

Parabolic Text/Colonial Context: A Reading of John Steinbeck's *The Pearl*

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Abstract

John Steinbeck's popular novella *The Pearl* (1947) has been variously interpreted as a parable of anything but colonialism in spite of the evident colonial context of its narrative. This paper argues that Steinbeck has re-written a Mexican Indian folktale into a parable of Spanish colonialism of Mexico. Steinbeck uses the universality of the parable form to reflect on the discourse of classic European colonialism and the textual dynamics of cultural identity which operates to frame the colonial subject as the Other of the colonizing self. A range of postcolonial approaches is employed in this paper, such as the theories of Fanon and Bhabha, to uncover how Steinbeck politicizes his essentially parabolic narrative into a parable of colonial dissemination and the modes of empowerment the colonial subject fashions to culturally resist this dissemination.

Keywords: Chicano, colonial discourse, cultural Identity, parable

John Steinbeck's 1947 novella *The Pearl* has long been read and interpreted as a parable at the suggestion of its author. In a short frame-like narrative threshold to the narrative proper of *The Pearl* Steinbeck suggests that his novella is to be read as a 'parable' because the actual story his novella is retelling is an old folktale that has come a long way of oral communal retelling to be endowed with parabolic moral meaning. Steinbeck, here, relies on the reader familiarity with the Biblical parable of the pearl in Matthew 13:45-46 to act as the reader's horizon of expectation when approaching the novella. Although a substantial body of criticism was produced on this issue, the text of *The Pearl* remains highly subversive of most critical readings. It is really hard to establish a satisfying moral, allegorical, or parabolic pattern in *The Pearl* because what Steinbeck produced departs radically, in terms of both vision and method, from the original Mexican folktale whose particulars are registered in his *Sea of Cortez: a Leisurely Journey of Travel and Research* (1941). Indeed, the parable of wealth and the sin it brings is more pertinent to the young Mexican Indian pearl diver of the folktale than to Steinbeck's central character Kino. *The Pearl* is more of a

tragedy than a parable with no or diminished moral or ethical pretensions.

However, Steinbeck subsequent critics sought to de-moralize the parable by taking lead from Steinbeck's admonishment to the reader in that same narrative threshold that 'everyone takes his own meaning from it and reads his own life into it.' Linda Wagner-Martin, for instance, believes that in this novella Steinbeck "makes the Mexican folktale a parable about the American dream." (p.96) She reads his attitudes and psychological states in the immediate years after World War II as an indication of a deep disillusionment with material success. This state of spiritual and intellectual discontent finds its direct reflection in the composition of *The Pearl*. However useful it may be, such an approach shifts the locus of meaning and significance from text to biographical context which, thereby, narrows, if not belittles, the scope of the parable in *The Pearl*. The parable as such loses its characteristic universality.

Probably, a better understanding of what Steinbeck means by 'parable' in *The Pearl* might be located in his literary intentions behind his Mexican travels. Steinbeck's deep interest in Mexico and its people is well documented but the

literary intentions behind this interest received comparatively less attention. Steinbeck's correspondences over his Mexican travels during the 1930s and 40s are quite useful in understanding what he was trying to do in his 'Mexican' writings. As early as 1932, Steinbeck wrote to his literary agent Elizabeth Otis that he was going to Mexico, and from there he plans to go on horseback in the direction of Guadalajara to seek entrée into a number of small forgotten Indian villages. He plans 'to do a series of little stories on the road—local sagas. . . . Such things might well be done with simplicity, with color and with some charm, if one were able to present the incident against its background and at the same time permeate it with the state of mind of its community.' (quoted in Shillinglaw, 2006:162-3)

Steinbeck has proved that he is more than a local colorist in his treatment of the folktales and stories of the land he is exploring. He works within the Western tradition of mimetic realism characteristic of the novel as a literary genre. Although realism is incompatible with the allegorical and parabolic modes of writing, it can appropriate such modes of fabulation on the symbiotic level of the folktales re-invention. This requires the novelist to accurately capture the 'state of mind' of the native Mexican communities. This mental state is collective and denotes the communal worldview of such local societies. More precisely, the novelist is required to add in some ideological distancing in his narrative re-invention of the local Mexican folktales through the investigation of the web of power relations underlying and fashioning such worldview. This can only be done through opening the parabolic folktales to historicity in that each folktale is re-invented as a specific historical moment that acts as a textual space for the fashioning of ideological parables of reading. This undermines the timelessness of the classic parable turning it into a parable of a specific historical moment. This bending of the parable into the space of temporality turns its rhetoric of

divinity into an existential polemics of the human ontology.

