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Symbolism as Suggestive of 'Rite of Passage': Reading John Steinbeck's *The Red Pony*

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By

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Approval Letter

This thesis entitled "Symbolism as Suggestive of 'Rite of Passage': Reading John Steinbeck's *The Red Pony*," submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Devraj Poudel has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Letter of Recommendation

Mr. Devraj Poudel has completed his thesis entitled "Symbolism as Suggestive of 'Rite of Passage': Reading John Steinbeck's *The Red Pony*" under my supervision. He carried out his research from 2065/03/01 B.S. to 2065/08/27 B.S. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voice.

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Hem Lal Pandey

Supervisor

Date: ----------

Abstract

The study makes symbolic study of linguistic features – images, symbols, metaphors and events in Steinbeck's *The Red Pony*. He traces the progress of the initiation of the protagonist Jody Tiflin in the four episodes. The initiation starts from "The Gift." In the first episode ten-year old Jody is given a red pony as a gift. Jody becomes responsible as he takes care of the pony. However, the negligence of Jody and the unfulfilled promise of Billy Buck make the irrevocable death of the red pony. Jody learns from the event both the pain of the lost treasure and the realization that life as full of losses and failures. In the second episode "The Great Mountains," the sudden appearance of the old Paisano Gitano arouses Jody's curiosity and interest of the unknown mystery of the old man and the mountains. Yet, as Gitano is forced to leave and faces the oncoming end of his life by himself, Jody finds out that becoming senile is a cruel and miserable experience and he feels sympathetic to Gitano. In the third episode "The Promise," Jody is promised to have a colt which the mare, Nellie is going to deliver. As he witnesses the stages the mare Nellie goes through from the mating, pregnancy, the dangerous delivery and finally the sacrifice of her life for the new life of the colt, Jody learns to accept the cycle of life and death in human beings, animals and nature. Finally in "The Leader of the People," Jody expects to become the leader of the people as he would follow the example of his grandfather. Thus, these four episodes of *The Red Pony* transform Jody from an innocent child to a mature boy, which reflects the 'rite of passage.'

Contents

Chapter I

Steinbeck and His Texts

This research work is a study of Nobel Prize-winning writer, John Steinbeck's fifth novella, *The Red Pony* published in 1937. The study examines Steinbeck's advocacy of celebration of the spirit and courage of adolescence through the initiation story of the protagonist boy, Jody into adult life. The title of the text 'pony' functions as a symbol of his innocence and maturation. By using the symbols of childhood and maturation, Steinbeck shows man's initiation into the world of adulthood, and thus into maturity. He uses the symbols which suggest the "rite of passage" to prepare man for life.

In all of his works, Steinbeck shows his concern for human condition. Peter Lisca observes that his works, with wide range of interests, diverse in mood, passionately concerned in their sympathies, "celebrate the worth of man" (50). He combines a naturalistic way of looking at things with a deep sympathy for people and human condition. His works explore the elements of human nature which are common to all people. He usually finds them in the family, the group and the nation, rather than in the individual. In a letter of 1933, he wrote: "[t]he fascinating thing for me is the way the group has a soul, a drive, an intent . . . which in no way resembles the same things possessed by the men who make up that group" (High 163).

Steinbeck's attachment to nature shows that he builds his works form a rich variety of observed details. But it also leads him to shape his stories more like, as Leo Braudy views, "myths or tables than realistic novels"

because he makes much use of symbols and myths (91). Details are infused with almost symbolic significance, and the relationship between characters verges on the allegorical theme. One of the reasons of his excessive use of symbols and myth in his works, perhaps, is the US government's constant surveillance on him as he held socialist and radical views on society throughout much of his life. And also, many of his books were banned for carrying communist themes – “Red material” (Benson 16).

Steinbeck was writing at a time when California was supposed to be the land of opportunity during the "great depression," in 1902. This proved to be a favourable environment that served to develop his potentiality and roused his interest in literature (Ruland 337). He wrote many stories and articles for the university's student newspaper. Steinbeck wrote his first novel, *Cup of Gold* in 1929. In 1930 he met Edward Ricketts, a Marine biologist and philosopher, who helped him publish his second novel *To a God Unknown* (1932) and a collection of short story *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932). However, *Tortilla Flat* (1935) was his first admired novel. In 1936, *In Dubious Battle* was published and the following year *The Red Pony* was published. After that his most celebrated works *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Of Mice and Men* were published in 1939 and 1940 respectively. The former which is considered to be his masterpiece won the Pulitzer Prize and Nation Book Award in 1939.

With the success of *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck traveled to Mexico to film a documentary, *Forgotten Village* (1941) about living condition in and the same year he became a serious student of marine biology with *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* (1951). He devoted his

services to the war, writing *Bombs Away* (1942) and the controversial play novelette *The Moon is Down* (1942). In 1943, he worked as war correspondent for The New York Herald Tribune. By 1948, Steinbeck made three excursions to Russia, divorced his second wife and lost his friend Edward Ricketts between 1950 and 1959. Steinbeck published several novels including *East of Eden* (1952). In all, he wrote twenty-five books, including sixteen novels, six nonfictions and several collections of short stories. In 1962, Steinbeck received the Nobel Prize for literature. In his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize for literature, he expressed his views about literature and the improvement of mankind:

> A writer is delegated to declare and celebrate man's proven capacity for greatness of heart and spirit for gallantry in defeat, for courage, compassion, and love. In the endless war against weakness, these are the bright rally – flags of hope and emulation. I hold that a writer who does not passionately believe in the perfectibility of man . . . (Boren 294).

In this way, Steinbeck's work formulates and dramatizes attitudes toward the human experience which anticipated those of young men and women born years after his time of literary ascendancy.

John Steinbeck began to develop a distinct literary voice and to experiment with characterization, concision and thematic unity in his novels and short stories. According to Bloomington and Jay Parini, John Steinbeck addresses the "repercussions of social exploitation, Puritanism, and materialistic values in his fictional works" (165). Steinbeck is noted for his sharp, forceful idiom, wry humor and profound compassion for the poor, the

inarticulate, and the politically oppressed. In this regard, Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury find the "spirit of nature" in *The Red Pony* (338).

Early critical reaction to Steinbeck's short fiction was generally favorable, but following World War II his literary reputation began to decline. During the 1950s and 1960s commentators began to find fault in Steinbeck's stories for being sentimental, philosophically simplistic, and overly theatrical. Contemporary critics like John. Ditsky recognize, however, that Steinbeck's short fiction reflects "the social and psychological concerns evident in his novels and that his stories often served as preparatory sketches for his longer, more celebrated works" (46). Despite such critical trends, Steinbeck has really stood the test of time as a great American writer.

Steinbeck's realistic yet sensitive portrayal of ordinary working class has consistently garnered praise, and when Steinbeck was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1962; the awards committee lauded his "sympathetic humor and sociological perception" (Benson 23). This all shows Steinbeck's talent in the field of literary writing and thus he has now become one of America's most respected authors.

Critical Response on Steinbeck's Writing

John Steinbeck started writing stories when he was a small boy in California. Much of what he saw directly and heard up found its way into his works. He travelled through woods orchards and endless green valleys of California. He understood the cycle of nature by alternate promise of fertility, and threats of drought. On weekends, his father took him along with his three sisters on long drives out into the broad and beautiful valleys

south of Salinas, the town where John was born in 1902. He observed works and the rundown shacks in which they lived. He developed a feeling for the land. Each year the Salinas River flooded and then dried up and he began to understand the cycles of seasons. We can gather that he must have loved the nature. That is why he has set four novels and several stories in the lush country side where he spent his youth?

