Depression’.
CANARY ROW (1945)

After a long experience with the play-novelette form, Steinbeck simplified the structure of his novel. This pattern in its relaxed form of the novel shows a coherent thematic development, which is found in *Cannery Row* (1945).

*Cannery Row* was Steinbeck’s major work of fiction after his classic *The Grapes of Wrath*. For a period of five years he was occupied with experimentation on a variety of writing. And the last two of these years, his writing was on America’s involvement in World War II. After the writing of *The Moon Is Down* he went overseas with the American forces and wrote about the war in his dispatches for the home front for the *New York Herald Tribune*. The war brought an emotional revulsion, and when he
came back home, he was unable to gather together to edit his dispatches in book form. It was only in 1958, when the dispatches were published with the title, *Once There Was A War*, that a sudden change took place in Steinbeck's mood and temper. In less than two months he wrote and published *Cannery Row* in December 1945.

On the surface, this novel seems to be quite gay, irresponsible and frolic. The novel reflects Steinbeck's reaction towards a world whose basic values have changed drastically after eleven years of severe 'economic depression', followed soon by the massive aggression and destruction of the world war, which, to be precise, were the important features of the *Age of Depression*. The ultimate result as conceived by the author was, perhaps, one of the escapes into a counterculture which is superficially reminiscence of *Tortilla Flat*. However, the earlier novel was light and subdued in comparison with *Cannery Row* with its philosophically based and impassioned celebration of values, to that of the dominant capitalist ethics in America.

The novel is short, having thirty-two chapters with full of episodic chapters. The setting is in a section of Monterey, characterized by its sardine canneries. The time is before the out-break of World War II. The inhabitants in the area are American 'bums', not 'paisanos'. They include Doc, the biologist who runs the one-man Western Biological Laboratory, Dora Flood, madam of the Bear Flag Restaurant, a whore-house, Lee Chong, a Chinese and owner of a grocery store; Mack and the boys –
Eddie, Hughie, Jones, Gay and Hazel, living in a storage shed, which they called "the Palace Flophouse and Grill".\footnote{13}

There are other characters like an \textit{avant garde} painter called Henry, Mr. and Mrs. Malloy living in an abandoned boiler, and Frankie, a retarded juvenile whom Doc befriends. There are many others who appear in the book briefly. The story of the novel is not that large. The centre of the story is Doc and next to him is Mack, and the later dominates the company of the boys staying in the Flophouse. Mack and his friends admired Doc. They planned one evening to give a surprise party, in Doc's Laboratory on his return from a collecting trip. Fortunately or unfortunately Doc did not come back to his laboratory that day in time, and the party was a glorious failure, which ended in a brawl that wrecked the whole lot in the place.

After a period of gloom, they organized another party, which also proved to be riotous. The novel ends with Doc, after the party, washing the dishes the following morning. The narrative course is not so systematically inserted as in \textit{The Grapes of Wrath}. Incidentally, \textit{Cannery Row}, a novel written with the war in the background, filled in the complex relation to facts of lives in the nineteen forties. The novel brings into being a new world to replace the one that is in the process of self-destruction.

His friend Ed. Ricketts, the original of Doc, has described the novel as an essay in loneliness.
As a matter of fact, *Cannery Row* amalgamated the unchanging world of art with those qualities of life, which had disappeared, never to return. Perhaps, because of the war, Steinbeck was very nostalgic, and may be it is in this connection, that Joseph Fontenrose states, ‘the principal mythical theme of *Cannery Row* is the Logos, the Word made flesh’. It is not merely a myth in the traditional meaning of the term, rather, it is a doctrine, religious and philosophical, Christian and Pagan, which was used to interpret myth, and Steinbeck employs it in *Cannery Row* as he does genuine myth in other words the theme stated clearly in chapter two. The author wrote:

> The Word is a symbol and a delight which sucks up men and scenes, trees, plants, factories and Pekinese. Then the Thing becomes the Word and back to Thing again, but warped and woven into a fantastic pattern. The Word sucks up *Cannery Row*, digests it, and spews it out, and the Row has taken the shimmer of the green world and the sky-reflecting seas.\(^{14}\)

Steinbeck, the author lucidly converts the Word from chaos into cosmos. He has brought in a creative pattern and imposed it on the chaos of experience in *Cannery Row*, which he described with considerable pungency in the opening paragraphs of the novel. He wrote:

