

# SIMBOLICAL MEANING IN STEINBECK'S SHORT STORY "FLIGHT"

By

**I Gede Lanang Rat Supardinata**

Program Non Regular Sastra Inggris

Fakultas Sastra

Universitas Udayana

## ***Abstrak***

*Dalam studi ini karya penulis terkenal Amerika John Steinbeck dengan judul Flight dipilih untuk dibahas. Tokoh utama dalam cerita ini adalah Pepe seorang remaja riang yang digambarkan bersifat sangat malas dan gampang-gampang dan tidak suka kesibukan. Ibunya menunggu dan menunggu dia untuk mengambil suatu kehidupan yang lebih serius. Pembahasan dalam cerita pendek ini menggunakan metode penelitian deskriptif. Sumber data primer dalam penulisan ini adalah cerita pendek itu sendiri yang berjudul Flight tentang teori sastra yang dikemukakan oleh William Kenney (1966) dalam bukunya How to Analyze Fiction, dan buku Theory of Literature yang ditulis oleh Rene Welek and Austin Warren (1962), sedangkan buku Interpreting Literature oleh Knickbocker. K.L and H. W. Reninger (1993) dipakai sebagai pendukung kedua teori tersebut di atas. Hasil dari penulisan ini menyatakan bahwa cerita pendek Flight banyak terdapat arti-arti symbol dan seperti yang dapat dilihat dengan jelas, John Steinbeck telah menggunakan banyak teknik dan contoh simbolisme untuk membantu menggambarkan akhir dari cerita pendek, Flight. Beberapa contoh arti simbolik termasuk warna, arah, dan alam ditemukan dalam cerita pendek ini.*

*Key word: hitam, symbol, kematian*

## **1. Background of the Study**

Literature refers something creative, imaginative, and expressive of which the material is language. It is created based on human consciousness and imagination which is translated by the artist into a concrete form. One of the important aspects of literature is its relationship with human life because it expresses and shares human life as well as human experiences.

In literature, there are many things that can be analysed both intrinsically and extrinsically, there are elements to study such as theme, setting, character, plot, point of view, style and tone, structure and technique, and so forth.

Extrinsically, it can be concerned with the author's biography, social and cultural status, personal experience with life and language, moral values, and so forth

Novel is one of the forms of literary works; it is a fictional piece of prose that is usually written in a narrative style. Novels tell stories, which are typically defined as a series of events described in a sequence. It has been part of human culture for over a thousand of years, although its origins are somewhat debated. Regardless of how it began, the novel has risen to prominence and remained one of the most popular and treasured examples of human culture and writing.

In this study, a short story known as *Flight* which is written by the American author John Steinbeck is analyzed. It is the story of young Pepe Torres, an unsophisticated youth from an isolated farm along the California coast. He wants very much to be considered a man. A deeper understanding of *Flight* is then discussed by studying Steinbeck's autobiography.

## **2. Problem of the Study**

The problems discussed are formulated as follows,

1. What symbolical meaning does Steinbeck want to convey to the readers in *Flight*?
2. How does the life experience of the writer help understand the story?

## **3. Aims of the Study**

This study is intended to fulfil three aims: the general, specific, and academic aims.

The general aim of this writing is to apply the theories related to novel in order to get better understanding of John Steinbeck's short story entitled *Flight*, meanwhile the specific aim of this writing is to find out what message the writer wants to deliver.

The last is an academic aim, that is, to apply the theory of literature studied in the English Department to write a scientific work which gives contribution to this department, so this writing can be used as a reference to help students who are interested in analysing fiction.

## **4. Research Method**

There are three points covering this section: data source, method and technique of collecting data, and method and technique of analyzing data.

### **4.1. Data Source**

The data of this study were taken from the story entitled *Flight* written by John Steinbeck (Adventures in American Literature. 1968. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc.). *Flight* is generally considered one of Steinbeck's best works of short fiction, written at the height of his career. His energetic narrative style gives *Flight* its suspense and symbolical meanings.

### **4.2. Method and Technique of Collecting Data**

The data of this study were taken from the main character in the short story entitled *Flight* by John Steinbeck, published in 1938 in *The Long Valley*, a collection of stories set in the Salinas Valley in California. All the information was collected through library research and note taking, and the important step in collecting the data was reading the story repeatedly, in order to find out the message the writer wants to deliver.

### **4.3 Method and Technique of Analyzing Data**

The data were analyzed according to the theory to find out the symbolical meaning and the other relevant information obtained from other sources is used to support the analysis of the study.

The data were collected from the data source then through the data collection, they were analyzed by using the theory of William Kenney. 1978. *How to Analyze Fiction*, and theory of Warren and Wellek. 1962. *Theory of Literature*.

## **5. Analysis**

*Flight* tells the story of Pepe, a jovial teenager who is described many times as very lazy and easy going. His mother waits and waits for him to take life more seriously.