In *The Pearl* Steinbeck re-writes that native Mexican folktale of the young Indian Mexican pearl diver who finds the pearl of the world into an existential parable of an historical moment, roughly 400 years after the Spanish conquest of Mexico. Steinbeck translates the timeless parable of the folktale into the historicity of the land and its people producing, what amount to, a parable of colonialism for Kino is not that allegorical Everyman nor his pearl is that Biblical one of eternal salvation. He is, rather, the living memory of his indigenous race and the pearl he finds, regardless of its Biblical symbolic resonance, is something like a plot device that is employed to initiate the postcolonial discourse of the novella. More precisely the pearl is employed here as ever as a symbol of salvation but not of the spiritual sort traditionally associated with the Biblical context. Kino's pearl "of the world," and not of the afterworld, becomes in the course of the story a means for salvation from the repressive bondage of colonialization.

Steinbeck re-writes the original Indian folktale into a parable of colonialism through a two-fold strategy. He first internalizes the pearl that Kino finds with parabolic meaning and second he fashions it into an ideological agency to highlights a counter discourse to colonialism. In both stages things proceed in a high ritual manner. Although the great pearl is originally sought by Kino to pay for the healing of his scorpion-bitten son, the intensity of magic prayers and genuine desire of the parents turn the pearl into a divine gift. The "magic of prayer" of Kino's wife matches the rigidity of her face as if she labors "hard to force the luck, to tear the luck out of the gods' hands, for she needed the luck for the swollen shoulder of Coyotito. 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."

(*The Pearl*, 1947:23) The pearl becomes a divine gift born out of the urgency of human desire.

In the second stage the pearl is interpellated as an ideological object. The scene of Kino's statement of his future plans after selling the pearl is key to understand this ideological transference. The scene is highly ritualized as Kino is positioned like a shaman or holy figure holding a divine object and making prophesies rather than wishes. The awe and wonder of the Indians gathering around him work to substantiate suggestiveness of this scene. Kino, here, is performing a religious ritual rather than merely announcing the things he plans to do after selling the pearl. He is a seer prophesying the future of his people. Kino does not speak directly to his people. He "looked into his pear" and "in the incandescence of the pearl the pictures formed of the things Kino's mind had considered in the past and had given up as impossible." (*The Pearl*, 1947:31) He speaks to them like a shaman in trance. Two important bearings arise from this key scene: First, the pearl for Kino is a sort of a Lacanian mirror stage. He sees his heart's desires incarnated in the pearl then he speaks them out. The gaze precedes the spoken word creating a psychodrama (Lacan, 2006:76-77): 'In the pearl he saw Juana and Coyotito and himself standing and kneeling at the high altar, and they were being married now that they could pay. He spoke softly, "We will be married—in the church."' (*The Pearl*, 1947:31) He experiences an imagery state of mastery and bodily unity (Lacan, 2006:78-79) by identifying with the images of himself that the surface of the pearl conjures up to him. He takes this as a model for its interaction with the external world and especially the colonizer. Kino is not literally a child but the logic of cultural identity behaves in similar ways to Lacan's theory, especially in the context of superiority-inferiority pattern of relationship between colonizer and colonized in the classic discourse of colonialism. The European colonizer did not only 'considered' Kino's people as 'Children' but "he treated them like children."

(*The Pearl*, 1947, 35) Seen in this perspective, the pearl mirrors Kino's subconscious desires to identify with the colonizer. The things he plans to procure or performs emulate the colonizer. This psychic emulation ranges from Western life style to things that empowers the colonizer like the gun and knowledge (as literacy).