*Cannery Row* in Monterey in California is a poem, a stink, a grating noise, a quality of light, a tone, a habit, a nostalgia, a dream. *Cannery Row* is the gathered and scattered, tin and iron and rust and splintered wood, chipped pavement and weedy lots and junk heaps,
sardine canneries of corrugated iron, honky-tonks, restaurants and whore-houses, and little crowded groceries, and laboratories and flophouses. Its inhabitants are, as the man once said, “whores, pimps, gamblers, and sons of bitches”, by which he meant everybody. Had the man looked through another peephole he might have said, “Saints and angels and martyrs and holy men”, and he would have meant the same thing.15

Among the inhabitants of Cannery Row there is a Chinese character called Lee Chong. Steinbeck has referred to this character with some mysterious interest. He wrote:

Lee Chong is more than a Chinese grocer. He must be. Perhaps he is evil balanced and held suspended by good- an Asiatic planet held to its orbit by the pull of Lao Tze and held away from Lao Tze by the centrifugality of abacus and cash register Lee chong suspended spinning, whirling among groceries and ghosts.16

Now, the elements that the author has created, are the Palace Flophouse, Doc’s laboratory, Lee Chong’s grocery, Dora’s whore-house, La Ida’s barroom, Hediondo Cannery, the vacant space near Doc’s laboratory and the iron pipes in which men slept. The non-descript of a kind of inhabitants whom the respectable citizens would call ‘bums’ and ‘whores’ may also become ‘the Virtues, the Graces, the Beauties’.17

In his own way, Lee Chong also may be regarded as a demiurge with the chaos of goods in his store on which he imposed his own order. In this
way the first eight chapters of the book give us an idea of some cosmos being created out of chaos through the power of the Word of some demiurge. The Word of Dora Flood imposes some order upon a whorehouse called the Bear Flag Restaurant. Doc also has imposed his Word upon the confusing collection of creatures in the Western Biological Laboratory. In the same way Mack and Malloy have also brought some order to a group of individuals.

The Word starts the plot moving. And Mack said:

That Doc is a fine fellow. We ought to do something for him.¹⁸

Doc’s word that he needed frogs gave Mack’s company the chance to earn the money needed for the party. The first party was abortive, and Dora’s simple words:

You gave him a party he didn’t get to. Why don’t you give him a party he does get to?¹⁹

Then started preparations for the second party, which became a success, ending with Doc cleaning up the party mess and reading a book aloud:

Even now
I mind the coming and talking of wise men from towers
Where they had thought away their youth. And I, listening.
Found not the salt of the whispers of my girl,
Murmur of confused colors, as we lay near sleep;
Little wise words and little witty words,
Wanton as water, honied with eagerness.  

The important thing to be noted is that the Word is truly creative, and that the false word can be as powerful as a true Word. The Word can create the appearance which hides reality. Dora was a keeper of a house of sin, but she was really a kindhearted philanthropist. Her man William, who was supposed to be a watchman, was really a pimp. Thus, when he overheard Mack referring to him as a pimp, his heart was broken and he committed suicide. Thus, Steinbeck has used the myth of Logos, the Word made flesh as a frame for the structure of *Cannery Row*.

Apart from mythical theme, one cannot ignore the theme of group organism, which has been depicted in the other novels of Steinbeck. The Palace Flophouse can be regarded as an organism within a large organism of *Cannery Row*. Moods of gloom or joy pervade the Palace Flophouse and spread out everywhere in *Cannery Row*. News travels through the community in the usual mysterious way. The two parties organized for Doc may be regarded as organisms. The second party, initially conceived because of Dora’s word, can be more thoroughly examined. The people let the knowledge ‘grow gradually like a pupa in the cocoons of their imaginations’. Its life was lusty while it lasted. Steinbeck had many things to say about the parties.
He said:

"...a party has a pathology, that it is a kind of an individual and that it is likely to be very perverse individual. And it is also generally understood that a party hardly ever goes the way it is planned or intended".21

A party may start as something, raging, howling and boiling. And then a fever sets in, and after a little silence a party will be quickly over. Thus, Steinbeck seems to have a new idea of group organism. Even then ecology remains something very significant in the structure of the novel.

