# The Portrait of Humanity in the Pearl by John Ernst Steinbeck

## Franco Gabriel Sunyoto<sup>1</sup>; M. Amir Pattu<sup>2</sup> & Harlinah Sahib<sup>3</sup>

1,2,3 Department of English Language Studies, Hasanuddin University, Makassar, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: Franco Gabriel Sunyoto

#### Abstract

This study aims to explore the portrait of humanity reflected in John Ernst Steinbeck's novel, The Pearl, which focuses on the role and treatment of characters in the novel. This research has two main objectives: first, to present the kinds of humanity in the novel, and second, to describe how the portrait of humanity is experienced by the characters in the novel. This research uses a descriptive qualitative method to collect data obtained from library research, this research applies the theory of Structuralism approach to identify the intrinsic elements contained in the novel. The intrinsic elements that become the focus of the research are character and characterization. The findings of this research when kino experiences a series of tragedies before and after finding the pearl, which show lately the transformation of the human side of him. Through this research, the intrinsic elements in this case the characters and characterizations in the novel describe the life of the main character who experiences the development of his humanity from being a simple, caring, loving father and husband to a man who is violent, rude, and controlled by greed. The intrinsic elements in this novel also provide information on the influence of Kino's interaction and development from the characters around him, such as Juana, his wife. Coyotito, his only son, The Doctor, The Priest, The Pearl Buyers, The Neighbors, and also The Trackers that ruined his life until the end of the story. The Pearl illustrates the diverse facets of humanity including Love Affection, Care and Compassion, Greed and Altruism, and Solidarity and Prejudice.

Keywords: Structuralism, Humanity, and the Pearl Novel

### Introduction

From the earliest literary works that have captivated the imaginations of ancient societies to the contemporary novels, poetry, and plays that continue to enthrall and challenge readers, the realm of literature stands as a testament to the boundless creativity and profound insights of the human mind (Herma & Astuti, 2022). Through the power of language, the writer has crafted intricate narratives, lyrical expressions, and thoughtprovoking dialogues that transcend the boundaries of time and space, enabling readers to immerse themselves in the diverse experiences that shape the human condition, to grapple with complex moral and ethical quandaries, and to gain a deeper understanding of the underlying principles that guide our comprehension of the world and our place within it. Literary works, in their multifaceted forms, serve as a means for the writer to explore the complexities of the human experience, to reflect on the universal truths that bind us as a species, and to engage readers in a dynamic and thought-provoking journey of self-discovery and understanding. From the timeless tales of ancient civilizations to the captivating narratives of the modern era, the realm of literature continues to evolve, offering readers a profound and enriching exploration of the human condition.

As writer have observed, the study of literature is a uniquely human endeavor, stemming from the innate human need to comprehend, express, and share the diverse experiences that define the human condition (Wowor et al., 2021). It reflects the fundamental drive to make sense of our lived realities, to give voice to our innermost thoughts and emotions, and to explore the universal truths that bind us as a species. The expansive and diverse literary canon, encompassing a wide spectrum of genres, styles, and cultural traditions, offers readers a profound and multifaceted exploration of the human experience. Each literary work serves as a distinct window into the existential struggles of the individual, the complex social and cultural factors that shape our perspectives, and the myriad ways in which we navigate the complexities of the human experience and the natural world (Ismail, 2020).

Literary works serve as powerful mirrors reflecting the complexities of human existence, capturing the intricate social, emotional, and philosophical dimensions of life. These narratives act as conduits for examining the prevailing conditions of society and the enduring human values that define various eras. Moreover, literary works function as vital social institutions, intricately woven into the fabric of human existence (McGhee et al., 2007). They encompass a diverse range of themes, touching upon the social, cultural, religious, economic, and political facets of life. Each piece of literature emerges from the wellspring of an author's creativity, allowing them to articulate their unique perspectives and personal experiences regarding the myriad social realities we encounter daily. Through the lens of their imagination, authors can vividly illustrate the complexities of human interaction and the broader societal context, crafting narratives that invite readers to engage deeply and reflect on their own lives. This rich tapestry of expression within literary works makes them compelling subjects for analysis and interpretation, revealing layers of meaning that resonate with readers across generations.