But this psychic state of imaginary unity and its fantasy of mastery is temporary and can't hold any longer because the things Kino emulates affect an entry into the symbolic order which breaks this fantasy by repression of desire by the signifying imperative of the colonial discourse. This would eventually erupts in a cognitive split between conscious and unconscious knowledge: "And suddenly he was afraid of his talking. His hand closed down over the pearl and cut the light away from it. Kino was afraid as a man is afraid who says, "I will," without knowing." (*The pearl*, 1947:34)

It is Kino who gives the pearl its secular parabolic connotations because he is conceived by Steinbeck as a self-conscious colonial subject in eternal rage with the grave wrong done to his race by Spanish colonization. Earlier in the novella, Kino the simple and uneducated Indian pearl diver is possessed with rage and fury as he looks suspiciously at the European doctor: "Kino stood in the door, filling it, and hatred raged and flamed in the back of his eyes, and fear too, for the hundreds of years of subjugation were cut deep in him."(*The Pearl*, 1947:38) Kino's behavior is symptomatic of traumatized personality. Obviously, Steinbeck translates the historical trauma of the Mexican Indians into Kino's instinctual hatred and rage. Kino's hysterical reactions are consequential upon the "cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences." (Brave Heart, 2004:7) Kino did not witness the horrors of the Spanish colonization of his land centuries ago but still he is subject to the wounding consequences of

the colonial event and, at the same time, carries deep in his psyche the wounds and scares this event left in the collective memory of Kino's race. Kino had inherited this traumatic experience from his forefathers just like the canoe which came to him by way of inheritance from his line of ancestry.

Kino, as such, rages not against the European doctor as an individual but against what this doctor stands for:

This doctor was not of his people. This doctor was of a race which for nearly four hundred years had beaten and starved and robbed and despised Kino's race, and frightened it too, so that the indigene came humbly to the door. And as always when he came near to one of this race, Kino felt weak and afraid and angry at the same time. Rage and terror went together. (*The Pearl*, 1947:12)

This interior monologue puts it eloquently that this is a case of historical or generational trauma. The range of emotions Kino shows are symptomatic of the painful experiences the Mexican Indians were inflicted with. It is the cultural psyche that Steinbeck is fashioning in this situation.

Furthermore, this 'state of mind' is closer to Steinbeck's later radicalism than to the rage of a father distressed over the fate of his scorpion-bitten baby. However, it is worthy to note that Steinbeck here anticipates the postcolonial thoughts of Franz Fanon as this is a colonial rule based on violence and oppression. Kino feels anger and rage at the doctor for 'the hundreds of years of subjugation that were cut deep in him' (29). Such colonial rule, according to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, 'is the bringer of violence into the home and into the mind of the native' (1963: 38) and that violence is the 'natural state' of colonial rule (1963:61). This accounts for

Kino's unconscious fear and vulnerability of the Eurocentric colonizers. His fear and vulnerability are natural response to the Spanish colonizer's use of violence to maintain its supremacy over Kino's race. This violence stems from the racialized views that the colonizer entertains toward the colonized subjects. The colonizer, in Fanon's view, often inscribes the colonized subject with ideas of backwardness and a lack of human empathy and rationality. Consequently, the colonial subject is 'dehumanized' by colonialism to such an extent that 'it turns him into an animal' (Fanon, 1963:42). This finds its boldest expression as the narrator goes on delineating Kino's psychological state at that moment: 'He could kill the doctor more easily than he could talk to him, for all of the doctor's race spoke to all of Kino's race as though they were simple animals.' (*The Pearl*, 1947:12)