Doc goes for collecting specimens in the Great Tide-Pool near Monterey. It is a microcosm of creatures. Steinbeck wrote:

The sea is very clear and the bottom becomes fantastic with hurrying, fighting, feeding, breeding animals.22

Predatory, symbiotic, and parasitic animals live together in lusty profusion. Thus, the ‘tide-Pool’ becomes a central image in the novel. The Cannery Row is a tide-pool of cannery workers, managers, bums, whores, storekeepers, and Doc himself. This gives us an idea of an image of the whole world as a tide-Pool, and the inhabitants of the Row are ‘Everybody’. From these angles, the book can be regarded as a kind of morality play. In the words of Steinbeck:

Mack and the boys, too, spinning in their orbits. They are the Virtues, the Graces, the Beauties of the hurried mangled craziness of Monterey and the cosmic Monterey where men in fear and hunger destroy their
stomachs in the fight to secure certain food, where men hungering for love destroy everything lovable about them.23

Doc has developed a morality theme when he talks to Richard Frost about Mack’s company. Steinbeck wrote:

Doc said, “Look at them. There are your true philosophers. I think,” he went on, “that Mack and the boys know everything that has ever happened in the world and possibly everything that will happen. I think they survive in this particular world better than other people. In a time when people tear themselves to pieces with ambition and nervousness and covetousness, they are relaxed. All of our so-called successful men are sick men, with bad stomachs, and bad souls, but Mack and the boys are healthy and curiously clean.”24

This is the philosophy of life behind Tortilla Flat, another important work of the author. However, in this conversation one also finds the social Darwinism of Sea of Cortez. In the words of Steinbeck:

“It has always seemed strange to me,” said Doc. “The things we admire in men, kindness and generosity, openness, honesty, understanding and feeling are the concomitants of failure in our system. And those traits we detest, sharpness, greed, acquisitiveness, meanness, egotism and self-interest are the traits of success. And while men admire the quality of the first they love the produce of the second.”25
In *Cannery Row* Mack and his company seem to have these virtues and shun the vices, however, they live more successfully than the greedy and acquisitive men. He was hinting at a deeper reality behind the appearance of success and happiness in the contemporary American life. After the distrust first party Mack said to Doc:

"She got out of hand", said Mack. "It don’t do no good to say I’m sorry. I been sorry all my life. This ain’t no new thing. It’s always like this". He swallowed deeply from his glass”. I had a wife”, Mack said. “Same thing. Ever’ thing I done turned sour. She couldn’t stand it any more. If I done a good thing it got poisoned up some way.26

Inspite of all these remorseful moments, Mac and the boys are happy. In the words of Steinbeck:

All of our so-called successful men are sick men, with bad stomachs, and bad souls, but Mack and the boys are healthy and curiously clean. They can do what they want. They can satisfy their appetites without calling them something else.27

Behind this idyllic picture of the loafers in *Cannery Row*, one has a glimpse of maladjustment which brings a man to Skid Row, where he spends his time and money to buy bottles of cheap wine. This disenchantment with the life of ‘Everybody’, and the general recognition that men can be ‘holy men’ or ‘sons of bitches’, was a familiar mood during and towards the end of World War II. *Cannery Row* shows the ambivalence of human nature quite vividly, by suggesting that in
everybody what respectable citizens call thieves, rascals or bums, is really, in certain respects, the superior human being.

At this point, Steinbeck’s portrayal of characters becomes a satire on contemporary American life with its commercialized values, and its ruthless greed of property and status. At the centre of it there is Doc himself, modeled on Edward Ricketts as the author wrote:

He wears a beard and his face is half-Christ and half-satyr, and his face tells the truth.²⁸

He has a natural kindness, which endears him to all creatures around him. His calm and enquiring mind plays around all subjects in a detached and non-teleological way, but not coldly. He lives in a world of wonders and excitement. He loves beer, music, woman and talk. The life in Cannery Row swirls around him, leaving him still a ‘lonely, isolated figure’. Edward Ricketts himself describes the novel as ‘an essay in loneliness’. The novel ends with Doc pictured once again, after the wild hilarity of the second party, and the companionship and the timelessness of sensuous delights cooling in his memory, reading alone his favorite lines from a Sanskrit Poem, “Black Marigolds”:

Even Now.
I know that I have savored the hot taste of life
Lifting green cups and gold at the great feast.”²⁹
The lines of Black Marigold reflects that melancholy, discernment and lonely condition of life, can be lifted by moments of joy, kindness, parties and love affairs when one savors ‘the hot taste of life’\textsuperscript{30}, and after that, once again one goes into the world of melancholy and loneliness which has been a common phenomenon in a period when there is little economic activity causing poverty and unemployment among the people in ‘the age of depression’.
THE PEARL (1947)