The foundations of this approach can be traced back to the influential work of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who challenged the assumption that words serve as transparent descriptors of the world, instead suggesting that they derive their meaning from a system of relationships and abstract structures within a given language. As line with (Muchtar et al., 2023) claim signs explain social processes that develop in a setting, meaning that signs and language are inextricably linked. Saussure's binary distinction

between the signifier and the signified has been a pivotal influence on the structuralist approach to literary analysis, as it has shaped the field's focus on the patterned linkages among the signifiers of language, rather than on any real referents or single, authorial meanings - a shift that has called into question the notion of representation itself, as the structuralist perspective suggests that meaning is not simply a matter of mirroring or describing the external world, but is instead actively produced through the interplay of linguistic and cultural codes (Aiello, 2006). Structuralism functions as a fundamental approach in the field of literary research, highlighting the importance of intrinsic elements as its central focus. This methodology seeks to uncover and analyze the underlying structures that govern literary works, offering a deeper understanding of their meanings and functions. According to (Chinade, 2012), Structuralism is distinguished by its clear objectives and critical perspectives, which together form a systematic framework for analysis. This analytical approach not only illuminates the text itself but also reveals the broader cultural and social structures that influence literary creation.

The novel is a written work of art by an author that talks about the life he experiences based on the circumstances around him during the process of creating the literary work (Detcheverry, 2024). The example of novel that came of is John Ernst Steinbeck's novel The Pearl. The novel took place of a modest coastal village. The Pearl, published in 1947, follows the life of Kino, a humble fisherman whose fate changes dramatically when he discovers an extraordinary pearl, gleaming with promise. Initially viewed as a symbol of hope that could elevate his family's status and secure their future, the pearl soon becomes an emblem of misfortune. In this novel, the pearl transcends its material worth, evolving into a complex symbol of ambition and destruction. It represents the duality of human desire: a beacon of hope that can illuminate paths to prosperity but, paradoxically, also a source of chaos and despair when tainted by avarice. Throughout the story, Steinbeck intricately weaves together threads of internal and external conflict, revealing how fragile human values can be when faced with powerful external forces, such as economic hardship and moral decay (Barlow, 2023).

In The Pearl, Steinbeck intricately weaves together themes of greed, social inequality, and the elusive pursuit of happiness. Through rich storytelling, the novel vividly portrays how human behavior, moral integrity, and interpersonal dynamics can be warped under the weight of societal and economic pressures (Shillinglaw, 1991). Kino, initially content with his modest existence alongside his devoted wife, Juana, and their beloved son, Coyotito, finds himself on a turbulent journey after his fateful discovery of the "pearl of the world." The goal of this research is to unravel the intricate themes of humanity present in The Pearl and to assess how these values are illuminated through the characters' experiences. The focus will center on the moral and ethical transformations that Kino and his family undergo as the discovery of the pearl shifts their lives irreversibly. By employing a humanity approach, this research seeks to uncover how Steinbeck articulates his poignant reflections on humanity, as well as how the characters'

struggles echo the universal quest to uphold fundamental human values amidst an oftenunforgiving world.

## 2. Methodology

The methodology employed in this study is qualitative research. This approach is designed to explore, understand, and analyze social or cultural phenomena within their natural context, placing a strong emphasis on gaining an in-depth understanding of human experiences, perspectives, and interactions.

Furthermore, the primary data source refers to the main data that is directly collected and analyzed as the object of the research. In this study, the primary data consists of the entire novel The Pearl by John Ernst Steinbeck. This literary work serves as the central focus of analysis, providing the textual basis for interpreting the themes, characters, and narrative structures relevant to the research objectives. In addition to the primary source, this study also utilizes secondary data, which includes various forms of literature and supporting information that are relevant to the research topic. These secondary sources are essential for providing theoretical frameworks, contextual background, and scholarly interpretations that enrich the analysis of the primary text. The secondary data will be obtained from books, academic theses, peer-reviewed journals, scholarly articles, and other credible references that contribute to the overall understanding and depth of the research. The writer also utilizes library research as a method for data collection in this study. Literature research involves gathering information that substantiates the study's objectives. The data collection process is based on a variety of sources, including books, theses, and articles pertinent to the analysis at hand.