Steinbeck's fame as a writer reached its height with the coming of the Great Depression in the United States. This ‘depression’ refers to the world wide economic disaster of 1930s. It followed the U.S. bloom of 1920s, which ended in stock market crash of October 1929. A long decline in economic activities ensued, until in 1932, one out of every four U.S. workers was unemployed. The Great Depression was the longest and deepest of the setbacks that have scarred the American economy. It had a greater effect on the thinking and the institutions of the nation than any similar events. All aspects of western culture including art literature, theater, education and science, were affected and shaken.

When Steinbeck’s finest novel *The Grapes of Wrath* was published in 1939, America was still in the process of recovering from Great Depression. It is typical of the 1930s, when the effects of the Depression were aggravated by the years of draught and dust storms which covered large areas in Oklahoma and neighboring states. Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* has been the subjects of workshop for the critics of establishment since its first production; Steinbeck’s allegorical structure is reflected in Peter Lisca's comments:

> This structure has its root in the Old Testament. The novels three sections; the drought, the journey and California correspond to the oppression in Egypt, the exodus, and the sojourn in the land of Canaan, which in both accounts is first viewed from the mountains. This parallel is not worked out in detail but grand design is there: The plagues (erosion), the Egyptians (banks) the exodus, (.Journey) and the hostile tribes of cannon, Californians. (67)

A congressman, Lyle H. Boren addressing his colleagues, bitterly condemned Steinbeck for having exposed in his novel the total depravity, vulgarity and degraded mentality of author. Mr. Boren resents, in his contemptuous remarks, the implication in that book: “I arise to say you, my colleagues and to every honest, square minded in America, that the painting Steinbeck made in his book is a lie, a damnable lie, a black, infernal creation of a twisted, distorted mind” (113).

Not only the congressmen but the religious persons have condemned the reality depicted in the novel. Similar kind of criticism has been blurted by the Reverend W. Lee Rector of Ardmore, who considered *The Grapes of Wrath* a heaven-shaming and Christ-insulting book:

> The projection of the preacher of the book into a role of hypocrisy and sexuality discounts the holy calling of god called preachers--. The sexual roles that the authors makes the preacher and young women play is so vile and misrepresentative of them as a whole that all readers should

> revolt at the debasement the author makes of them. (Shockley 353)

Most of Steinbeck's critics have analyzed the importance of Christian symbolism in his writings; they professed in *The Grapes of Wrath* a contemporary adaptation of the Christ image and in which the meaning of the book is revealed through a sequence of Christian symbols. If we consider first the language of the novel, major characters speak a language that has been associated with debased piedmont culture. It is, I suggest, easy to find in vocabulary, rhythm, imagery and tone the similarities to the language of the Bible.

In *The Red Pony*, on which the present study is based, Steinbeck has celebrated the spirit and courage of adolescence through the boy, Jody Tiflin. The novel, which takes place on the Tiflin ranch in the Salinas Valley, California, is divided into four sections: "The Gift", "The Great Mountain," "The Promise", and "The leader of the People" with which the four sections are connected by common characters, settings and themes. Through each story, the reader follows Jody's initiation into adult life, in which the pony of the title functions as a symbol of his innocence and maturation like most ten year old boys, Jody feels the urge for rebellion as well as the need to be loved. In these stories, Jody begins to learn about adulthood – its pains, its responsibilities and its problems – through the acceptance of his father's gifts. First he is given a red pony and later he is promised the colt of a bay mare. But both these gifts bring him tragedy as well as joy, and Jody not only learns some harsh lessons about life and death, but is also made painfully aware of the fallibility of adults.

Talking about the role of nature, myth and allegory in Steinback's works like *The Red Pony*, Leo Braudy comments:

> Steinbeck's attachment to nature ensures that he builds his works from a rich variety of observed details. But it also leads him to shape his stories more like myths of fables than realistic novels. Detail is infused with almost symbolic significance and the relation between characters verges on the allegorical. (91)

This shows Steinbeck's techniques of using myths and symbols in his writing, which makes it rich and eternal.

Since its publication, *The Red Pony* has been well received by literary critics. Many critics have praised highly the artistic style of the novella. For example, critic F. W. Watt indicates that *The Red Pony* presents a loosely connected sequence of four episodes with a central figure. He finds the particularity of the sequence lies in the “air of intimate, personal revelation . . . which partly accounts for its freshness and immediacy” (46). The attraction of these four episodes as Peter Lisca observes rests on “the lyric realism of their prose style, a style which . . . retains a rhythm and tone more akin to the idyllic and pastoral than to the naturalistic ” (100-1). Another critic, Warren French, points out that *The Red Pony* is one of Steinbeck’s works in which form and content is most perfectly integrated (62-3). Frederic Carpenter also finds the artistic maturity of the style of the novella and says that in the novella, “Steinbeck finally achieves complete realism, and carried his literary thought through to its logical consequences” (77). Similarly, Joseph Warren Beach echoes

that the novella achieves the same subtlety as that of the stories of the famous Russian story teller Anton Chekhov (83). The above critical comments have shown that the style of *The Red Pony* is highly appreciated.

Although these above-mentioned critics have analyzed the text, *The Red Pony* from various perspectives, they have not yet analyzed it from the perspective of symbolism. Hence the researcher seeks to examine the symbolic significance in the novel.

The thesis has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter presents an introductory outline of the work -- a short introduction to John Steinbeck and a short literature Review. Moreover, it gives a bird's eye view of the entire work.

The second chapter tries to explain the theoretical modality briefly that is applied in this research work. It discusses New Critical perspective with reference to imagery and symbolism.

On the basis of the theoretical framework established in the second chapter, the third chapter analyzes the text at a considerable length. It analyzes how the novel *The Red Pony* is based on symbolism. So, this chapter tries to prove the hypothesis of the study – Steinbeck's concern for man's initiation into the world of adulthood, and thus into maturity. Steinbeck uses the symbols which suggest the "rite of passage" to prepare man for life.

Finally, the fourth or the last chapter will sum up the main points of the present research work and the findings of the researcher.

Chapter II

The New Criticism

The new critical approach, which originated in 1920s and 1930s, has its base on the formalistic approach which focuses on literary forms. It emphasizes the importance of reading a literary text as an independent and complete work of art. In essence, the new critics revolted against established trends in American criticism, arguing for the primacy of the literary text instead of focusing on interpretations based on context. These critics taught how to read the text closely. They taught to look at the individual work of literary art as an 'organic form.' They articulated the concept that in an organic form there is a consistency and an internal vitality that we should look for and appreciate. Thus, one of the most salient considerations of the new criticism was the emphasis on the work of art as an object.

In the Classical period too, an aesthetic object was greatly testified to a preoccupation with 'form'. Plato has exploited dialectic and shaped movement towards Socratic wisdom by his imagery, metaphor, dramatic scenes, characterization, setting and tone. Aristotle's *Poetics* recommends an “orderly arrangement of parts,” that form a beautiful whole or ‘organism’ (qdt. in Guerin et al. 78). Horace admonishes the would-be poet: “in short, be your subject what will, let it be simple and unified” (78). In this way, some sort of awareness of "formalism" is at least implicit in many other classical, medieval, and Renaissance treatise on art or poetics.

The similar trend was continued by Romanticists. Even though the Romantics emphasized on the imagination and subjectivity as the shaping

power and unifying vision, the interrelationship between whole and parts was manifested in a consistently recurring 'image' among them -- the image of growth, particularly of vegetation. Shelley uses these images in his *Defense of Poetry*. In a "legitimate poem," Coleridge declares, the parts "mutually support and explain each other; all in their proportion harmonizing with, and supporting the purpose and known influences of metrical arrangement" (19). Similarly Edgar Allan Poe believes in maintaining and transmitting a single unitary effect in lyrical poems and short tales

The term "new criticism" became established in common academic and literary usage after the publication of John Crowe Ransom's *The New Criticism* in 1941. It came to be applied to a theory and practice that was prominent in American literary criticism until late in the 1960s. So, it became a dominant trend in English and American literary criticism from the 1920s to the early 1960s. Its adherents were emphatic in their advocacy of close reading and attention to the text itself, and they rejected the theory based on extra textual sources especially biographies of the author. Those critics who contributed to the development of the new criticism are – Allen Tate, T.S. Eliot, I. A. Richards, Cleanth Brooks, W.K. Wimsatt, Monroe Beardsley and R.P. Blackmur. They later adopted the name of Fugitives and published an elegant literary magazine called *The Fugitive* in Nashville from 1922 to 1925.