As Cannery Row was being published in 1945, Steinbeck was already writing another book. Fortunately Cannery Row presented a world in which the popular ethics governing American life has been rejected. The new work, The Pearl delved into the conditions and the processes of the rejection. Each is inspired by the sudden and insolent change of modern American life, and each presents a strong critical attack, direct or indirect, on the ways and values of American civilization. But, while Cannery Row is a broad comedy of bawdiness and gaiety, The Pearl has offered lyrical beauty and a simple action leading to a somber and pathetic conclusion. In The Log From the Sea of Cortez, Steinbeck tells of his visit, along with Ricketts and their companions, to the fascinating and venerable city of La Paz. In The Pearl, he enumerates the events which occurred there
sometime in the past. The story circulates around an Indian boy and a pearl which Steinbeck wrote after more than four years of his visit to La Paz with the title, "The Pearl of the World" and it appeared in Woman's Home Companion in December, 1945. And in 1947, The Pearl, a short novel was published.

Steinbeck's small novel is based on the story that he heard among the Indians. In his novel, he has expanded its meaning on the various aspects of the story. As the novel opens, dawn is just breaking on the peaceful and domestic life of Kino and his family, living in a hut by the sea, enjoying the contentment that simple necessities bring to those who know few luxuries. Then, a scorpion stings the baby son Coyotito. The baby is taken to the avaricious town-doctor, who refused to treat the child without payment. The appearance of the scorpion and the behavior of the doctor on that beautiful morning open a dimension of evil which can be comprehended by the simple Indian fishermen.

It is into this dimension of evil that Kino unwittingly enters, when he fished up a great pearl. He is overjoyed at what the pearl could bring. The author wrote:

...its music of promise and delight, its guarantee of the future, of comfort, of security. Its warm lucence promised a poultice against illness and a wall against insult. It closed a door on hunger.31
Kino hopes that he can go for a proper church marriage with his wife, Juana, education for his son and other physical luxuries. In other words, all the maternal things that the civilized world can offer, seem to be embodied in the pearl. The huge and beautiful pearl promises mastery of the world, and for this Kino, in a way, ‘sells the old peace of his life and his soul’. Kino sets his heart on them so completely that when his brother Juan Tomas asked Kino –

“You will not give up the Pearl”, Kino gave his firm reply – “This Pearl has become my soul’, said Kino ‘If I give it up I shall lose my soul’.

Soon the consequences follow. Old friends grow suspicious and new false friends appear. The doctor rushes to offer his service, secretly drugs the baby and then cures it to show that he is needed. The monopolistic pearl-broker, through his agents, plots to force a cheap sale of the pearl. When Kino refuses to sell, he is attacked and beaten in the night and he stabs someone in the dark in self-defence.

Juana tries to throw away the troublesome pearl, and Kino strikes her on the face in anger. Gradually the world for Kino changes because of the pearl. With growing determination to get what it promises, Kino says:

When we sell it at last, I will have a rifle,’ he said, and he looked into the shining surface for his rifle, but he saw only a huddled dark body on the ground with shining blood dripping from its throat.
But Kino does not budge an inch from his decision to make everything out of the Pearl.

Steinbeck wrote:

And Kino thrust the pearl back into his clothing, and the music of the pearl had become sinister in his ears, and it was interwoven with the music of evil.\textsuperscript{34}

In the night of Kino’s pursuit, and the desperate struggle among the rocks four persons are killed and the child also dies. When they return home with a lot of bitterness the meaning of the pearl becomes fully transformed. Without the fulfillment of its former promise, the pearl has caused a lot of suffering and in the eyes of Kino the charm of the pearl fads slowly. In the words of the author:

And the pearl was ugly; it was grey, like a malignant growth. And Kino heard the music of the pearl, distorted and insane.\textsuperscript{35}

The pain and suffering in Kino’s life came from his attempt in a society in which the outcasts of \textit{Cannery Row} survive happily by accepting what the society sees as a defeat or failure. Thus, a sense of disillusion and bitterness underlie in both \textit{Cannery Row} and \textit{The Pearl}. The earlier book ends in a catharsis of satire and comedy, but in \textit{The Pearl} there is a catharsis of pathos.
In *The Pearl* Steinbeck uses symbolism and focused on the meaning of Kino's throwing away of the pearl, because of a personal defeat, consequent upon a rejection of ambition to a statement about the nature of the universe and of man's soul. One may suppose that the pearl represents the accumulation of wealth and property, which has been depreciated in Steinbeck's earlier novels in favour of a 'simple life with few wants'. In this context, what Kino wants is not luxury and riches. He simply looks for more advantages, for himself and his family, and that is what the pearl might offer him. Thus, when he throws away the pearl, an important question arises. The narrator says that it is quite proper for a man to increase his wants, Steinbeck wrote:

'...it is one of the greatest talents the species has and one that has made it superior to animals that are satisfied with what they have'.