In conducting the analysis for this research, the writer followed a series of systematic steps to ensure the accuracy and depth of the findings. The process began with multiple readings of John Steinbeck's novel The Pearl in order to thoroughly comprehend the content and extract relevant primary data. After gaining a comprehensive understanding of the text, the writer proceeded to identify the core problems presented within the narrative. These problems were then classified according to their thematic and structural significance. Following this, the writer closely observed and highlighted specific parts of the novel that were directly related to the identified problems. To support and enrich the analysis, the writer also collected secondary data from various sources, including textbooks, academic theses, and scholarly articles. These secondary sources were analyzed critically to provide theoretical and contextual support for the research problem. The findings from both the primary and secondary data were then compiled and analyzed to form the core content of the thesis. Finally, the writer summarized the research findings and drew conclusions based on the overall analysis, presenting a comprehensive interpretation of the issues explored in the novel.

## 3. Findings

An identity that triggers various types of conversations, gestures, and thought patterns and which are carried out by the entity. According to (De Temmerman, 2010), a character refers to someone in literary works with one essential identity Used by authors to create and develop characters within a narrative. This process allows readers to understand the characters' personalities, motivations, and complexities, making them relatable or compelling.

### 1) Kino's Character

Kino, the main character in The Pearl, is a complex figure who embodies both strength and vulnerability. At the beginning of the novel, Kino is portrayed as a hardworking, optimistic, and family-oriented man. His love for his wife, Juana, and his infant son, Coyotito, is central to his motivations. Kino's initial dreams and desires are modest. he hopes to secure a better future for his family by paying for Coyotito's education, which he believes will allow his son to rise above poverty.

Kino looked into his pearl, and Juana cast her eyelashes down and arranged her shawl to cover her face so that her excitement could not be seen. And in the incandescence of the pearl the pictures formed of the thing Kino's mind had considered in the past and had given up as impossible. 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". (Steinbeck, 1992: 24).

As a husband and father, Kino has a dream to achieve when he gets the pearl of high value. This is evident in Kino's desire to legitimate his marriage to Juana through the church. Kino opens his eyes, but now there is hope that finally the future is in his hands, the pearl held up in hand makes him no longer a pearl-searching fisherman who has no place in the teeth of upper-grade people, the people who look down on him, feel nauseous to see Kino, his wife, children and his family and his community when they visit the city, and hope that he can ask the doctor to help cure his son, Coyotito which is poisoned by the scorpion and fell into critical condition.

## 2) Juana's Character

Juana, Kino's wife, provides a contrast to Kino's character. Whereas Kino is driven by the potential of the pearl, Juana represents practicality, humility, and wisdom. From the moment Kino finds the pearl, Juana senses that it will bring harm rather than fortune. She is deeply connected to the natural world, and her instinctive understanding of its balance and harmony often contrasts with Kino's impulsive actions.

His blanket was over his nose to protect him from the dank air. His eyes flicked to a rustle beside him. It was Juana arising, almost soundlessly. On her hard bare feet, she went to the hanging box where Coyotito slept, and she leaned over and said a little reassuring word. Coyotito looked up for a moment and closed his eyes and slept again.' (Steinbeck, 1992: 2).

Juana, wifey, mama love, kind and caring woman, strong, tough woman, obedient wife. In the text above it says how deeply she loves her son Coyotito. And that should owe this to be fully appreciated because not leaving her child in any situation and condition is her love as a mother, even the heat of the sun will not be penetrated how great is the love of a mother for her only child.