Steinbeck extends the bestiary to be the very underlying foundation of the colonizer's state. The colonizer's worldview is essentially animalistic and is motivated by a Darwinian ethos of animalistic survival. The city of La Paz is 'a thing like a colonial animal' (*The Pearl*, 1947:27)). The implication is that the version of Spanish colonialization is predatory in nature and employs violence and aggression as its tools of expansion. In spite of the uneasy beauty of the place, the colonial city has inscribed itself on this natural scene. Its yellowness eclipses the white and blue colors of the native Mexican Indians. The symbolic connotations are unmistakable as the evil vitality this color symbolizes goes in perfect match with the historical association of the Spanish conquest of Mexico to loot its gold. In 1519, the Spanish explorer Cortes waged a brutal war on the Aztecs in order to loot the vast stores of gold known to exist in the capital, Mexico-Tenochtitlan. (Marrin, 1986:18) This historicity opens on a predatory present. The richness of the nature as represented by the sea and the beach of the colonial city in conveyed in terms of a vital bio-diversity. "the yellow sand" of the beach

opens on rich and vital marine life. Dynamic verbs, like bubbled and sputtered, are thrust in gerundial construction, like crawling, swimming, and growing, to create an impression of vital density in the marine waters. This natural vitality of bursting life is emphatically countered with the harsh animalistic ethos of struggle for survival of the 'colonial city': "On the beach the hungry dogs and the hungry pigs of the town searched endlessly for any dead fish or sea bird that might have floated in on a rising tide." (*The Pearl*, 1947:18)

It is interesting to note that the essence of both worlds is conveyed in animal imagery but with qualitative difference, a fact that John H. Timmerman fails to document in his elaborate analysis of animal imagery of *The Pearl* in his book *John Steinbeck's Fiction : The Aesthetics of the Road Taken* (1991:202-4). Animals in nature are potentially vulnerable, peaceful, and a source of life whereas the colonial city features dogs and pigs which are not predatory by nature but scavengers of dead creatures. This, in principle, conveys the basic pattern of the nature of the structure of power relationship between colonizer and colonized subject at that particular historical moment in Mexico. In establishing this pattern of a predatory colonial city and a virile and productive native environment Steinbeck looks ahead to Edward Said's binary opposition of colonial center and colonized periphery. The colonial metropolis is the center/master space where the Eurocentric self is conceived against an alien 'Other' that is displaced to the periphery space of the colonized subject. In *The Pearl* Kino and his race are subjected to multifarious cultural oppression by Spanish conquistadors to efface their cultural and national identity.

Steinbeck conveys this image of colonization in naturalistic Darwinian imagery. In chapter 3, Steinbeck depicts deadly fights for survival taking place mostly in the darkness of night where "small fishes glittered and broke water to escape a school

of great fishes that drove in to eat them." People in the city "could hear the swish of the small ones and the bouncing splash of the great ones as the slaughter went on.... And the night mice crept about on the ground and the little' night hawks hunted them silently." (*The Pearl*, 1947:42) Kiyoshi Nakayama (1997:199) notes that this paragraph is well timed between the doctor's two night visits to Kino's house, "so that readers cannot miss the symbolic application of the "law of the jungle" to the Indians-the members of the Kino family are destined to be eaten as the weak." The Darwinian law of the jungle is the very ethos of colonialism where the vulnerable and weak Mexican Indian are 'devoured' by the all-powerful European colonizers.

After centuries of colonial oppression Kino and his race become an empty racial reference as 'the black ones' and their language is by now an 'ancient tongue' that has become a form of cultural embarrassment. Native Mexican Indian community has experienced a harsh change from value system to consumer ethos, from symbols and rituals to cultural imitations.

This latter aspect of cultural imitation is very important to understand the response of the colonized subject to the cultural dissemination of colonialism particularly in the areas of language and religion. The postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha explore the nature and mechanism of this process of cultural imitation as practiced by the colonial subject in his influential book *The location of Culture* (1994). Bhabha (1994:122) argues that the colonizer seeks to discipline and restrain the colonial subject by imposing what he calls a 'mimicry strategy' or 'sly civility' on the colonial subject. This mimicry strategy is a form of cultural imitation that the colonial subject recurs to as the only possible action available to achieve a status of acceptability and affect an exit from the space of otherness. Colonial mimicry, according to Bhabha, stems from the colonizer's "desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a

subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.” The kind of cultural imitation that the colonizer induces in the colonial subject is at once ironic and imperfect because the ultimate aim of this strategy is to discipline rather than create a colonizer’s double. Effective mimicry “must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.”(Bhabha, 1994:122) While this strategy undermines the original cultural identity of the colonial subject, it also mimics his difference by stereotyping this subject as pale comic copies of the colonizer. Bhabha speaks to this effect when he remarks that “mimicry is, thus, the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which “appropriates” the Other as it visualizes power.”(Bhabha, 1994:122) The colonized as such achieve no real exit from the space of otherness as mimicry asserts his inferiority in the paradigm of colonialism. Traces of this cultural imitation as mimicry are present among Kino’s people, especially in terms of language and religion in order to highlight, by way of contrast, the cultural defiance and resistance of Kino to the Spanish colonizers.