Again with a sense of irony the narrator says that man must be tactful with the gods, who do not love man's plans and successes unless it comes by accident.

In fact Kino's problems have their sources in the contemporary economic system. One finds that the pearl buyers are really '...only one pearl buyer with many hands'. It is a kind of collective organism, whose main purpose is to cheat the pearl fishers and sellers.

They are only doing their job as well as they can. Once the pearl seller thought of taking the pearl to the capital, the whole problem breaks
out. It seemed that Kino’s loss was some kind of punishment brought upon himself for trying to leave his place or station. Kino’s brother Juan Tomas observed that Kino had ‘defied not the pearl buyers, but the whole structure, the whole way of life’.

One cannot successfully challenge that structure. It is not merely the economic system but the universe. Juana knew that Kino has the strength and power of a mountain, and could stand until he is broken himself. At the end, Kino comes back to his place or station, having lost everything because he has not been satisfied with what he had.

In *The pearl* Steinbeck seems to be telling a teleological tale. Outwardly, there are only good and bad things, black and white things, good and evil things, and nothing in between. However, a careful reading of the tale shows that everything in the pearl is in between. It is difficult to answer who or what is purely good or evil, black and white. The doctor is seen to be purely evil and black. But he too has his dreams, like everyone else, of going back to a pleasant life in Paris. This is the way things are. And *The Pearl* can be regarded as a non-teleological parable.

Again, as a tale growing out of *The Log From the Sea of Cortez*, Steinbeck’s small novel shows his interest in biology, which was imbibed in him by Ed. Ricketts. Here is a town which looks like ‘a colonial animal’ having one emotion. In this town the news of Kino’s pearl travels swiftly though mysterious channels.
Steinbeck wrote:

“The news stirred up something infinitely black and evil in the town, love is withheld. The poison sacs of the town began to manufacture venom, and the town swelled and puffed with the pressure of it”.

The town as an organism had to root out any troublesome member. The town as an ecological unit had to preserve itself and each individual in the unit must stay within the circle of his kind and not encroach on another’s. That is why Kino’s changing position because of the pearl had to be checked. In addition to this, Steinbeck has also included symbolic and allegorical elements, such as the economic system, the age of the 30’s where man ran after riches. He has done this in other novels also. That is why he has been regarded as a creator of fables, moralities, allegories and parables. This also can be seen in his setting, language, characters and symbol. In this connection, Peter Lisca has stated that for *The Pearl*, the term “parable” is not quite accurate. It is too long for a parable and too complex and rich in meaning. He thinks that ‘allegory’ is a better term, if the readers think of the number of levels at which the novel can be read. For example, it is possible to read it as a story, involving an ambition to rise above one’s circumstances with the courage and skill to defeat the unscrupulous enemies and battling against heavy odds.

*The Pearl* is not, however, a conventional success story. The success in the story lies in Kino’s rejection of his ambition and his return to his
original position. The ending of the novel is quite moving, with Juana, and her sixth sense warning Kino and said:

'This pearl is like a sin! It will destroy us,' . . . Throw it away, Kino.' Let us break it between stones. Let us bury it and forget the place. Let us throw it back into the sea. Kino, my husband, it will destroy us.41

At last they decided to throw it back into the sea. Initially he was paranoid, and insisted that his wife Juana should do the act of throwing the pearl into the sea. But she insisted that Kino should do the act, and so he did. Critics feel that this decision by the couple was not 'defeat' but 'victory'. With this, Kino and his wife Juana returned to the town carrying their dead son. One could interpret 'The Pearl' as a symbol of both good and evil.

With World War II ending in 1945, there was a post-war economic boom or a rise in the price index in America. However, this boom was deflated by the frustration produced by the cold-war and by witch-hunting at home. The idealism of the years of the war was replaced by commercial greed. Once again, the world was found not safe for democracy. Both psychological and economic adjustment was the need of the hour. Steinbeck as a writer did not believe in the past and its successes. When the 'Depression years' and the war were over, he turned to new concerns.
Notes


