



"The Pearl": Realism and Allegory

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The Pearl: Realism and Allegory

Harry Morris

Professor Morris' analysis of John Steinbeck's *The Pearl*, a selection widely taught in high schools, is set in the context of a discussion of the allegorical mode in fiction. A Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota, Dr. Morris is an assistant professor of English at the Florida State University

JOHN Steinbeck has never been very far away from the allegorical method. Some of his earliest work—and among that, his best—shows involvement with elements of allegory. *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) employs as a framework the journey, the most common of allegorical devices:

Go thou to *Everyman*,
And show him in my name
A pilgrimage he must on him take
Which he in no wise may escape.

Eight years later, Steinbeck displayed his perfect familiarity with *Everyman* by using a passage from the morality play as an epigraph for his own most complete allegory of the life-journey, *The Wayward Bus* (1947). *In Dubious Battle* (1936) has some things in common with the medieval psychomachia, the debate, the poetry of warfare between body and soul, between head and heart. The title itself comes from the opening book of *Paradise Lost* (I.104), where, shortly following, Milton presents his own great allegory of sin and death (II.648-814). Some episodes in *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932) and some stories in *The Long Valley* (1938) move into allegory frequently, although in the ear-

ly fiction allegorical materials are so completely absorbed into the techniques of realism as to be almost undetectable.

But beginning in 1945 and through the years immediately following World War II, following the realistic works that belong to that war, Steinbeck wrote a series of novels that he proclaimed openly to be allegorical. In addition to the already mentioned *Wayward Bus* (1947) were *Burning Bright* (1950) and *East of Eden* (1952). Preceding these three was *The Pearl*. Peter Lisca, in *The Wide World of John Steinbeck* (1958), cites letters which Steinbeck wrote to Pascal Covici to show that *The Pearl* was completed by early February 1945. *Woman's Home Companion* in its December issue of the same year was the first publisher, presenting the short novel under the title *The Pearl of the World*. An earlier letter to Covici indicates that while the story was still in progress Steinbeck called it *The Pearl of La Paz*. When it was issued in book form in 1947 to coincide with its release as a motion picture by RKO, it had become simply *The Pearl*. A rehearsal of these variations in the title should not be considered pedantry, for nothing more clearly indicates the allegorical nature of the work as

it developed in Steinbeck's mind from the beginning. Although the city of La Paz may be named appropriately in the title since the setting for the action is in and around that place, the Spanish word provides a neat additional bit of symbolism, if in some aspects ironic. In its working title, the novel tells the story of *The Pearl of Peace*. When this title was changed to *The Pearl of the World* for magazine publication, although the irony was partially lost, the allegorical implications were still present. But Steinbeck had apparently no fears that the nature of the tale would be mistaken when he reduced the title to merely *The Pearl*, for he could rely still upon the epigraph to warn his readers:

If this story is a parable, perhaps everyone takes his own meaning from it and reads his own life into it.

Status of Allegory

But why should a critic labor to put the stamp of allegory on a modern novel? For also two hundred years now such a mark has been almost equivalent to a seal of literary oblivion. Shakespeare, the greatest writer in the English language, had eschewed allegory. One of the next best, Chaucer, turned an early hand to translating *The Romance of the Rose*, but after a few more false starts, found his genius in narrative and satire and produced his two masterpieces, *Troilus and Criseyde* and *The Canterbury Tales*. But it was Coleridge who downgraded allegory in a series of critical pronouncements and then became the master and model of a hundred and fifty years of literary criticism. His influence has been such that I have heard one of America's foremost poets and one of the major figures in what has long been called the "New Criticism" say, "I simply cannot read Spenser," by which he meant he could not abide allegory. Steinbeck's *Pearl* has come also under this interdict. When first published, it was reviewed

by Maxwell Geismar, who wrote, "... the quality that has marked Steinbeck's work as a whole is . . . the sense of black and white things and good and bad things—that is to say, the sense of a fabulist or a propagandist rather than the insight of an artist?" The fabulist as Geismar describes him is neither more nor less than the allegorist. We see how far distaste for allegory has come. The writer who employs the mode is read out of the ranks of the artist; the fabulist lacks insight.