Historically, language and religion of the native communities in Mexico were suppressed by the Spanish colonizers as heathen, irrational, and primitive. Helplessly caught in the web of power relations as the inferior part, Kino’s people were forced into Catholic Christianity and had to embrace the tongue of the dominant white colonizer, an act that led eventually to the complete loss of their cultural identity. But this is not to say that the colonial subject is completely passive or helpless as resistance to this loss is never absent, especially in people like Kino. The conversation between Kino and the servant of the doctor, who is one of his race, carries unmistakable signs of Kino’s cultural resistance: “Kino spoke to him in the old language” but “the servant refused to speak in the old language.” Kino’s cultural defiance is in stark contrast to the servant’s submission of his native cultural

identity. Steinbeck plays on this identity theme in the ironic twist he adds to the servant’s next reply to Kino’s request of the doctor’s services: “a little moment,” he said. “I go to inform *myself*.” (italics added) (*The Pearl*, 1947:13) The ceremonial way the servant talks and the language mistake he commits meant as the ‘slippage’ of mimicry. What the servant is doing as a colonial subject is repetition with difference which mimics the servant as a comic stereotype or bad copy of the colonizer. While this is meant to ridicule the servant and by extension those colonial subjects who submit to the will of the colonizer, it also hints at the fact that imitation as a form of a loss of cultural identity within the colonial paradigm works to emphasize the pattern of servitude underlying colonizer-colonized relationship.

This same practice of cultural imitation also figures prominently in the space of religion. Although Kino and his Indian community are by now supposed to be Christian subjects, the Catholic church is a mere social, rather than spiritual, practice for them. We are told twice that one of Kino’s wishes/plans is to be married off to his wife Juana in the church. They are husband and wife by common law of the Indian community. The text does not indicate any religious motivation for this wish. Probably it has to do with Kino’s wish to bring happiness to his wife or might be related to his sense of social pride not as an individual but as a type of his people. However, Kino as a colonial subject tends to fashion conscious and subconscious resistance to this ‘religious’ mimicry. His old religion is surfaces in his interior monologues only. It is never stated externally or even put to practice neither individually nor socially. It is always the ‘gods’ and not ‘God’ that appear in his musing: “Chance was against it, but luck and the gods might be for it. And in the canoe above him Kino knew that Juana was making the magic of prayer, her face set rigid and her muscles hard to force the luck, to tear the luck out of the gods’ hands.” (*The Pearl*, 1947:23)

It is interesting to note that the relationship of Kino and his race to Christianity is paradoxical. Upon the coercive imposition of the colonizer's religion Kino and his people developed a schizophrenic duality of religious conviction. The suppression of primitive Indian religions make Kino's people no real followers of the Christian faith because they experience a return of the repressed on the unconscious level. It is "God or the gods" that Kino, Juana, and the rest of their Indian community believe in as the text of *The Pearl* indicates more than once. This religious duality is typical of the colonial subject caught in what Homi K. Bhabha calls 'the third space.' Bhabha (1994:36) contends that meaning produced outside cultural boundaries is located in a space called the Third Space which is a sort of 'in-between space' located between existing referential systems and antagonism, i.e., it belongs neither to the colonizer nor to the colonized. The cultural identity of the colonial subject in this space is ambivalent. Juana is a typical instance of this third space ambivalence: "Under her breath Juana repeated an ancient magic to guard against such evil, and on top of that she muttered a Hail Mary between clenched teeth." (*The Pearl*, 1947:110)