Stephen Matterson does not call new criticism a critical movement. He views it as "an empirical methodology that was, at its most basic and most influential, a reading practice" (166). It was a practice that was

expressed most cogently in three important books: *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) and *Practical Criticism* (1929) by the English critic I. A. Richards, and *Understanding Poetry* (1938) by the American critics Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren. According to Matterson, defining the discipline of English or indeed literary criticism, meant a "loosening of the links that had in the past bound English so closely to other disciplines, notably Classics and History" (166). In this respect the new criticism was crucial in helping to define English Studies, clarifying the role of the literary critic and shaping the development of departments of English in universities. It is in this spirit that John Crowe Ransom's essays, "Wanted: An Ontological Critic," and "Criticism Inc." (1938) are of particular importance.

In a pragmatic way, the New Criticism has been crucial in developing teaching practices that are still used in the classroom. Richards wrote *Practical Criticism* because he felt that undergraduates at Cambridge had never been taught to read literary texts by closely focusing on the words before them on the page. In a series of experiments, Richards provided undergraduates with the texts, without providing the names of the authors or the titles, of the previously unseen poems, and asked them to provide written responses. He noted from these the students' general inability to comprehend meaning and to be sensitive to nuance and linguistic ambiguity. Their responses, Richards thought, were too often vague and impressionistic. This led him to develop modes of comprehension and ways of paying attention to the text's language, which eventually laid the foundation of new critical approach.

Practical Criticism and *Understanding Poetry* are major foundational texts for new critical theory in their shared insistence on the special nature of the language of the literary-artifact. Language functions in a different way in a work of literature than it does elsewhere – scientific and journalistic writing, for instance; and the first job of the reader is to acknowledge and apprehend this special function and the role it plays in the formation of meaning. In this regard, new criticism is concerned with formal aspects, and significant connections have been made between new criticism and formalistic approach. Both place special emphasis on the formal elements of the literary text such as image, symbols and metaphors, because these most obviously signal the crucial distinction between literary and non-literary uses of language. In scientific and journalistic writing, there is the use of non-literary language. It also needs to be emphasized that whereas the new critics considered all literary genres, it was poetry which most got their attention and to which they gave their full attention. Indeed, some of the new critics were significant poets themselves.

The main new critical idea is the autonomy of the literary text. They insist on the presence of everything within the work which is necessary for its analysis and; they ignore the matters outside the work itself – the life of the author, the history of his times. As Eliot says, “[a] poem should be treated as primarily as poetry and hot another thing” (Abrams 181). So, the new critics regard a work of art as an independent and self-sufficient verbal artifact. Similarly, John Crowe Ransom says, “[t]he first law of criticism is that it shall be objective, shall cite the nature of the object" and shall recognize “the autonomy of the work itself as existing for its own sake”

(Abrams 181). In this general orientation, the literary text as such is generally viewed as a privileged site for shaping and disseminating cultural values held to be essential attribute of the aesthetic specificity of text.

The new critics are only concerned with literary history – the past literary trends and movements. According to Gerald Graff, Wellek, and others, the new critics concern themselves with the history and context of a work of literature but not about the history and context of the author. For them, in order to truly understand a work of literature, it is important to "embrace a total historical scheme," using it as the standard against which one judges a literary text (23). But in contrast to traditional literary criticism, which emphasizes the context and background of a text almost as much as the text itself, the new critics argue that literary texts are complete in themselves. Additionally, theories of new criticism elevate the role of criticism in academics – according to them, criticism is crucial to help maintain poetry and language. Most studies of new criticism identify it as a formalist mode of critical interpretation, focusing on a close reading of the technicalities, structure, themes, and message of the literary text. Many of the literary qualities, which are held in high esteem by the new critics, were first expressed in the prose works of Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The new critics consider his work on critical theory as a fundamental starting point in their principles of literary criticism.

One of the most well-known texts detailing new criticism theory was published by Cleanth Brooks in 1947, titled "The Well-Wrought Urn." In this work, Brooks, in addition to articulating the theories of new criticism, also interprets many seminal poetic texts using the principles of the new

critics. The new critics argue the life and times of the author and the spirit of the age in which he lived are certainly of interest to the literary historian, but they do not provide the literary critics with information that can be used to analyze the text itself. They point out that authentic knowledge of the author's intended meaning is usually unavailable while interpreting the text. Even if the author leaves a record of his intention, that is his personal intention, and if the readers interpret the text accordingly, they commit fallacy what Wimsatt and Beardsley call an "intentional fallacy." They argue that what an author intends is irrelevant to judgment of a literary text. Intention, they argue,

> is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of a literary art, and it seems to us that this is a principle which goes deep into some differences in the history of critical attitudes. It is a principle which accepted or rejected points to the polar opposites of classical 'imitation' and Romantic expression. (945)

That is, there were two grounds for the attack on intentionality. The first is that authorial intention is never clear and may always be a matter of dispute. The second ground, and a more important one for the new critics, was that to invoke intention was to threaten the integrity of the text by introducing the figure of the author. This is an important point, and one which marks a crucial departure of the New Critical removal of authorial intention. For the new critics, removing authorial intentionality was part of a strategy of sealing off the boundaries of the text and ensuring that only the words on the page are the true focuses of critical judgment.

Similarly, we should not focus on the reader's personal response to find the meaning in the text. So, the reader's personal response does not matter because reader's feeling or opinions about a text may be produced by some personal associations from past experience rather than by the text. In this connection we commit what again Wimsatt and Beardsley call "affective fallacy." They argue that the affective fallacy results from emotional effect of individual reader; it is a "confusion between the poem and its results" (952). So, a text dealing with a highly emotive subject still has to be judged as a text, by the working of its 'system of language', and not by the intensity that its subject might generate. Richards's *Practical Criticism,* with its scrutiny of lazy impressionism, was the grounding for 'The Affective Fallacy' (1949). They attack on both of these perceived 'fallacies' has been very much in line with the new critical belief in the autonomy of the text.

Since literary language is special language, we need to acknowledge that there are clear boundaries between the text and the world. While approaching the text, readers need to focus on the 'system of relationships' – technicalities, structures, themes and the message of the text – that operates within the text, rather than on those that may operate between the text and the world beyond its boundaries. Being different from other uses of language, this system ensures that the literary artifact is autonomous. Significantly, some of the New Critical metaphors for the poem involved were spatial, suggesting a view of the poem as an enclosed space or a container. Perhaps the most enduring of these is Brooks's view of the poem borrowing a phrase from John Donne's poem, "The Canonization' as a

‘well-wrought urn’” (Matterson 171). The literary text is a free-standing, autonomous object, containing meanings that are specific to the context provided by the text.

The process of formalistic analysis is complete only when everything in the work has been accounted for in terms of its overall form. Organic form is a particular concept important to the new critics. Coleridge defines an organic form as an “innate which shapes as it develops itself from within, and the fullness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form” (Abrams 101). The new critics turn the attention of teachers, students, critics and readers to the essential matter: what the work says and how it says as inseparable issues. In other words, they do not separate 'form' from 'content.' Unlike scientific and everyday language, the form of literary language – the word choice and agreement that create the aesthetic experience – is inseparable from its content, its meaning. The form and meaning of a literary work develop together like a complex living organism whose parts cannot be separated from the whole. The work’s ‘organic unity’ – the working together of all the parts to make an inseparable whole – is the criterion by which new critics judge the quality of literary work. In a text which has an ‘organic unity,’ all of its formal elements work together to establish its theme, or the meaning of the work as a whole.