It is doubtful that Coleridge ever intended his sometime-mentioned disapproval of allegory to be taken as strong aversion. His lecture on Spenser seemed to equate allegory with a one-to-one relationship between story and underlying meaning:

No one can appreciate Spenser without some reflection on the nature of allegorical writing. The mere etymological meaning of the word, allegory,—to talk of one thing and thereby convey another,—is too wide. The true sense is this,—the employment of one set of agents and images to convey in disguise a moral meaning.

The unfortunate suggestion that moral meanings have to be disguised is also present. But the more famous and more severe disavowal is in Coleridge's *Statesman's Manual*:

Now an allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses; the principal being more worthless even than its phantom proxy, both alike unsubstantial, and the former shapeless to boot.

But elsewhere Coleridge found exceptions to his general censure: the allegory of Cupid and Psyche, the Sin and Death episode in *Paradise Lost*, and the first part of *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Nevertheless, Coleridge had done almost irreparable damage. Only recently have there been signs that allegory has been given a false character. Rosemond

Tuве has shown that the first mistake is to imagine that medieval and Renaissance allegory could ever be comprehended as a one-to-one relationship of story and second meaning. Allegory in Spenser's hand is as rich in its multiplicity of meaning as is symbolism, the most highly admired literary device both of Coleridge and of modern criticism. Parable in the New Testament and medieval commentary on the Old Testament gave rise to the rich legacy that we call the fourfold manner of Scriptural interpretation, of which Dante wrote, "although [three of] these mystical meanings are called by various names, they may all be called in general allegorical, since they differ from the literal." No literary figure can ever quite ignore that Christ chose to talk in parables; none can ever forget that *The Divine Comedy* is one of the most complex allegories ever written. Great allegory, even in its purest forms—in so medieval a work as the anonymous *Pearl* of the fourteenth century—carries all the exciting allusiveness of the most complex symbolism. Our own age is rediscovering this fact, and much fine literature is being produced in the allegorical mode, from the serious attempts of Steinbeck already mentioned and including such important novels as Orwell's *Animal Farm*, Faulkner's *A Fable*, and Katherine Anne Porter's *Ship of Fools* all the way to the intellectualized comic strips of Schulz and Walt Kelly. Of course, allegory has never been completely dead in the modern novel, for in their ways Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Mann's *Magic Mountain*, and Joyce's *Ulysses* carry an allegorical burden. It has become fashionable to call them mythopoeic—reworkings of old or inventions of new myths—but the myths themselves are true allegories.

Steinbeck's Method

In reading *The Pearl*, we encounter the work of a professed parabolist, and

we must assert, and so reject Geismar's explicit objections to *The Pearl*, that the fable is an art form and that the fabulist as artist has never lacked insight. We cannot evaluate Steinbeck's performance with the criteria employed for judgment of the realistic novel. We cannot condemn *The Pearl* because as Geismar says it is all black and white, all good and bad. Such was Steinbeck's intention:

And because the story has been told so often, it has taken root in every man's mind. And as with all retold tales that are in people's hearts, there are only good and bad things and black and white things and good and evil things and no in-between anywhere.

Writing about its composition, Steinbeck said elsewhere, "I tried to write it as folklore, to give it that set-aside, raised-up feeling that all folk stories have." He was telling us again that *The Pearl* is not totally in the realistic tradition.

But Steinbeck knew that the modern fabulist could write neither a medieval *Pearl* nor a classical Aesopian Fox and Grapes story. It was essential to overlay his primary media of parable and folklore with a coat of realism, and this was one of his chief problems. Realism as a technique requires two basic elements: credible people and situations on the one hand and recognizable evocation of the world of nature and of things on the other. Steinbeck succeeds brilliantly in the second of these tasks but perhaps does not come off quite so well in the first. In supplying realistic detail, he is a master, trained by his long and productive journeyman days at work on the proletarian novels of the thirties and the war pieces of the early forties. His description of the natural world is so handled as to do double and treble duty in enrichment of both symbolism and allegory. Many critics have observed Steinbeck's use of animal imagery that pervades this novel with the realistic detail that is also one of its strengths:

Kino awakened in the near dark. The stars shone and the day had drawn only a pale wash of light in the lower sky to the east. The roosters had been crowing for some time, and the early pigs were already beginning their ceaseless turning of twigs and bits of wood to see whether anything to eat had been overlooked. Outside the brush house in the tuna clump, a covey of little birds chattered and flurried their wings.