However, most of Kino's people emerges from this third space with a mimic personality, to use a Bhabha key term. The scene of the priest's visit to Kino in the village discloses the working of mimicry in the space of faith which is mostly related to how Christianity is being disseminated to serve European colonization. Upon the coming of the priest the Indians show excessive signs of reverence: "The men uncovered their heads and stepped back from the door, and the women gathered their shawls about their faces and cast down their eyes." (*The Pearl*, 1947:35) The physical gestures of the native Indians betray a sense of fear and submission in the presence of the priest. They behave like 'children' in the presence of the master than like European Christian church members. The irony of this situation stems from

the literal way these Indians take themselves to be Biblical 'children'. The irony is devastating with the subsequent authorial remark on the priest's reaction: "Children, he considered these people, and he treated them like children." (*The Pearl*, 1947:35) The remark on the speech of the priest re-orientates the whole scene from the space of the sacred to the realm of colonial discourse of supremacy. The priest as 'father' figure connotes the colonial master figure and the Indians as 'children'/ colonial subjects. The focus is not so much on colonial paternalism than on the discipline of the children.

The priest addresses Kino telling him "thou art named after a great man and a great Father of the church." (*The Pearl*, 1947:35) The irony is devastating here as the bombastic Biblical language does not match the addressee, nor that this piece of information is true. The purport is to show the predatory nature of the priest and the seeming way he uses religion to take advantage of the ignorant natives. However, the agency of this 'benediction' remains colonial rather than religious because historically Christianity was employed in the colonial discourse as a tool of cultural appropriation. The colonial subject is such an act of appropriation is of a liminal status. The priest's speech is not laudatory of Kino but internalizes his inferiority as well. The priest admonishes Kino that his "namesake tamed the desert and sweetened the minds of thy people, didst thou know that? It is in the books." (*The Pearl*, 1947:35) The word 'namesake' is key to the act of cultural appropriation as it underlies the transaction of cultural identity displacement and subsequent imposition on the colonial subject. Moreover, Kino's namesake is a missionary but the attributes the priest gives him are emulated by the colonialist as missionary of culture in the classic colonial discourse. The verbs 'tamed' and 'sweetened' imply that Kino's people were 'wild' and 'ignorant' in a way that emulates Matthew Arnold's definition of culture as 'sweet and light' as opposed to barbarianism or what he calls

‘philistinism.’ Interestingly, Kino’s reaction to the priest’s speech seems to recognize the colonialist rather than the religious authority of this figure. When the priest tells him that this piece of information is in the ‘books’ Kino is suspicious and reserved. His doubt and subsequent mental response is largely stimulated by the later part of the priest’s speech on the implied barbarianism of Kino’s race. Kino’s unconsciously looked down at his son’s head and, at this moment, the reader is caught in Kino’s interior monologue: “Some day, his mind said, that boy would know what things were in the books and what things were not.” (*The Pearl*, 1947:35) Kino’s mistrust of the priest is typical of his mistrust of the colonial discourse this priest represents. This is further supported by Kino’s sensing “the music of the enemy” sounding in his head. (*The Pearl*, 1947:35)

This later issue of knowledge as resistance to the colonizer figures prominently in the making of Kino as a colonial subject. Kino repeatedly states his wish to have his son Coyotito to be educated not merely out of a fatherly wish of a better future for his son but as the ultimate means to be on equal stand with the colonizers of his people. Looking in the pearl surface like a seer Kino declares as if in a transcendental trance that: “My son will read and open the books, and my son will write and will know writing. And my son will make numbers, and these things will make us free because he will know—he will know and through him we will know.” (*The Pearl*, 1947:33) The Biblical connotations are unmistakable. Steinbeck plays on the word ‘son’ to transform Coyotito into ‘the Son, my Savior.’ The use of the collective ‘we’ and ‘us’ as the end-recipients of this act of empowerment via knowledge further substantiates this desire for redemption from colonial oppression as both communal in scope and of divine urgency. Kino, at such moments, ceases to exist as an individualized Indian pearl diver and turns into an ideological construct, probably, as the voice of his people’s conscience, if not Steinbeck himself. But this wish can also be seen

as a sign of Kino’s desire to embrace the ways of the European colonizer because knowledge as invoked here is a construct of Western Enlightenment. Yet, one can argue here that Kino seeks not identification with the colonizer as much as using this knowledge as a means of empowerment against that very colonizer. This desire for empowerment is evident in Kino’s other wish to have “a gun’ or’ maybe a rifle.” (*The Pearl*, 1947:32) This last wish to own a rifle means one thing in Kino’s situation which is his desire to wage a war because a rifle is not a personal gun for protection but a heavy gun for military purposes.