When the poetry and critical essays of T.S. Eliot were published, they gave strong reinforcement to the new critics. Eliot said that a work of art should have an "objective correlative,” by which he means that a text must have “a set of objects, a situation, and a chain of events" (Hazard 766).

He means to say that in a work of art there should be certain objects through which emotions and feelings can be expressed. Eliot suggests that there is a unique experience to which the language of the poem corresponds: the poem means just what it says, but it is the "objective correlative" in experience that makes the intellectual and emotional value of the poem intelligible. In "Hamlet and His Problems" (1919) Eliot proposed that the effects of poetry stem from a relation between the words of the text and events, states of mind, or experiences that offer an "objective correlative" (124). Eliot propounds this idea while arguing that Hamlet is a less than satisfactory play because no sufficient correlative or too many correlatives can be found.

Because they view the literary text in this way, the new critics distrust paraphrase of the text. To paraphrase a poem is to translate it from one medium to another, and therefore to substitute one kind of meaning, a meaning that arises from the textual context – that is, the poem's 'organic system of relationships' – into a medium in which that system does not operate. A poem's meaning is specific to the system of relationships within that poem. Meaning is context-specific, but is also part of the overall experience of the poem, how it sounds, how it appears on the page. As I. A. Richards puts, “it is never what a poem says which matters, but what it is. Paraphrase necessarily means the loss of this context, of the experience of the poem, and hence of the poem's full meaning (Matterson 171). Similarly, Cleanth Brooks says that we can very properly use paraphrases as “pointers and as shorthand reference provided that we know what we are doing. But it is highly important that we know what we are doing and that we see plainly

that paraphrase is not the real core of meaning which constitutes the essence of the poem" (962). Thus, for the new critics, paraphrase is, as Brooks famously describes as a "heresy" (963). Brooks distinguishes between science and literature. This distinction rests on the common belief is literature to be a special kind of language whose characteristic features should be defined in opposition to the language of science.

The principles of the new criticism are basically verbal. That is, a literary work is conceived to be as Ransom writes, "a special kind of language whose attributes is refined systematic opposition to the language of science" (Hazard 866). And the explicative procedure in the new criticism is to analyze the meaning and interaction of words, figure of speech, and symbols. The emphasis is on the "organic unity" in a successful literary work of overall structure and verbal meaning which must not be separated. In a work of art, 'form' is the overall combination of different syntactic and semantic aspect that contributes to the formation of 'organic unity.' So, structure, shape, interplay, interrelationships, denotations, and connotations, images, symbols, repeated details, climax, denouement, balances and tensions, rhythms, and rhymes and sound are accounted for in terms of overall form in a work of art.

In the new criticism, the distinction between literary genres, although acknowledged, does not play an essential role. The essential components of any work of literature whether lyric, narrative, or dramatic are conceived to be words, images, and symbols rather than other aspects. According to Abrams, "these linguistic elements, whatever the genre, are often said to be organized around a central and humanly significant theme, and to manifest

high literary value to the degree" that they manifest "'tension', 'irony,' and 'paradox' in achieving a 'reconciliation of diverse impulses' or an 'equilibrium of opposed forces'" (Abrams 181). Thus, the form of work is said to be primarily a 'structure of meanings' which involve into an integral and freestanding unity mainly through a play and counter play of 'thematic imagery' and 'symbolic action.'

Brooks and Warren's description of the poem as 'an organic system of relationships' is a significant, as it indicates a key element of New Critical approaches to the text. For the New Critics the literary artifact was primarily a system of language. In it, language operates in a different way from how it does elsewhere, as it is governed by a different set of rules. For instance, a poet will use a particular word with a full sense of its qualities, will exploit its suggestive meanings (its connotations) as well as its literal meaning (denotation), will choose a word for how it may sound, and for how it resonates with other words in the poem. In the literary text, then, words are qualitatively different from words (even the same words) in another, non-literary context, where their denotation and literal meaning may be the only qualities that the writer focuses on and all that the reader expects or requires. To develop this further, literary language is non-functional language, because the language is doing more than giving us straightforward information. Nevertheless, as both Ransom and Tate emphasize, this does not mean that literary language is useless. On the contrary, they both argue, it is through literature that we come to the fullest knowledge of reality, since in it language is used in a way that reflects all of our human needs and resources, which are not only utilitarian.

In new criticism, the organic unity – the working together of all the parts to make an inseparable whole – is the criterion by which new critics judge the quality of a literary work. In a text which has an organic unity, then all of its formal elements work together to establish its theme, or the meaning of the work as a whole. Through its organic unity, the text provides both the complexity that a literary work must have, if it is to adequately represent the complexity of human life, and the order that human beings, by nature, seek. For new criticism, then, the explanation of literary meaning and the evaluation of literary greatness becomes one and the same act. For new criticism, the complexity of a text is created by the multiple and often conflicting meanings woven through it. And these meanings are a product primarily of four kinds of linguistic devices: paradox, irony, ambiguity, and, tension. Firstly, paradox is a statement that seems self-contradictory but represents the actual way things are. Irony, in its simple form, means a statement or event undermined by the context in which it occurs. Irony is always at the center of new critical interpretive practice. They hold that there is always a tension at the heart of text. The tension in the text is created by the presence of heterogeneous elements or the opposite ones. Because of the tension, irony emerges. Cleanth Brooks in “Irony as a Principle of Structure” elaborates the concept of irony as a combinative or reconciling power that fuses ambiguity, multiplicity and variety of meanings found in any literary work into the unity, wholeness and identity. This fusion because of the irony is important because it gives an ontological status to the text. The following description of a wealthy husband's sense of moral rectitude, from Edith Wharton's *House of Mirth*

(1905), is an example of an ironic statement. Regarding irony, Lois Tyson writes “Once in the winter the rector would come to dine, and her husband would beg her to go over the list and see that no divorcees were included except those who had showed signs of penitence by being remarried to the very wealthy” (121). New criticism, however, primarily valued irony in a broader sense of the term, to indicate a text's inclusion of varying perspectives on the same characters or events.

Ambiguity is significant in new criticism. It occurs when a word, image, or event generates two or more different meanings. In scientific or everyday language, ambiguity is usually considered a flaw because it's equated with a lack of clarity and precision. In literary language, however, ambiguity is considered a source of richness, depth, and complexity that adds to the text's value.

Finally, the complexity of a literary text is created by its tension, which, broadly defines linking together of opposites. In its simplest form, tension is created by the integration of the abstract and the concrete, of general ideas embodied in specific images. Tension is also created by the dynamic interplay among the text's opposing tendencies, that is, among its paradoxes, ironies, and ambiguities.

As noted earlier, the complexity of the text, to which all of these linguistic devices contribute, must be complemented by a sense of order if a literary work is to achieve greatness. Therefore, all of the multiple and conflicting meanings produced by the text's paradoxes, ironies, ambiguities, and tensions must be resolved, or harmonized, by their shared contribution to the theme.

In new criticism, figurative language has significant place. For example, image and symbol are important. The term “imagery” has many connotations and meanings. *Princeton Encyclopedia* puts it as “the reproduction in the mind of a sensation produced by a physical perception” (Preminger et al. 363). Thus if a man's eye perceives a certain color he will register an image of that color in his mind – ‘image,’ because the subjective sensation he experiences will be an ostensible copy or replica of the objective color itself. The mind may also produce images while not reflecting direct physical perceptions, as in the attempt to remember something once perceived in the undirected drifting of the mind over experience but not longer present in the combinations brought out of perception by the imagination or in the hallucinations of dreams, fever and so on.