Kino is identified symbolically with low animal orders: he must rise early and he must root in the earth for sustenance; but the simple, pastoral life has the beauty of the stars, the dawn, and the singing, happy birds. Yet provided also is a realistic description of village life on the fringe of La Paz. Finally, we should observe that the allegory too has begun. The first sentence—"Kino awakened in the near dark"—is a statement of multiple allegorical significance. Kino is what modern sociologists are fond of calling a primitive. As such, he comes from a society that is in its infancy; or, to paraphrase Steinbeck, it is in the dark or the near-dark intellectually, politically, theologically, and sociologically. But the third sentence tells us that the roosters have been crowing for some time, and we are to understand that Kino has heard the cock of progress crow. He will begin to question the institutions that have kept him primitive: medicine, the church, the pearl industry, the government. The allegory operates then locally, dealing at first with one person, Kino, and then with his people, the Mexican peasants of Lower California. But the allegory works also universally, and Kino is Everyman. The darkness in which he awakes is one of the spirit. The cock crow is one of warning that the spirit must awake to its own dangers. The allegorical journey has often been called the way into the dark night of the soul, in which the darkness stands for despair or hopelessness. We cannot describe Kino or his people as in despair,

for they have never known any life other than the one they lead; neither are they in hopelessness, for they are not aware that there is anything for which to hope. In a social parable, then, the darkness is injustice and helplessness in the face of it; in the allegory of the spirit, darkness concerns the opacity of the moral substance in man.

The social element is developed rapidly through the episode of Coyotito's scorpion bite and the doctor's refusal to treat a child whose father cannot pay a substantial fee. Kino's helplessness is conveyed by the fist he crushes into a split and bleeding mass against the doctor's gate. This theme of helplessness reaches its peak in the pearl-selling attempt. When Kino says to his incredulous brother, Juan Tomás, that perhaps all three buyers set a price amongst themselves before Kino's arrival, Juan Tomás answers, "If that is so, then all of us have been cheated all of our lives." And of course they have been.

Kino is, then, in the near dark; and, as his misfortunes develop, he descends deeper and deeper into the dark night of the soul. The journey that the soul makes as well as the journey that the living Kino makes—in terms of the good and evil that invest the one and the oppression and freedom that come to the other—provides the allegorical statement of the novel.

Difficulties of the Method

In the attempt to achieve believable situations, create three-dimensional characters, Steinbeck met greater difficulties that he did not entirely overcome. The germ-anecdote out of which he constructed his story gave him little more than the bare elements of myth:

An event which happened at La Paz in recent years is typical of such places. An Indian boy by accident found a pearl of great size, an unbelievable pearl. He knew its value was so great that he need never work again. In his one pearl

he had the ability to be drunk as long as he wished, to marry any one of a number of girls, and to make many more a little happy too. In his great pearl lay salvation, for he could in advance purchase masses sufficient to pop him out of Purgatory like a squeezed watermelon seed. In addition he could shift a number of dead relatives a little nearer Paradise. He went to La Paz with his pearl in his hand and his future clear into eternity in his heart. He took his pearl to a broker and was offered so little that he grew angry, for he knew he was cheated. Then he carried his pearl to another broker and was offered the same amount. After a few more visits he came to know that he could not sell his pearl for more. He took it to the beach and hid it under a stone, and that night he was clubbed into unconsciousness and his clothing was searched. The next night he slept at the house of a friend and his friend and he were injured and bound and the whole house searched. Then he went inland to lose his pursuers and he was waylaid and tortured. But he was very angry now and he knew what he must do. Hurt as he was he crept back to La Paz in the night and he skulked like a hunted fox to the beach and took out his pearl from under the stone. Then he cursed it and threw it as far as he could into the channel. He was a free man again with his soul in danger and his food and shelter insecure. And he laughed a great deal about it.