## 3) Coyotito's Character

Coyotito, Kino and Juana's infant son, is a symbolic character in The Pearl. Though he does not speak or contribute much to the action, his role is crucial to the development of the plot. Coyotito's bite by a scorpion early in the story sets the events of the novel into motion, as Kino and Juana's desperate desire to cure their son's injury leads them to search for the pearl.

Coyotito represents innocence and the potential for a better future, a future that Kino imagines can be achieved through the wealth that the pearl promises. However, his tragic death by the end of the story emphasizes the novel's central theme: that the pursuit of material wealth, especially when driven by selfish desires, ultimately leads to destruction. Coyotito's death serves as the ultimate cost of Kino's obsession and symbolizes the loss of hope and innocence.

The two came from the rutted country road into the city, and they were not walking in single file, Kino ahead and Juana behind, as usual, but side by side. The sun was behind them and their long shadows stalked ahead, and they seemed to carry two towers of darkness with them. Kino had a rifle across his arm and Juana carried her shawl like a sack over her shoulder. And in it was a small limp heavy bundle. The shawl was crusted with dried blood, and the bundle swayed a little as she walker. Her face was hard and lined and leathery with fatigue and with the tightness with which she fought fatigue. And her wide eyes stared inward on herself. She was as remote and as removed as Heaven. Kino's lips were thin and his jaws tight, and the people say that he carried fear with him, that he was as dangerous as a rising storm (Steinbeck, 1992: 88).

Coyotito's tragic death, which got shot by the watchers at in the middle of the night is near the beach in which Kino and Juana escaped. A baby's cry mistaken for a coyote's roar caused the release of the trigger from the watcher's rifle, which struck Coyotito directly inside the body. The child who was supposed to represent the future of Kino and Juana ended up dying a gruesome death by bleeding to death to save his parents. Because of his father's greed this sacrifice had to be settled in full as blazing punishment for the arrogance of their parents refusing to let go of the pearl and opting to stay with him, their only son who was far more precious than the pearl.

#### 4) The Doctor's Character

The Doctor in The Pearl is a representative figure of colonial and social oppression. Initially, the Doctor refuses to treat Coyotito, deeming him an unworthy patient because of Kino's poverty. However, once Kino discovers the pearl, the Doctor changes his tune, seeing an opportunity to exploit the situation. The Doctor's character represents the

exploitation of the poor by the wealthy and the systemic inequalities that exist in the society Steinbeck critiques.

The doctor said, "I was not in when you came this morning. But now, at the first chance, I have come to see the baby". (Steinbeck, 1992: 30).

He said, "sometimes, my friend, the scorpion sting has a curious effect. There will be apparent improvement, and then without warning-pouf!" He pursed his lips and made a little explosion to show how quick it could be, and he shifted his small black doctor's bag about so that the light of the lamp fell upon it, for he knew that Kino's race loves the tools of any craft and trust them. "Sometimes", the doctor went on in a liquid tone, "Sometimes there will be a withered leg or a blind eye or a crumpled back. Oh, I know the sting of the scorpion, my friend, and I can cure it". (Steinbeck, 1992: 30).

The new conversation happened after the doctor just heard that Kino, the pearl fisherman who visited his house this morning carrying his sick child for cure, had found a fish pearl to sell which was so valuable. He finds out about this and, immediately, his behavior changes, and he immediately comes to Kino at his house. You can see the picture of greed of all onto irregular life. He also intentionally exploited that for the momentum to deceive Kino and Juana said that their son would die sooner if not treated directly by himself the medicine specialist. Not only this, but the doctor also attempted to dabble Kino with expensive and high-quality medicine that would be given to his son, Coyotito, and he alone, the only man that would cure his cause. Already the doctor was able to clearly tell that the only thing he wanted was to take advantage of this opportunity so that his payment could be made at a very high price. Almost the same price as this pearl value in the hand of the Kino.

## 5) The Priest's Character

The Priest in the story is another representative character of societal corruption. Though he is a religious figure, he is more concerned with the potential benefits he could gain from Kino's newfound wealth than with the spiritual welfare of Kino or his family. The Priest's character, like the Doctor, highlights the exploitation of the indigenous people by those in power, particularly religious institutions that are supposed to serve the community but instead use their positions for personal gain.