Imagery works in two ways, as an association of something negative with negative images that creates a sense of what is unpleasant in life and as the association of something positive with positive images create a forceful impression of the preferred alternative. In both instances, the idea is made richer, more complex, and more interesting through association. It is possible to list some areas of experience from which the poets most frequently select their images. They are frequently associated with the things in nature, as flowers, animals, the weather, darkness and light. Apart from religious, cosmic and natural imagery, images can be drawn from daily life or from the body. It is therefore possible to have some idea in advance of what sort of images one is likely to encounter in a text. It is important to grasp the imagery because there are informing ideas in the text and those

ideas are realized and fixed expression largely through the writer’s use of imagery. Image is a device that enables the writer to achieve complexity and force. They are a series of set at different angles. So as the theme moves on, it is reflected in a number of different aspects. Images also lead to symbolic meaning. About the symbolic significance of imagery Burke says:

> One cannot long discuss imagery without sliding into symbolism. The writer's images are organized with relation to one another by reason of their symbolic kinships. We shift from the image of an object to its symbolism as soon as we consider it, not in itself, but as a function in a texture of relationships. (Preminger et al.154-155)

When an image takes on meaning beyond its objective self, it moves into the realm of symbol.

In its broadest sense a symbol is anything which signifies something. It is device which stands for or represents or suggests something else. In literary discipline, however, the term "symbol" refers to a word or phrase that signifies an object or event which in its turn signifies something, or has a range of reference beyond it. An image of 'flag' symbolizes national pride and glory. In poetry, 'rose' stands for beauty, 'winter' for old age, 'spring' for youth, 'road' for life, 'sea' for death. In symbolic reference, the intended meaning is hidden. A symbol represents something else often as an idea or quality by analogies or association. Thus, 'white,' 'lion,' 'rose' commonly symbolize or represent innocence, courage and beauty respectively. Such symbols exist by convention and tradition. An image is associated with a

state in the poem, but with a symbol we have to infer the meaning and association. So, symbol is an object animate or inanimate, which represents or stands for something else. J.A. Cuddon writes:

> Scales, for example, symbolize justice; the orb and scepter, monarchy and rule; a dove, peace; a goat, lust; the lion, strength and courage; the bull dog, tenacity; the rose, beauty; the lily, purity; the stars and strips, American and its states; the cross, Christianity; the Swastika (or crooked cross) Nazi Germany and Fascism; the gold, red and black hat of the Montenegrin symbolizes glory, blood and mourning. The scales of Justice may also be allegorical; as might, for instance, a dove, a goat or a lion. (671)

An image is associated with a state in the poem or text, but with a symbol we have to infer the meaning and association.

Symbols may sometimes remain within the work, as it were, but it is the nature of symbols to have extensional possibilities to open out to the world beyond the art object itself. So, many new critics do not deny the connection of the work to the outside world. They hold that we must go sometimes beyond the pure aestheticism of the work in itself to the extended meaning of the work as suggested by its symbols. Symbols are aspects of form and, form embodies theme which transcends the individual literary work. Symbol is a way of using something integral to the work to reach beyond the work and engage a world of value outside the work. Blackmur says that "the text is self-sufficient but not isolated" (Hazard 885). He does not deny the application of literary theory in the analysis of a

literary text. This shows that he favors the extended meaning of the test to the socio-political and cultural domains. Not to do so would be to turn the work too much within itself, making it overly centripetal. If a work is too centripetal because of the limited notion that it should exist in and out of and for itself alone, the works becomes an object of art, suitable for a shelf but in danger of losing the very life that makes it important to the reader.

The following chapter tries to analyze the text, *The Red Pony* by remaining within the framework of new critical approach as it interprets the linguistic features – image, symbols metaphors and language.

Chapter III

Jody's Transition from Childhood to Maturation: 'Rite of Passage' in *The Red Pony*

Steinbeck's novella, *The Red Pony* is full of the symbols of childhood and maturation. The toys of childhood give way to the symbols of adulthood and old age. Thus, the dominating theme of the four episodes in *The Red Pony* centers upon the stages of initiation of the young Jody Tiflin symbolizing the 'rite of passage' as they help prepare the protagonist boy Jody for matured life. These four episodes, lead the boy through stages of initiation into the mysteries which the adult must live with: sickness, age, death, procreation, birth etc. The stages from childhood to adulthood are full of impatient expectation and waiting, nameless sorrow as well as desperate acceptance of what has happened. Steinbeck intends to present the adventures which teach Jody the need for stoic endurance in order to survive in an imperfect and cruel world. The imperfect and cruel world, accordingly, is best represented by physical death with different perspectives in each episode.

The Red Pony has become something that children as well as adults are drawn to. Jody Tiflin's gradual emergence into maturity is traced with affection, reserve, clarity and compassion. In the process, Steinbeck writes forcefully about the painful transformations human beings must endure. *The novella* is composed of four short tales, "The Gift," "The Great Mountains," "The Promise" and "The Leader of the People." The protagonist Jody Tiflin in these four tales narrates the stories and describes characters and scenery which are very familiar to Steinbeck. Also, the four tales are set in Salinas

Valley, and California. Salinas Valley serves as the best place for Jody to observe and experience life on ranch. Moreover, Jody Tiflin is very sensitive to nature and natural processes. In this way, Steinbeck presents with subtlety and vividness the feelings, the thoughts and the activities of Jody Tiflin.

I. “The Gift”: The First Episode as Symbol of Childhood

Jody Tiflin is only a little boy, ten years old. Steinbeck describes his physical features – hair like “dusty yellow grass and with shy polite grey eyes, and with a mouth that works when he thinks” (4). This reflects the boy’s innocence as a small boy. When the boy grows old enough to take care of things, he is given the ‘red pony’ as a gift by his father. As he is immature and small, he is not confident. So, there is a sense of hesitation in him. Steinbeck describes his immaturity and shyness:

> Jody could not bear to look at the pony’s eyes anymore. He gazes down at his hands for a moment, and he asks very shyly, “Mine?” No one answered him. He put his hand out towards the pony. Its gray nose came close, sniffing loudly, and then the lips drew back and the strong teeth closed on Jody’s fingers . . . Jody asked again – “Mine?” (11).

Jody is given ‘the red pony’ in late summer; he names it after the Gabilan Mountains he loves the most and cares for it in order to ride it on Thanksgiving – a public holiday in the US to give thanks to God for good harvest and health. But it dies on the mountain side at the end of this chapter. The particular first death, Jody confronts in “The Gift” shocks him so strongly that he gives full vent to his disillusionment and anger in “the

buzzard" which tries to devour the carcass of the 'red pony' (36). The gift symbolically indicates the recognition that Jody is ready for more mature responsibility. As he is given the pony, he immediately begins to feel the sense of responsibility. He is willing to get up very early in the morning so as to take care of the pony. He dresses more quickly ever than usual in the kitchen, while he washes his face, combs back his hair. He finds himself in a great hurry. So, his mother addresses him irritably: "Don't you go out until you get a good breakfast in you?" (9). His briskness and voluntary acceptance of getting up early and to do his responsibility signals the threshold of being matured. Jody's ownership of a horse not only brings him the duty but also considerably lifts his status among his friends. Jody is originally more timid than his friends, yet the possession of a pony differentiates him from them. Steinbeck writes:

> Before today Jody had been a boy, quieter than most, even suspected of being a little cowardly. And now his was different . . . They knew instinctively that a man on a horse is spiritually as well as physically bigger than a man on foot. They knew that Jody had been miraculously lifted out of equality with them, and had been placed over them. (12)

Owning and caring for a pony is Jody's first step toward becoming adult, toward differentiating him from the mass represented by the boys who enviously admire the pony. Jody's courage is up. He too feels the superiority of the horseman. He says: "He is old enough. Nobody can ride him for a long time. I'm going to train him on the long halter. Belly Buck is going to show me how" (12). Hence, Jody obtains a higher level of spiritual

awareness and is made spiritually as well as physically bigger by becoming a horseman.