Steinbeck recorded this sketch in *The Sea of Cortez* (1941), where he noted also how difficult it would be for anyone to believe:

This seems to be a true story, but it is so much like a parable that it almost can't be true. The Indian boy is too heroic, too wise. He knows too much and acts on his knowledge. In every way, he goes contrary to human direction. The story is probably true, but we don't believe it; it is far too reasonable to be true.

We see in Steinbeck's source all the major elements of his expanded version: the Mexican peasant, the discovered

pearl, the belief that the pearl will make the finder free, the corrupt brokers, the attacks, the flight, the return, and the disposal of the pearl. But there are also additions and alterations. The episodes of the doctor and the priest are added; the motives for retaining the pearl are changed. While the additions add perhaps some realism at the same time that they increase the impact of the allegory, the alterations tend to diminish the realistic aspects of the hero. Kino becomes almost unbelievably sophisticated. The boy wants only to be drunk forever; Kino wants his son educated. The boy wants to buy prayers for his own soul and for the souls of his relatives in Purgatory; Kino distrusts the priest who asks that the church be remembered when the pearl is sold, closes his fist only more tightly about the pearl, determined instead to buy a rifle. The boy's desires are primitive; they are consonant with his origins and his intellect, crafty and wise as he may be. Kino's wants are sophisticated; he sees in the pearl not the objects that can be bought, but beyond. Coyotito's education will make the Indians free, a social, political, and economic sophistication; new clothes and a church wedding will give Kino and Juana position and respectability, again a social sophistication; the rifle will give Kino power, an intellectual sophistication. With the rifle all other things were possible: "It was the rifle that broke down the barriers. This was an impossibility, and if he could think of having a rifle whole horizons were burst and he could rush on." Later, ironically, all that the rifle gives to Kino is the power to destroy human life; and in this irony, the symbolic import of the pearl-rifle fusion gives to the allegory the very complication that Geismar (and even Steinbeck himself) says is lacking. The pearl is not clearly good or evil, black or white.

Diminished Realism

In these alterations, employed perhaps to add reality to a fable, Steinbeck has diminished realism. Narrative detail alone supplies this element. The opening of chapter three, like the beginning paragraph of the book, is descriptive:

A town is a thing like a colonial animal. A town has a nervous system and a head and shoulders and feet. A town is a thing separate from all other towns, so that there are no two towns alike. And a town has a whole emotion.

Animal imagery again dominates the human scene, but this passage is only the first half of a statement that is concluded midway through the chapter:

Out in the estuary a tight woven school of small fishes glittered and broke water to escape a school of great fishes that drove in to eat them. And in the houses the people 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.

Symbol, allegory, and realistic detail are again woven satisfactorily together. The large fish and the lawks symbolize the doctor, the priest, the brokers, and the man behind the brokers, in fact all enemies of the village people from time prehistoric. Allegorically these predatory animals are all the snares that beset the journeying soul and the hungering body. Realistically these scenes can be observed in any coastal town where water, foul, and animal ecology provide these specific denizens.

Somewhere in every chapter Steinbeck adds a similar touch: the tidepool description that opens chapter two, the pearl-buyer with his sleight-of-hand coin manipulation midway in chapter four, the great wind passages at the end of chapter five, and the wasteland imagery a third of the way into chapter six. All these passages operate symbolically as

well as realistically, and some of them work even allegorically.

Interpretation of the Allegory

One of the major charges against allegory is obscurantism. Why does the author not say what he means outright? Is it not too easy to derive two or more entirely separate and frequently contradictory meanings from a single allegory? These are the terms in which Coleridge first objected. Being told what a poet intended by his allegory, he responded,

Apollo be praised! not a thought like it would ever enter of its own accord into any mortal mind; and what is an additional good feature, when put there, it will not stay, having the very opposite quality that snakes have—they come out of their holes into open view at the sound of sweet music, while the allegoric meaning slinks off at the very first notes, and lurks in murkiest oblivion—and utter invisibility.