In both wishes Kino is not going to give up his original cultural identity as an Indian and a Mexican but he seeks to appropriate the colonizer’s tools of power. The colonizer would naturally refuse to legitimize such wishes as they entail a disruption of the hierarchies of power in the discourse of classic colonialism. The pearl trade in La Paz, we are told, is in the hand of a mysterious figure who has ‘many hands.’ This figure who controls the lives of the Indian pearl divers is undoubtedly the colonizer or colonialism. The mystery and omnipotence of this figure turns it into a logos or nemesis. Kino’s people had tried helplessly to break out of this colonial nemesis across their history. Each time they send a man to sell their pearls out of La Paz the man disappears with strong hints that these men are murdered. The colonizer uses religious argument to convince them to abandon this scheme and accept their inferiority as willed by God. The Father/colonizer employs Biblical argument for this end: “The loss of the pearl was a punishment visited on those who tried to leave their station...each man and woman is like a soldier sent by God to guard some part of the castle of the universe.” (*The Pearl*, 1947:59) Kino’s people accept this colonization of the mind with resignation. By comparing its power hierarchy to the Biblical ‘castle of the universe’ colonial authority presents itself to the colonial subjects as divine and retributive as well.

This was quite enough to keep them submissive slaves in the 'castle' of colonialism. Juana and Kino's people show this stereotypical response to Kino and his pearl. Juana fears that the pearl is evil and it shall destroy them all whereas Kino's people response to his schemes with the pearl is symptomatic of the colonizer's conditioning of their minds to accept their bondage. They believe that "God punished Kino because he repelled against the way things are." (*The Pearl*, 1947:34)

It is interesting to note that this is the only time in the novella that Kino is not taking issues with colonialism. The response this time comes in the form of a reflection or a commentary by the narrator, which can be identified as Steinbeck's voice as well, in which a sharp criticism is leveled against Kino and his people as responsible for their thralldom. They are passive and submissive now as they were before. After discussing this historical incident the two brother "squinted their eyes a little, as they and their grandfathers and their great-grandfathers had done for four hundred years, since first the strangers came with arguments and authority and gunpowder to back up both." (*The Pearl*, 1947:60) Long history of submission has conditioned them bodily into ineffective human beings. The narrative aside grows bold in tone into an open criticism of Kino's people as responsible for their slavery: And in the four hundred years Kino's people had learned only one defense-a slight slitting of the eyes and a slight tightening of the lips and a retirement. Nothing could break down this wall, and they could remain whole within the wall. (*The Pearl*, 1947:60)

Although this foreshadows Kino's tragic failure, he defies colonial nemesis heroically. He dares to go beyond the permitted boundaries and break the 'wall' of the colonial logos. Juan Tomas, Kino's elder brother, speaks to this end when he tells Kino that he has "defied not the pearl buyers, but the whole structure, the whole way of life, and I am afraid for you." (*The Pearl*, 1947:70)