The realization of the dream of becoming a horseman is assisted by Billy Buck, the long-term ranch hand of the Tiflins. Instead of identifying himself with his father, Jody takes Billy Buck as his male idol. Being greatly skilled in country arts and crafts, Billy Buck understands animals as if he were one of them. Steinbeck writes: “He told Jody how horses love conversation . . . A horse never kicked up a fuss if someone he liked explained things to him” (9). Truly, his experience and self-confidence in craftsmanship make him accomplish his responsibilities on the farm in a spirit of quiet competence and real satisfaction, and sometimes in a spirit of authentic pleasure. With the craftsmanship which reflects the heroic mold of old frontier explorers, Billy Buck could work out as a common hero figure and lead the way of Jody’s growth as a matured person. Jody’s dream of being a horseman eventually is destroyed by the death of the ‘red pony.’

The sense of the disillusionment of the dream is sharpened by the doubt of the authority of the infallibility of Billy Buck. Jody is promised by Billy that it wouldn’t rain that day so the pony could be taken out for the sun shine. To Jody, “Billy Buck wasn’t wrong about many things. He couldn’t be” (17). Nevertheless, it does rain. The mistake Billy makes not merely leads to the ultimately serious illness and then horrible death of the ‘red pony’ but also breaks the important authority he himself builds up. However, the red pony’s death is partly the result of Jody’s own carelessness. While caring for the sick pony, Jody falls asleep twice and doesn’t notice that the pony runs into the storm which seriously aggravates

the bad cold. Jody finally realizes that no one in fact is particularly responsible for the unfortunate death of the ‘red pony.’ Steinbeck deliberately brings this situation in order to teach Jody a lesson, which contributes to his development into an adult.

The narrative power of the first episode is intensified and heightened by the fact that it is the first. In this, the beginning of Jody’s path of knowledge of pain and death, the dreamlike sense of wonder and the marvelous gains its power from the fact that it is the first. However intense and varied later experience may turn out to be, they will never again be first, a fact which has always given particular poignancy too early love, and – as in this case – early passages toward understanding the world. Jody’s reaction toward the experience of first death in his life is very significant. To a ten-year-old boy, Jody could only transfer his deep sorrow and anger by attacking the ‘buzzard’ which devours the carcass of the pony. Moreover, his own violence reaches to its peak that he beats the ‘buzzard’ to death. Steinbeck writes:

> He stuck again and missed. The red fearless eyes still looked at him . . . He struck again and again, until the buzzard lay dead, until its head was a red pulp. He was still beating the dead bird when Billy Buck pulled him off and held him tightly to calm his shaking. (36)

The animalistic quality shown by Jody’s instinctive violent attack characterizes the childhood behavior which will finally disappear as he grows up. Jody’s father who already loses the animalistic quality couldn’t perceive the psychological reaction of Jody’s feeling toward the death. “His

father moved the buzzard with his toe, 'Jody,' he explained, 'the buzzard didn't kill the pony. Don't you know that?'" (36). In contrast with this unfeeling and scornful attitude of Jody's father, Billy who is more sympathetic comprehends fully Jody's emotion. Steinbeck writes: "He had lifted Jody in his arms, and had turned to carry him home. But he turned back on Carl Tiflin. 'Course he knows it,' Billy said furiously, 'Jesus Christ Man, can't you see how he'd feel about it?'" (36). Once again, Billy's role as a Steinbeck's hero is emphasized by the sympathy he shows to Jody. This significant first experience of life and death and human relationship undoubtedly teaches Jody a lot. In this way, Jody has learned that man cannot always vent his feelings directly on what has hurt him. He has learned also that nature is impersonal, no respecter of human wishes.

II. "The Great Mountains": The Second Episode as a Symbol of Acceptance of the Old Age and its Indignities

In the second episode "The Great Mountains," Jody confronts not only the cruelty of nature but also the mercilessness of human world. The death of the 'red pony' along with Jody's sufferings of violence and pain in the first episode "The Gift" present the realistic physical death scene, whereas death of the old *paisano* Gitano in "The Great Mountains" signifies more on the philosophic and symbolic perspective of death. The symbolic perspective of death is closely related with the natural symbolism revealed by the setting of the episode. The Tiflin ranch is located in a valley cup formed by two ranged – Gabilan Mountains and the Great Mountains. Gabilan Mountains on the eastern side which Jody favors so much as to name his precious pony after it "were jolly mountains . . . The foothill cup

of the home ranch below him was sunny and safe . . . The chickens scratched about in the dust of the farmyard with quick waltzing step" (40). In Jody's mind, the range of Gabilan Mountains represents life, a sense of settled community, a concept of familiarity. The Great Ones on the western side, however, represent the mystery of the unknown, the looming fear of the dry and the dark. No matter how urgently Jody endeavors to discover the mystery behind the Great Ones, it is forever "dear to him, and terrible." Just as Steinbeck describes, "When the sun had gone over the edge in the evening and the mountains were a purple-like despair, then Jody was afraid of them; then they were so impersonal and aloof that their very imperturbability was a threat," it is under such an environment that Jody broods over the mystery of the unknown things (41).

The climax of the episode is reached by the sudden arrival and departure of the old *paisano* Gitano. Gitano arrives at the Tiflin ranch and insists on staying on the farm because he was born here and he simply wants to live here until he dies. Nevertheless, Carl Tiflin firmly refuses the request. Gitano leaves at dawn next morning with the old horse Easter and his sharp rapier and goes westward to the Great Mountains. To the practical stern Carl Tiflin, Gitano is like Herman Melville's Bartleby, very difficult to get rid of. As for Jody, he reacts excitingly to the old man and identifies him with the mystical Great Mountains. Learning that the old man once goes into the Great Mountains, Jody asks him anxiously, "What did you see in there?" Yet he is rather disappointed by the answer, "I don't know . . . I don't remember" (45). Jody's curiosity and earnest searching for the knowledge of the unknown beyond remoteness which neither his father nor

Billy Buck can explain for him cannot be solved by Gitano either. The far away mountains still remain as mystical as before. Moreover, the remote mountains become more than a geographical quality, a topographical rise; they assume the dark lineaments of the boy's own hoped for and feared future and symbolize his yearnings about life beyond the boundaries of his own environment.

Likewise, the yearnings about life urge Jody to explore the mystery of Gitano. The past history of Gitano in the Great Mountains fascinates Jody to such an extent that he slips to the barn and, surprisingly, finds Gitano holding a sharp rapier. "Jody stands overwhelmed by the thing in Gitano's hand, a lean and lovely rapier with a golden basket hilt. The blade was like a thin ray of dark light. The hilt was pierced and intricately carved" (51). At this Jody asks the old man inquisitively: "Where'd you get it" Where'd it come from?" (51). To Jody's imaginatively questioning little mind, Gitano is soon connected with the pioneering spirit of ages gone by, while the rapier symbolizes the spirit of daring pioneering which animated the heroes of yesterday. Jody, whose dream of being a heroic horseman being physically broken in the first episode, attempts to concretize the dream through Gitano. Notwithstanding, Jody perceives that Gitano is incomprehensible as that of the Great Mountains. Steinbeck writes:

> Gitano was mysterious like the mountains. There were ranges back as far as you could see, but behind the last range piled up against the sky there was a great unknown country. And Gitano was an old man, until you got to the dull dark eyes. And in behind them was some unknown thing. He didn't ever

> say enough to let you guess what was inside, under the eyes. (50)