Such is the reaction to *The Pearl* of Warren French in *John Steinbeck* (1961), who finds Kino's disposal of the pearl capable of contradictory interpretations: it may be seen as "noble renunciation," but it can also be read as "defeatism." *The Pearl* is most commonly understood as a rejection of materialism. Peter Lisca accepts the theme of anti-materialism but suggests a second layer of allegory which creates a "pattern of man's search for his soul." Others think *The Pearl*, like many another Steinbeck novel, to be a search for values, something like Odysseus' ten-year wanderings in the Homeric epic.

I often wonder at the ability of the anti-allegorists to read any piece of literature. Like Coleridge, allegory-haters are usually symbolism-lovers. How do they find any more certainty in the meaning of the evasive symbol than in "obscure" allegory? How do they respond to the "negative capability" of Shakespeare and Keats? What is their reaction first to

Christ's parables or Dante's *Paradiso* and then to the mountains of commentary on both that indicate there is very little certainty in any interpretation? We might say to them (since allegory deals almost always with the ways toward faith) that their faith is weak and urge that they ask in order to be given, seek in order to find, and knock in order to have opened.

But even the interpreters who have dealt with and accepted the allegory of *The Pearl* have been disturbingly vague. What are the results of Kino's particular search, we ask? What is the nature of Kino's soul? its disposition? in grace? in reprobation? What set of values did he arrive at? What is the precise nature of the materialism which he rejected?

Let us consider the general implications of any allegorical journey. Either it chronicles the transition of the soul from its captivity in the body and this mortality to liberation in Paradise and eternal life, or it records simply man's passing from a state of sin to one of grace. Quite often both these things happen at the same time. In *The Divine Comedy*, for example, Dante the pilgrim passes from this world into the existence of the afterworld; yet the entire journey is also one man's moral regeneration from error to rectitude, an object lesson that instructs the traveler in the nature of sin and the terrors of its punishment as opposed to the beatitude of salvation and the glories of its rewards.

But one thing always remains at the end of an allegorical journey. The traveler of the literal journey is still alive, still mortal, still in this world, and still to make the true journey from the corruption of this earth to the crystal bowers of heaven or sulphurous pits of hell that is undergone only after death.

Kino's Journeys

Kino's flight may be seen as a double journey, with a third still to be made.

The journey is one half spiritual—the route to salvation of the soul—and one half physical—the way to freedom from bodily want. The second half is obvious; it is the theme of most of the early Steinbeck works; it is delineated in the list of things Kino will buy with the pearl. The first half may not be obvious, since for a long time now critics have been calling Steinbeck's writing non-teleological, by which they mean it does not concern itself with end-products, with what might be, what should be, or what could be, but only with what is. Especially is he unconcerned with eschatology. This view has long seemed to me mistaken. An allegorist with no teleology, no eschatology is almost a contradiction in terms. How this view of Steinbeck came into being is easy to see. His early novels such as *In Dubious Battle* and *The Grapes of Wrath* are a-Christian. No set of characters ever swore by Christ's name or cried out their disbelief in the church more often than those in *In Dubious Battle*. Mac says to Jim Nolan, "You got no vices, have you. And you're not a Christer either." But these are early works. In Steinbeck's latest novel, *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961), the central character, Ethan Allen Hawley, is a regular member of the Episcopal Church; his problems are oriented about morality in a Christian framework, and much of the incidental symbolism is sacramental. Perhaps we have witnessed in Steinbeck himself an orthodox conversion, which, once witnessed, gives us cause to look for signs of it in previous writings. *The Pearl* is one of the first in which I detect a change; Juan Chicoy's bargains with the Virgin of Guadalupe in *The Wayward Bus* may be reluctant religion, but they represent at least a willingness to sit at the arbitration table with what used to be the enemy. *East of Eden*, in my view, among other things is an allegory of redemption through grace.