Retribution in the form of violence and terror is inflicted on him and his family. The colonizer's agents hunt down Kino and his family who find themselves caught in a cycle of excessive violence. His canoe is destroyed, his hut is burnt, and he and his wife are physically assaulted. His final attempt to escape La Paz brings him the ultimate retribution because his act is not one for survival or to protect his family but an attempt to go far beyond the permitted boundaries because he left La Paz to find a buyer for his pearl. Although Kino's adamant will to pursue his dreams is heroic defiance, the drift of the narrative gradually builds up a demonic aspect in his personality. The man is growing paranoid who is suspicious of "Everyone." (*The Pearl*, 1947:47) This paranoia seems to add an aspect of cruelty to his responses even towards his wife Juana. At times he seems to be obsessed with the pearl and/or that the pearl seems to possess him. Yet all of these eccentricities are indication of one thing which is Kino's obsession with his dreams for his family and, ultimately, for his people. Kino keeps protesting throughout the text that this is their "one chance...to break out of the pot that holds us in." (*The Pearl*, 1947:50) The colonial castle is a prison house for Kino and his race and the pearl is the instrument of their salvation. Seen in the colonial context of *The Pearl*, the salvation that Kino seeks through the pearl is not personal nor spiritual. It is rather communal in appeal as it takes the form of liberation from the colonizer. Kino, as such, becomes in Steinbeck's terms a 'phalanx' figure, "a great individual who willingly sacrifices himself to the whole" and that his tale goes "beyond the limits of a parable or a morality play." (Nakayama, 2006:283) The textual moment when mimesis displaces the parabolic in *The pearl* coincides with the moment Kino breaks out of the La Paz, the colonial animal. He becomes a dangerous subject quite subversive of the colonial hegemony. The cycle of violence and the tragedy that ensues are so real that Steinbeck's naturalistic vision of the world in which Kino is caught is

excessively moribund. Kino and his family are caught in a helpless struggle for survival in the harsh mountainous area outside La Paz.

Kino at this stage is well out of the space of the subaltern. He has a voice and can meet the retribution of the colonial hegemony with equal violence. Yet, the violence that Kino exercises up to now is legitimate as self-defense. His figure by now telescopes victimization with heroism but carries the evident seeds of its tragic fall. Like in classical tragedy, Kino's fall is never personal but has its serious consequences on the whole community. Kino does not lose the pearl but loses the agency of the pearl which is the baby Coyotito. Without Coyotito the pearl is worthless as a means of communal salvation from the bondage of the colonizer. He therefore throws the pearl back to the sea and substitutes it with the rule of the gun. Kino's response at the specific point re-invents the whole novella into a 'a symbolic parable' not of moral issues as Kiyoshi Nakayama (2006:283) believes but of the inescapable inevitability of violence as the ultimate, if not only, available mode of resistance to colonialism. But this mode of resistance is desperate and blank as it seeks to eliminate the colonizer but without offering a substitute or even a better future.

This change of agency reflects itself in the change of Kino's personality. The communal phalanx has turned into a cold ruthless rebel. The scene of Kino's return to his village pins point the this change of agency. This scene is temporally distanced from the narrative present to history remembered. The scene is distanced in history and popular memory to add a further historiographical significance to it as a communal event. This distancing further relocates the reader back to the

short prologue-like of the novella to complete the frame narrative and to emphasize the ways in which actual history is explicated into parables of readings. This scene becomes the textual space where the act of witness is open to the power of interpretation. This is why omniscient narration drops in favor of communal oral reporting in the form of "the people say." This is mainly meant to depersonalize Kino as an Indian pearl diver into a communal hero in rebellion against the colonizers of his people. So the Kino that "had gone through pain and had come out on the other side" emerges as one who "carried fear with him...he was as dangerous as a rising storm." (*The Pearl*, 1947:116) This witness works to demonize Kino as 'Fury' because words like fear, dangerous, and storm mark him as an agent of destruction and annihilation. This fury-like aspect seems to confer divinity on his figure as he walks through the colonial city with 'magical protection' (*The Pearl*, 1947:116) of the gun he carries. The gun becomes a totem in the primordial mind of his people. This last point affects a scene of cultural appropriation because the gun and its associated supremacy is colonial but now it is appropriated into the primeval psyche of Kino's race as magical and divine. Put in simple words, this act of appropriation is but the way to confer legitimacy on the use of the colonizer's violent methods as the only viable means of resistance.

Now Kino and his people has successfully come out of the imaginary of the pearl to the reality of the gun. But even here mimicry finds ways to operate. The ensuing image is grotesque because it is on a deeper level the work of mimicry slippage: the classic image of the confident colonizer with a gun has become now an image of a furious colonized with a gun. The identification can never be complete in the presence of irony.

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