Old age and the approaching death embodied by the old Gitano deepen Jody's experiences of nature and human beings. Hence, while Gitano is found vanished with the old horse Easter and takes only one thing, the rapier, with him, Jody with an overwhelming sadness senses the old man's feeling and purpose. The old Gitano heads towards the West straight into the mountains. Gitano's Westward journey to the Great Mountains implies his death. Without the vehemently physical, even verbal responses as he reacts on the death of the red pony, Jody senses the desperate yet peaceful and calm aspect of death in the episode. The previous terrible disgusting feeling is replaced by the deep nameless sorrow which Steinbeck describes so beautifully,

> Jody thought of the rapier and of Gitano. And he thought of the great mountains. A longing caressed him, and it was so sharp that he wanted to cry to get it out of his breast. He lay down in the green grass near the round tub at the brush line. He covered his eyes with his crossed arms and lay there a long time, and he was full of a nameless sorrow. (59)

The departure of Gitano brings to Jody a strong sense of loss and nameless sorrow that are real and painful enough to initiate Jody to become matured. The tragic feeling toward the inescapable uselessness and unwanted condition of the old age arouses Jody's deep sympathies and widens his understanding of the human nature. It is obvious that the sympathies and nameless sorrow come not from grief for Gitano or the old

horse, but rather, from an emotional perception of that whole of which Gitano, Old Easter, the rapier and the Great Mountains are parts, recognition of the symbolic significance of their conjunction. Due to this feeling to the immensity of the past and the unknown things, the loss of Gitano to Jody is less personal than symbolic and universal.

III. “The Promise”: The third Episode as a Symbol of the Experience of Life or Death

In the third episode “The Promise,” Jody encounters another different perspective of death. The setting itself is deathlike. In a mid-afternoon of spring, the little boy Jody walks martially along the brush-lined road towards his home ranch. Banging his knee against the golden lard bucket used for school lunch, he contrives a good bass drum, while his tongue fluttered sharply against his teeth to fill in snare drums and occasionally trumpets:

> Sometime back the other members of the squad that walked so smartly from the school had turned into the various little canyons and taken the wagon roads to their own home ranches. Now Jody marched seemingly alone, with high-lifted knees and pounding feet: but behind him there was a phantom army with great flags and swords, silent but deadly. (54)

Jody at this point is given the responsibility at the very inception to watch the violent copulation of the mare Nellie and stallion:

> Nellie’s ears went back; she whirled and kicked at him as he went by. The stallion spun around and reared. He struck the mare with his front hoof, and while she staggered under the

> blow, his teeth raked her neck and drew an ooze of blood. Instantly, Nellie's mood changed. She became coquettishly feminine. She nibbled his arched neck with her lips. She edged around and rubbed her shoulder against his shoulder. (60)

This also helps Jody learn about the reproduction, which ultimately leads Jody to care for the mare Nellie during her pregnancy, to observe the sufferings and pains of the mare and to witness the cruel and terrible scene of killing the mare by cutting the living colt from her. In fact, Nellie could be spared if Billy Buck chooses to kill the new colt. However, as the title of this episode indicates, Jody is promised he would have the new colt as the reward of the arduous and new tasks and chores he performs during the spring and the entire summer. It is this previously determined promise that leads Billy Buck to make the decision to save the new colt at the expense of the mare. Billy Buck, being the male idol and hero of Jody, is sensitive to his status in Jody's eyes. The infallibility of Billy is challenged and destroyed a lot in the first episode "The Gift;" hence, Billy couldn't afford to lose his authentic image by breaking the promise once again. On the other hand, Billy loves Jody very much and during those months of waiting, he was continuously and sympathetically attuned to Jody's anxieties and excitements about the mare's condition. Billy's choice thus is determined. The problem of choice, here concretizes by the choice between killing the mare or killing the new colt, reveals Steinbeck's interest in the theme of choice.

The killing of the mare is the most frightening and violent scene in the novella. As Steinbeck describes,

> Jody looked back in time to see the hammer rise and fall on the flat forehead. Then Nellie fell heavily to her side and quivered for a moment. Billy jumped to the swollen stomach; his big pocket-knife was in his hand. He lifted the skin and drove the knife in. He sawed and ripped at the tough belly. The air filled with the sick odor of warm living entrails. The other horses reared back against their halter chains and squealed and kicked. (75)

After the exhausting killing of the mare, Billy says to Jody, “There’s your colt. I promised” (75). Death in this episode so terribly presented reflects strongly the cycle of life and death as the happening in “The Gift.” Death of the ‘red pony’ means life to the buzzards whereas death of the mare symbolizes life to the new colt. However, the different perspective of death shown in this episode lies in the great sacrifice of the mare Nellie. The struggles, sufferings, and finally the death of the mare are the price of the new life of the colt. Learning from the sacrifice of the mare, Jody realizes that men sometimes have to make sacrifices to achieve their ends. This understanding deepens Jody’s comprehension of a new sense of responsibility to life.

The thematic rhythm of life-death cycle, therefore, has been strengthened degree by degree in each episode of *The Red Pony*. Natural symbolism which suggests life and death respectively by Gabilan Mountains and the Great Ones in the “The Great Mountains,” it is properly and vividly presented by the black cypress tree by the bunkhouse and the water tub in “The Promise.” Arnold Goldsmith describes the later pair of

contrast as “the most obvious example of Steinbeck’s conscious effort to present this theme.” He also observes that “where the cypress is associated with death, the never-ending spring water piped into the old green tub is the symbol of the continuity of life” (72). Steinbeck identifies Jody with the corresponding symbols of the cypress tree and the water tub as he writes,

> This place had grown to be a centre-point for Jody. When he had been punished the cool green grass and the singing water soothed him. When he had been mean the biting acid of meanness left him at the brush line. When he sat in the grass and listened to the purling stream, the barriers set up in his mind by the stern day went down to ruin. (77)

Conversely, the ‘cypress tree’ where pigs are killed with the screaming and the blood makes Jody’s heart beat so fast that it hurts him. The strong contrast of natural symbolism builds up a new insight into nature on Jody’s sensitive mind and offers him a chance for a deeper observation of the world around him.

IV. “The Leader of the People”: Fourth Episode as a Symbol of Concern for the Whole Human Beings

In the fourth episode “The Leader of the People,” John Steinbeck portrays the sense of loss of Jody’s grandfather in quite an unfamiliar mood; but a new stirring of responsibility is shaped upon Jody to become the leader of the people. Again, the dominating theme of life-death cycle is represented by the relationship between Jody and his grandfather. Jody’s grandfather is an old dignitary and a respectful man who leads the western movement of the pioneers and he is proud of himself and loves to repeat his

old heroic past history. The leading of the pioneers as Jody's mother remembers, "was the big thing in my father's life. He led a wagon train clear across the plains to the coast, and when it was finished, his life was done" (92). Jody's grandfather is just like the ancient mariner in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," lives in his memory and attempts to maintain the heroic spirit of the past by telling the self-considered exciting story again and again. Carl Tiflin's complaint on the ceaseless repetition of the old generation glory contrarily testifies to the fact that the past history means nothing to the new generation, at least to the practical Carl Tiflin.

Carl Tiflin's complaint is overheard by old grandfather and it leads the old man to a new awakening. He bitterly announces,

> It wasn't Indians that were important, nor adventures, nor even getting out here. It was a whole bunch of people made into one big crawling beast. And I was the head. It was westering and westering. Every man wanted something for himself; but the big beast that was all of them wanted only westering. I was the leader, but if I hadn't been there, someone would have been the head. The thing had to have a head. (95)

Making the group into one big thing in this episode is "Steinbeck's first explicit statement of his group-man theory, which was hinted at in the earlier stories and novels and which was to be developed at such great length in his next four books" (Lisca 105). Grandfather, a symbol of another generation, is keenly conscious of the spirit of the group-man, but he fails to release himself from the old memories, while at the same time he fails to

communicate the significant spirit to the new generation. The grandfather says: “I shouldn’t stay here, feeling the way I do. I feel as though the crossing wasn’t worth doing. I tell those old stories, but they aren’t what I want to tell. I only know how I want people to feel when I tell them” (95).