One of Kino's journeys then is the search for salvation. The forces that necessitate the literal journey, the flight, are cloaked in mystery and darkness:

"I was attacked in the dark," said Kino. "And in the fight I have killed a man."

"Who?" asked Juan Thomás quickly.

"I do not know. It is all darkness—all darkness and shape of darkness."

"It is the pearl," said Juan Thomás. "There is a devil in this pearl. You should have sold it and passed on the devil."

We are reminded of the formlessness of Milton's allegorical Death. Juan Thomás, torn like Kino by desires for a better life but concerned for his brother's safety, both blesses the journey and argues against it:

"Go with God," he said, and it was like a death.

"You will not give up the pearl?"

"This pearl has become my soul," said Kino.

"If I give it up I shall lose my soul."

Already almost overburdened with multiple symbolic equivalences—it stands for greed, for beauty, for materialism, for freedom from want, for evil, for good, for effete society, degenerate religion, and unethical medicine, for the strength and virtue of primitive societies—the pearl, with these words of Kino, stands also for Kino's soul.

The Indian boy of the germ-story had quite falsely identified his hold on the pearl with a firm grasp on salvation, a salvation absolutely assured while he still went about enveloped in flesh and mortality: "he could in advance purchase masses sufficient to pop him out of Purgatory like a squeezed watermelon seed." Kino also holds the pearl in his hand and equates it with freedom from want and then, mystically, also with freedom from damnation: "If I give it up I shall lose my soul." But he too has mistaken the pearl. The chances are very much more likely that with freedom from want his soul will be all the more

in danger from sin. The Indian boy becomes free only when he throws the pearl away, only when he is "again with his soul in danger and his food and shelter insecure." The full significance of Kino's throwing the pearl back into the sea now becomes clear: the act represents his willingness to accept the third journey, the journey still to be made, the journey that Dante had still to make even after rising out of Hell to Purgatory and Paradise, the journey that any fictional character has still to make after his dream-vision allegory is over. Kino, Dante, Everyman have been given nothing more than instruction. They must apply their new knowledge and win their way to eternal salvation, which can come only with their actual deaths.

Kino's Triumph

It is difficult to understand how Warren French can interpret the "gesture [of flinging the pearl back into the sea] . . . as defeatism," how French can say that Kino "slips back not just half a step, but toboggans to the very bottom of the heap, for his boat smashed, his baby dead, and the pearl cast into the sea, he has less when the story is over than he had when it started." Kino is not defeated. He has in a sense triumphed over his enemy, over the chief of the pearl buyers, who neither gets the pearl nor kills Kino to keep him from talking. Kino has rid himself of his pursuers; he has a clear road to the cities of the north, to the capital, where indeed he may be cheated again, but where he has infinitely more opportunity to escape his destiny as a hut-dwelling peasant on the edge of La Paz. He has proved that he cannot be cheated nor destroyed. But his real triumph, his real gain, the heights to which he has risen rather than the depths to which he has slipped back is the immense knowledge that he has gained about good and evil. This knowledge is the tool that he needs to help

him on the final journey, the inescapable journey that everyman must take.

A final note should be added concerning some parallels between Steinbeck's novel and the anonymous fourteenth century *Pearl*. The Pearl Poet tells the story, in dream-vision and allegory, of the personal grief of a loving father who has lost his daughter, a child dead before she had lived "two years in our land." As the poem opens, the narrator returns to a place where a "pearl of great price" has dropped from his hand to the ground. He falls asleep over the spot; a young maiden appears whose garments are covered with pearls; and the narrator speaks to the girl, now identified with the pearl he has lost and whom he believes to be his daughter in heaven, grown in stature and wisdom:

O Pearl, quoth I, in pearls bedight,

Art thou my pearl that I have 'plain'd?

She lectures him about the ways to salvation. He struggles to cross a stream that separates him from her and from the heavenly city—the new Jerusalem—which is her abode. The effort awakens him, and he rises from the ground with new spiritual strength.