The story starts with Pepé showing off his knife skills, with the knife he inherited from his father, to his brother and sister. He was then interrupted by his mother telling him he must go into town to get medicine for the house. She set him up with a horse and some money, and sent him on his way “*You must ride to Monterey. The medicine bottle is empty. There is no salt. Go thou now. Catch the horse*” (Steinbeck. 1968: 577). Later that night he returned home from his short trip and revealed to his mother that he had accidentally killed a man with his knife. She got up in frenzy and immediately began to prepare him for his evasive journey to the mountains, because he could not stay there and risk being caught.

Pepe is often compared to his hardworking father by his mother, who desires for her son to be more like her deceased husband. Pepe’s holding his father’s knife to murder is symbolic of the completion of his childhood and entrance into adulthood. Unfortunately, he did not use his knife just as his father had, but he used it to take the life of another. The maternal figure in this story is used by Steinbeck in order to convey the idea of Pepe’s rising power as a man. Pepe’s mother was clearly shown to be his caretaker in the opening of the story. She scolds him, feeds him, and looks after him. However, when Pepe is trusted to go to the city by himself, his mother surrenders her hold on the family. In an attempt to have her boy become a man, she gives him a great responsibility. Pepe eagerly accepts this opportunity, but is confronted with the face of death instead of a small journey. Pepe’s mother put her trust into Pepe, and he did not disappoint her, because in the end, Pepe made the journey and left boyhood behind him.

Symbolism is the use of words symbolically such as dark meaning something unknown. When the writer uses one thing to stand for another we call it a symbol (Knickerbocker and Reninger, 1963:309).

In this short story, symbolism is used throughout the story in a variety of ways, including the indication of the ending. The most used piece of symbolism in the story is the usage of black. Black is in many ways associated with the element of death. Some examples of this includes the black handle on the long blade “*The long heavy blade folded back into the black handle*” (Steinbeck. 1968: 576), Pepe’s black hair “*Pepe had a tall head, pointed at the top, and from its peak*

*coarse black hair grew down like a thatch all around*" (Steinbeck. 1968: 576), the black string of jerky he chews on "*. . . he reached into the flour sack and brought out a black string of jerky. . . . he chewed slowly and drank occasionally from the water bag*" (Steinbeck. 1968: 581) and his father's black coat "*Your father's black coat, Pepe. Here put it on*" (Steinbeck. 1968: 579). With all these things combined, he is symbolically welcoming death in his future with the darkness.

Other pieces of symbolism include the use of nature such as the use of water. In the story, Pepe's water bag is hung over the horse's shoulder which ended up leaking. It symbolizes that Pepe's life is slowly leaking away from him. Another piece of symbolism is when Pepe loses his tools that define his humanity, he is left with no choice but to crawl on the ground like an animal, wriggling like a snake and "worming" his way along "*He moved with the instinctive care of an animal. Rapidly he wormed his way toward one of the big outcroppings of the granite on the hill above him*" (Steinbeck. 1968: 584). This symbolism because it represents the way his dad died ten years earlier when he was bitten and killed by a rattlesnake. More pieces of symbolism can be found when Pepe comes across the trees of the mountainside. The top of the trees appear as wind bitten and pretty much dead, symbolizing that the further up he goes, the closer he is to his death. The majority of the symbolism used throughout the story, each tells a tale of a bleak future with the outcome more than likely resulting in death and Pepe's demise due to his inability to cope with the treacherous conditions of the wilderness.

## **6. Conclusion**

Perhaps the most repeatedly used symbol in "Flight," is black. In literature many authors use black to represent death. There are numerous examples in this short story. Some of these include the black handle on the long blade, Pepe's black hair and the black jerky. Another example may be found when Pepé puts on his father's black coat, which represents death. When Pepé puts on the coat he is literally covering himself with death. Another fine example is the trail in which Pepé travels. Steinbeck describes the path as a well-worn black path. By traveling on this path he is in fact taking the road of death. Furthermore Pepé's

appearance also helps foreshadow the ending. Steinbeck describes him as having a black hat that covers his black thatched hair.

Throughout the story Steinbeck emphasizes nature symbolism. Nature symbolism includes a variety of things. One very popular symbol is water. Because of the fact that we, as humans, require water in order to live, water represents life. An example of this in the story would be Pepé's water bag that he hung over his horse's shoulder. The water leaked onto the horse's shoulder. This meant Pepé's life was actually leaking away. It just so happened that when the horse was shot it was in the same shoulder. The most obvious example of nature symbolism would be when Pepé is traveling up the mountain. When he first starts out he is traveling very close to the river. As he continues with his journey, the path in which he travels has the tendency to turn more and more away from the river. In reality this means Pepé is moving further away from life and closer to his inevitable death. These are just a couple of situations in the story *Flight* that help the reader catch a glimpse of the ending of the story.

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