The dark was almost in, and Juana's fire threw shadow on the brush walls when the whisper came in, passed from mouth to mouth. "The Father is coming-the priest is coming". The men uncovered their heads and stepped back from the door, and women gathered their shawls about their faces and cast down their eyes. Kino and Juan Tomas, his brother, stood up. The priest came in-a graying, aging man with an old skin and a young sharp eye. Children, he considered these people, and he treated them like Children. (Steinbeck, 1992: 27).

This is the first of the series of Kino's suspicions of the priest, marked by the priest's unexpected visit at night. Out of the blue, the priest had previously heard that a pearl fisherman from one of the cities had caught the great, shiny, and indeed extremely valuable pearl. So, the priest's greed is already working out when he comes at Kino's

house at night to "bless" Kino, Juana, and his son Coyotito, and give him safety. Moreover, the priest demanded tax from his blessing in return for the gift of the Almighty. This only furthered Kino's suspicion of the priest's motive for coming, as if he thought that the man of God in the church wouldn't even spare his prized pearl a look.

#### 6) The Trackers's Character

The Trackers are a group of men who pursue Kino and his family after they decide to flee from their village. Their role in the story emphasizes the escalating violence and conflict that arise from Kino's decision to keep the pearl. The Trackers are a reflection of the forces of greed and oppression that relentlessly pursue Kino, and their presence in the narrative increases the sense of paranoia and dread that plagues Kino as he tries to protect his family and the pearl.

He slid backward and did not bother to cover his tracks. He could not; too many little signs were there, too many broken twigs and scuffed places and displaced stones. And there was a panic in Kino now, a panic of flight. The trackers would find his trail, he knew it. There was no escape, except in flight. He edged away from the road and went quickly and silently to the hidden place where Juana was. She looked up at him in question (Steinbeck, 1992: 74).

Based on the text above, the arrival of the trackers alone has caused extraordinary fear for Kino and Juana. They have no other choice but to keep running and hiding. Hoping that they will not be caught and killed in vain just to defend the pearl that has disturbed the peace of their family's life. Even in a depressed state, Kino and Juana try to prioritize each other. The strong relationship between husband and wife above the fear of their death still makes them move from the threat that is in front of them at this time, of course with the hope of being safe and living like a family in general, living calmly and peacefully without any threats from others.

#### 4. Discussion

In this section, the writer delves into the analysis and discussion of the findings in The Pearl novel by John Ernst Steinbeck. This novel reveals how the portrait of humanity reflected in the novel.

### 1) Exploring The Reflection of Emotional Humanity: Love, Care and Compassion

Love affection can be defined as a profound emotional connection characterized by warmth, tenderness, and care towards another individual (Tytler, 2022). Love affection is a complex interplay of emotional and physical elements that fosters deep connections between individuals, enhancing their emotional well-being and social bonds.

The interplay of love affection, care, and compassion is central to understanding Emotional Humanity, particularly through character interactions in The Pearl. These emotional elements define individual relationships and reflect broader societal values and ethical considerations. Love affection is characterized by a profound emotional connection that fosters warmth and tenderness between individuals. This bond is often depicted through intimate interactions that reveal deep emotional ties. The moment when Kino touches Juana's cheek while reconnecting with their child illustrates a strong familial bond.

In summary, the relationships of love, affection, care, and compassion are intricately woven into the fabric of emotional humanity as depicted through character interactions in The Pearl. These elements shape personal dynamics and reflect broader ethical themes that resonate with readers. By analyzing these interactions, the writer gain insight into how characters navigate their emotions and responsibilities toward one another, ultimately enriching our understanding of human connections.

# 2) Exploring of Moral Humanity: The Interplay of Greed and Altruism in Shaping Relationships

Greed is often depicted as a destructive force that drives characters to pursue excessive wealth, power, or possessions at the expense of their moral integrity and relationships (Oka & Kuijt, 2014). Greed is a universal theme that transcends cultural boundaries, appearing in diverse literary traditions. It reflects societal concerns about morality and ethics, prompting readers to consider their values and the implications of their desires.