Steinbeck's familiarity with medieval English literature is easy to document. His general interest in allegory indicates a steeping in the tradition. The epigraph to *The Wayward Bus* establishes his close reading of *Everyman*; and two quotations from Old English in *The Winter of Our Discontent* (one of them significantly from the poetic *Genesis* in the Junius MS., 11. 897-899) show not only wide reading but also study in the original Anglo-Saxon.

The importance of the medieval *Pearl* for a reading of Steinbeck's novel is centered in the role of the children in each. Coyotito can, in several ways, be identified with Kino's "pearl of great value." The pearl from the sea is only a means by which Coyotito will be given an education. For the doctor, who at first

refused to treat Coyotito, the child becomes his means to the pearl, i.e. the child is the pearl to him. But more important than these tenuous relationships is the fact that with the death of Coyotito the pearl no longer has any significance. The moment the pursuer with the rifle fires, Kino kills him. Kino then kills the two trackers who led the assassin to him and who were unshakable. This act gives Kino and his family unhindered passage to the cities of the north, where either the pearl might be sold or a new life begun. But the chance shot has killed Coyotito, and though Kino and Juana are now free, they return to the village near La Paz and throw the pearl back into the sea. Thus the sole act that has altered Kino's determination to keep the pearl which has become his soul is the death of his child; and, as I read the allegory, Kino and Juana turn from the waterside with new spiritual strength, regenerated even as the father in the medieval *Pearl*.

Much has been made of the *leitmotif* of music in *The Pearl*: the song of the family, the song of the enemy, etc. The suggestion for this musical background, interlaced as it is with Steinbeck's chief themes (cleaning of the soul, new wealth, complete well-being), may have come from the second stanza of the medieval poem:

Oft have I watched, wishing for that
wealth

That was wont for a while to make
nought of my sin,
And exalt my fortune and my entire
well-being—

Yet never imagined I so sweet a song
As a quiet hour let steal to me;
Indeed many drifted to me there.

And, finally, the medieval *Pearl* ends on the same note of renunciation that is the crux of Steinbeck's fable:

Upon this hill this destiny I grasped,
Prostrate in sorrow for my pearl.

(Continued on page 505)

worth a multitude of less successful jobs like, for instance, Gavin or Chick. The descriptions of the mob as an animate single character are good fiction and good sociology, and though Faulkner may beg the question of Southern racism in the future, he has its past well pictured. It is significant that he includes among his characters no individual "nigger-hater," that he sees "nigger-hatred" as something bequeathed by the past, by the group defense mechanisms. These operate when a southern community, whose life is balanced so precariously on an anomalous relationship, senses that a member of either race is behaving in an out-of-character fashion. Faulkner's picture of mob behavior as akin to hypnotic

response is convincing. Though Southern readers may tend to go along with Gavin Stevens, they can hardly fail to benefit from a consideration of the morality back of it, and of Chick's discoveries. If non-Southern readers become acquainted with the motivations of the people represented in this book, they will perhaps gain a useful insight into a very live problem.

Any one of these books presents interesting material for study. Any two of them could be paired. However, a study of all three has extra value in forcing, through comparison, the kind of close reading and detailed discussion which tend to improve critical skill.

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And afterward to God I gave it up.
(modernizations of *The Pearl* by
Sister Mary Vincent Hillmann)

However, I do not think that anything overmuch should be made of these similarities. Possibly the mere title of Steinbeck's allegory brought memories to his

mind of the fourteenth century poem. He may have gone back to look at it again, but he may have satisfied himself with distant evocations only. For myself, whatever likenesses I find between the two works serve only to emphasize the continuing tradition of true allegory and the modern writer's strong links with the past.

Notification of Intention to Seek a Change in By-Laws

In accordance with constitutional requirements, NCTE members are hereby notified that a proposal to modify the by-laws of the Council will be voted upon at the Annual Business Meeting in San Francisco. The proposed modification would give the Executive Committee authority to increase dues for NCTE membership up to \$7.00 for regular members, to \$3.00 for junior members, and to \$35.00 for comprehensive members who wish to receive all publications. In recommending passage of the amendment, the Executive Committee stresses its intention not to raise Council dues until necessary and then only through gradual increases.