Contrary to narrow-minded and cruel Carl Tiflin, Billy Buck emerges as a hero and illustrates as the type of man Jody’s grandfather once was. Jody believes that heroes have ceased to exist, except for Billy Buck. Jody’s grandfather, too, associates Billy Buck with the old heroes, admiring him both for his special abilities as a cowboy and his concerns of nature and humans. Jody, who witnesses the sudden awakening of his grandfather, learns from it the incommunicable situation of human beings. However, Jody who grows up and matures through the progress of loss, nameless sorrow and acceptance could comprehend the feelings of his grandfather with sympathy. Furthermore, as Jody is motivated by the spirit of the group-man which his grandfather represents, he anticipates a new hope to be a leader some day in the future. He says, “[m]aybe I could lead the people some day” (96). Thus said, Jody not only shows his heartfelt consideration to the sadness of his grandfather but also consoles him with a glass of lemonade. His grandfather listens and accepts with smile. At the end of the fourth episode, the thoughtless boy is initiated into a thoughtful and responsible young man.

Finally, Steinbeck’s reputation is based largely on his ability to tell artistic tales. And, indeed, while Steinbeck understood that a writer is always engaged in recording his beliefs about life as well as his observations of it, he followed the advice of Edith Mirrielees, his English

teacher at Stanford, who taught him “the short story writer’s medium is the spotlight, not the searchlight” (Watt 23). It is the spotlight that Steinbeck uses so effectively in his early fiction. Nowhere is this truer than in the final stories of such as *The Red Pony*, and which detail the development of a young boy Jody Tiflin from childhood to maturity. The *Red Pony* tells of Jody’s experiences with birth and death; they are stories of his initiation into a violent world where pain and death are everywhere and danger is always present. Gradually, Jody learns that nature fulfills its promise: that life continues that individual lives end and then begin again, however painful that process may be to accept and understand. *The Red Pony* is an attempt, an experiment to set down this loss and acceptance and growth.

Steinbeck uses environment as meaning in telling the story of Jody Tiflin. His portraits of sinister forces working in a benign land, of human smallness in the midst of expansive nature, give his stories an added degree of tension and irony. He writes them out of ‘the pastoral design.’ In *The Red Pony*, he portrays inherently decent men and women who want only to live in peace and harmony in a green pasture. He shows also how dreams are destroyed by the follies and foibles of the dreamers as well as by the inevitable incursion of history, or how innocence gives way to growth of character that clarifies and enriches experience and enables man to make the necessary adjustments and adaptations to the way things are.

John Steinbeck's *The Red Pony* is a deceptively simple book that blossoms into full life meaning when examined as an artfully and symbolically presented novella. The book reads like a four-paneled painting which, viewed from the proper perspective, should be appreciated for what

it truly is – a remarkable rendition of symbolic work. The four episodes are held together by the texture out of which the meaning is produced. Here's my view of the thematic "glue" holding the individual stories together: In the first episode, "The Gift," 10-year old Jody learns through the sudden sickness, suffering and gruesome, buzzard-pecked death of his beloved red pony, Gabilan, that even "happy" gifts can result in sadness and loss, despite the best efforts of well-intentioned adults.

In the second episode, “The Great Mountains,” the boy views consequences of the ways of man. Jody sees how compassion has its economic and cultural limitations, when father refuses to honor the old paisano, Gitano's, request to live out his remaining years on the ranch where he was born. Consequence: Gitano disappears into the lonesome mountains towards the west, riding father's decrepit horse and ominously carrying only a sharp-bladed rapier. In the third episode, “The Promise”, hope comes through loss. Against a gloomy backdrop of loss, builds hope but culminates in the harsh choice between life of birthing mare and her breech-positioned colt. The bittersweet outcome, death of the mare to save her colt, is difficult to accept but does offer at least a glimmer of optimism.

In the final episode, “The Leader of the People,” despite life’s trials and tribulations, its fullness arises from having a sense of purpose. It mentions neither the loss of Jody's red pony nor his presumed raising of the newborn colt. Instead, the connection to the other stories and unifying message of the novella can be found within the final, almost trivial event: “Grandfather was about to refuse, and then he saw Jody’s face,” which led him to accept Jody's offer to make him a glass of lemonade (96).

Importantly, through the simple act of accepting Jody's offer, Grandfather nourishes the boy's sense of purpose. Although Grandfather's own life purpose has withered since that unforgettable year decades ago when he led a group of settlers out west, the boy's life lies ahead with plenty of potential for a purposeful future.

In sum, out of death, and love, springs life's potential: When life has a purpose, however big or small – from caring for a pony to returning to one's birthplace to die, from being a leader of the people to making lemonade for a loved one – we not only live but thrive.

IV. Conclusion

The four episodes in *The Red Pony* symbolically reflect the progress of Jody's maturity from an innocent little boy to a sympathetic thoughtful young man. They convey the universal experiences of human beings and illustrate the old heroic pioneering spirit. When Jody appears in the first episode "The Gift," he is a dependent and obedient boy. However, the ownership of a 'red pony' lifts his original position to a higher level, physically as well as psychologically, personally as well as socially. Jody owns 'the red pony' which promotes his social status and increases his self-dignity. Moreover, he nourishes from the ownership another level of spiritual awareness; this is the importance and responsibility of being a horseman.

In the second episode "The Great Mountains," Jody watches the old and useless Gitano come to his home and leave again to the great mountains to face the inevitable end of his life. Unlike the furious and destructive young boy beating the buzzard to death in the first episode, Jody realizes that old age as well as youth has its tragic aspect. Furthermore, in the third episode "The Promise," Jody learns from the mare Nellie the lesson that old age must give way to youth. While Billy Buck keeps his promise to reward Jody with the new colt at the expense of sacrificing the mare's life, Jody also learns that death and life are inseparable linked together. Thus, step by step Jody's initiation depends upon his accepting the inevitability of dissolution and death. Old, dying, and dead things surround Jody, and his knowledge of death through Gabilan, Gitano, Nellie, and his aged grandfather teaches him to respect and appreciate all forms of life.

Finally, in the fourth episode “The Leader of the People”, Jody, on the way of being molded as a leader is seriously demanded at first and gradually voluntarily shoulders all the responsibilities. Such responsibilities as feeding and caring for chickens, horses, doing tasks and chores on the farm function as good trainings both physically and morally to Jody. Furthermore, Billy Buck who helps shape Jody as a leader is the role model of the ideal leader with the sense of American heroic past. Billy Buck is qualified of being a leader who represents more than any other character in this novella, the kind of man who is often featured as the hero in Steinbeck’s work. Those categories in which Billy conforms to the general type of the hero involve the quality of his professional commitments and the cast of his thought. Billy Buck is highly qualified as the ideal leader in Steinbeck’s works because of his authority and skill in the farm affairs. His capabilities to consider nature and human relationship through an objective view, his kindness to sympathize with the needs of the lonely maturing Jody and sense of loss of old Gitano and grandfather. Therefore, at the end of the cycle of these four episodes, Jody is making steps toward adulthood. He sees beyond his own pain to the pain in others.

In this way, John Steinbeck achieves in these four brief episodes of *The Red Pony* the initiation of young Jody Tiflin. Steinbeck also traces the emotional development of a boy, Jody Tiflin, from the narrow self-concern typical children to a more compassionate view of the world. In this sense, the novella is a ‘rite of passage’ as it prepares Jody for life.

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