

# Depiction of oppression in the pearl by john steinbeck



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“ Steinbeck illustrates the tragic consequences of the loss of that freedom of the spirit in *The Pearl*, expressing a profound sympathy for the individual and the community that suffers under such an oppressive system.” (Perkins). In *The Pearl*, John Steinbeck describes that he feels great empathy for those who do not have freedom of spirit. This tragic effect makes individuals suffer in an oppressive system. The main reason of his writing of *The Pearl* is to give voice to the working class who sometimes do not have that liberty. He explains throughout the novel the unfortunate experiences that Kino endures. Kino has misused the power of the pearl and has caused oppression and disruption for himself and the community. In *The Pearl*, Steinbeck shows that Kino cannot escape oppression through the thoughts of Juana, the development of the pearl, and the cultural superiority of the doctor.

Steinbeck uses the thoughts and emotions of Juana to show that Kino cannot escape oppression. Kino has let his visions overcome his sanity and Juana says, “ There was no anger in her for Kino. He had said, ‘ I am a man,’ and that meant certain things to Juana. It meant that he was half insane and half god. It meant that Kino would drive his strength against a mountain and plunge his strength against the sea. Juana, in her woman’s soul, knew that the mountain would stand while the man broke himself; that the sea would surge while the man drowned in it”. Juana understands Kino’s masculinity. Kino cannot help fighting the forces that are beyond him because he is man, and it is his nature. He is blindsided by the greed and evil that has corrupted his life along with his family’s. Juana realizes that he cannot escape his oppressive state, and all will soon be destroyed. The quote uses metaphors comparing Kino’s strength to the mountains and seas. This means that Kino

will not surrender until he achieves his goals and visions for his family, which will soon cause oppression. This can be further explained by stating, “ Kino has entered a kind of moral twilight zone in which his physical strength reveals his moral weakness. Juana may be the person lying in the water, but it is Kino who has actually fallen in the most important sense, and the comparison of Kino to a snake — the traditional symbol of evil — seems perfectly appropriate” (Pearl). The moral weakness of Kino is evident when he realizes he cannot fight the supreme forces that surround him. The pearl has turned Kino into an evil and selfish person, and he cannot escape this. Kino cannot see the unfortunate causes of his actions and will cause his family oppression when he loses everything valuable in his life. Juana knows the horrible path Kino is heading towards, but she realizes there is nothing she can do because Kino is a man and has a certain authority over her.

Steinbeck uses the development of the pearl to show how Kino cannot escape oppression. Juana says, “ The pearl is like a sin; it will destroy us”. The Pearl of the World comes at a great price but also brings a great sacrifice. At first, the pearl was used as a symbol of hope and salvation. Kino sees the pearl to escape his status in society and his visions were very ambitious. The pearl then became a symbol of evil in the world because it seems as though the greed surfaces in the presence of evil. The pearl will soon destroy everything valuable in his life. Steinbeck uses a simile to compare the pearl to a sin. The pearl can represent the sin in the world, which is inescapable, just as Kino could not escape the oppression in the world. Perkins adds to this by stating, “ The loss of the pearl at the end of the story suggests his loss of hope for the future and a loss in his belief that he

can control his life and destiny.” Kino finally reaches the realization that the pearl was slowly killing him, and he has lost hope in his dreams of a new life, marrying Juana, and an education for Coyotito. Greed from the pearl has caused Kino to see what he has ruined in his life and he realizes he cannot control his own destiny.

The pearl develops throughout the story to show how greed can completely change a person’s beliefs and true values. Steinbeck shows that Kino cannot escape oppression through the cultural superiority of the doctor. Kino remembers, “ 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”. Kino reminds himself of the abusive power from the doctor’s race. He knows the ways of the doctor and becomes very cautious because the doctor dismisses him. The doctor later says that he is not a veterinary, which implies that Kino’s race, who were Indians, were animals. Kino’s rebellious and brave personality is hidden by the fear caused by the doctor. Steinbeck uses the words beaten, starved, robbed, and despised to show how awful Kino’s race was treated. Perkins further explains, “ Another consequence of this type of oppression is the disruption of the community, which provides an effective way to suppress any rebellion within that community. Disruption can be seen in the behavior of the doctor’s servant who refuses to speak to Kino in their native language.” The doctor’s servant, who was also Indian, feared the doctor, and therefore, he refuses to talk to Kino in their native language. The doctor’s

power is misused and disruptive to the community, which provides oppression for the lower classes. The Doctor's cultural power is harmful to the community and is affecting the actions of the people.

Steinbeck shows that Kino is in constant oppression through the thoughts of Juana, the development of the pearl, and the cultural superiority of the Doctor. Juana knows that Kino is a man and has authority over her, but she knows that Kino is slowly destroying himself and everyone around him. The development of the pearl shows how greed can overcome a person and change their true values and beliefs. The doctor abuses his power, which causes harm and disruption within the town and changes the opinions of a person. Steinbeck wrote many of his novels to give voice to the working class of America who might be experiencing similar types of oppression. John Steinbeck says, " A sad soul can kill you quicker, far quicker, than a germ."