Altruism is defined as a selfless concern for the well-being of others, often characterized by acts of kindness, generosity, and compassion without expectation of personal gain. Altruism significantly influences character relationships in literature by fostering connections based on empathy, compassion, and selflessness (Nitschke & Bartz, 2023). Altruism shapes character relationships in literature by fostering empathy, resolving conflicts, and reflecting societal values. It highlights the importance of compassion and selflessness in human interactions, ultimately emphasizing the transformative power of caring for others.

In contrast, altruism represents a selfless concern for others, characterized by acts of kindness and compassion without expectation of personal gain. This theme is essential in understanding how characters relate to one another and navigate ethical challenges. Altruism fosters empathy and compassion, creating bonds that can transcend individual desires. Kino's actions also reflect moments of altruism, particularly when he prioritizes the well-being of his family and community over his own ambitions. Due to his struggle faced with dire circumstances, he does not consider taking a boat from his neighbor, demonstrating a commitment to communal values and mutual support.

To sum up, through character interactions in The Pearl, the portrait of moral humanity examines their values regarding greed and altruism, ultimately questioning what it means to be morally human. The balance between these forces shapes individual destinies and broader societal norms.

# 3) The Social Humanity Depicted Through Solidarity and Prejudice in Community **Dynamics**

Solidarity refers to unity and mutual support among individuals or groups, often facing adversity or injustice. This theme emphasizes collective action, shared experiences, and characters united by a common cause, which often strengthens relationships, highlighting human experiences' interconnectedness. Solidarity creates a network of emotional support among characters (Loane & Jyldyz, 2023).

Prejudice profoundly affects character relationships in literature by shaping interactions, creating conflict, and influencing character development. Prejudice significantly influences character relationships in literature by creating conflict, driving character development, and serving as a vehicle for social commentary (Wang, 2024). It highlights the complexities of human interactions shaped by biases and encourages readers to consider the impact of prejudice on individual lives and society. Prejudice plays a significant role in shaping character relationships by influencing perceptions and creating conflict. In The Pearl, characters harbor biases that affect their interactions with Kino. The pearl buyers, exhibit prejudice against Kino based on his social status and ethnicity. They manipulate the situation to devalue the pearl, suggesting that Kino is unworthy of its true worth.

In summary, analyzing character interactions through the themes of solidarity and prejudice reveals how these concepts influence social dynamics within a community. Solidarity fosters emotional support and unity, while prejudice introduces conflict and shapes perceptions. Together, they create a rich tapestry that reflects the complexities of human relationships in social humanity.

#### 5. Conclusion

The Pearl by John Ernst Steinbeck is a profound exploration of the complexities of humanity, mainly through the relationships and interactions among its characters. The novel illustrates various dimensions of humanity, including love, greed, altruism, solidarity, and the impact of shared human experiences. As the central character, Kino embodies the duality of hope and despair. Initially driven by noble aspirations for his family's future, his discovery of the pearl transforms his character from a humble fisherman to a man consumed by greed and paranoia.

This transformation alters his relationship with Juana, who represents wisdom and practicality, leading to tragic consequences for their son, Coyotito. His death serves as a poignant reminder of the destructive nature of unchecked ambition and material desire. Juana's steadfastness contrasts sharply with Kino's descent into obsession. Her intuitive understanding of the pearl's dangers highlights individuals' moral dilemmas when confronted with societal pressures and personal desires. The characters surrounding Kino—such as the Doctor and the Priest—embody systemic exploitation and moral decay, further complicating the narrative's exploration of humanity.

Ultimately, The Pearl by John Ernst Steinbeck critiques the human condition by illustrating how aspirations can lead to connection and conflict. Steinbeck invites readers to reflect on their values and the implications of their desires within a broader social context. Through its rich characterization and thematic depth, the novel underscores the interconnectedness of human experiences, emphasizing that true wealth lies not in material possessions but in love, compassion, and community.

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