

Reading John Steinbeck's "Flight" as a Folktale

Didier Arcade Ange LOUMBOUZI

Senior Lecturer of American literature, Department of Modern Foreign Languages, Faculty of Letters, Arts, and Human Sciences, Marien Ngouabi University, Brazzaville, Congo

Corresponding Author: Didier Arcade Ange LOUMBOUZI, E-mail: aloumbouzi@yahoo.fr

ARTICLE INFORMATION

Received: November 08, 2020

Accepted: December 14, 2020

Volume: 3

Issue: 12

DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2020.3.12.3

KEYWORDS

"Flight", structuralism, short story, Torres, Mexican American, folktale

ABSTRACT

This paper analyses John Steinbeck's "Flight," a short story about the Torres, a Mexican American family, living on the periphery of Monterey in California and rarely going to town as it once happens to one of them, Pepé, who goes to buy supplies there. In addition to its one syllable word title and its twenty-six-page text, it is short like any short story in comparison with the novel which is another genre in spite of their common aspects. Its shortness clearly noticed does not end the debate on its form as it can also be compared with a folktale. The research question reads: to what extent can "Flight" be assimilated to a folktale? The aim is to show its characteristics of a Mexican American folktale. Concerning the approach, a reference is made to structuralism according to the theory on the form of the folktale developed by Vladimir Propp. In the end of this research, it is noticed that "Flight" is presented as a short story but it is formerly a folktale, a genre commonly linked to a given people identity, and Steinbeck uses it to express, to some extent, his compassion towards Mexican Americans marginalized within the Californian space.

1. Introduction

It is right saying that to limit John Steinbeck's writings to fiction is "to do him a disservice," as Pugh (2018, p. 132) underlined it before listing his various writings and productions. Instead of simply completing that long list, this is an opportunity to analyse an enriching aspect of his fiction in matters of genre. In addition to novels, John Steinbeck's fiction consists of short stories mostly published in his collection entitled *The Long Valley* including "Flight" which shortly tells the story of the Torres, an American family from Mexican Indian origins living on the periphery of Monterey in California, with a focus on what they experience once one of them goes to town to buy supplies. Though "Flight" is short by its one syllable word title and its twenty-six-page text, it is literarily short like any short story which owes much to the novel its mother genre or like a folktale which is another narrative genre. In reality, a short story is different from a tale or folktale, a kind of "narrative prose literature found in the oral traditions of the world" (*Encarta*). Beyond the shortness of the text, to what extent can "Flight" be assimilated to a folktale? The narration of "Flight," to mean the construction of its story, draws attention to analyse it in order to show its characteristics as a Mexican Indian or a Mexican American folktale. If Augenbraum (2017, p. 57) carried out a stylistic study on another Steinbeck's text, the short novel *The Pearl*, which he proves to be a re-writing of a Mexican tale told in Spanish at its origin and Loumbouzi (2019) tries to confirm its folktale structure, the present analysis is an attempt to apply to "Flight" a structuralist approach about the form of the folktale according to Propp (1970).² The latter's theory developed in his essay about the "morphology of the folktale" implies two main elements: the introduction of the initial situation followed by the introduction of the family (Propp, 1970, p. 36) and the characters' functions (Propp, 1970, p. 35). Subsequently, materials are analysed in two points which are the Torres family and its farm in the periphery of Monterey, on the one hand, and Pepé's mission to town and its consequences, on the other hand. Concluding on this analysis, a significance is drawn from Steinbeck's suggested concern with the folktale.

² The original text of Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* was written in Russian and published in 1928. It was translated into English (1958, 1968) but I only use the second edition (1970) of the French version first published in 1965.

2. The Torres family and its farm in the periphery of Monterey

In order to introduce the family, events occurring in "Flight" can first be recalled in short. Its story depicts the life of a lady, Mama Torres, having inherited a farm from her late husband and living with her children on the periphery of Monterey in California. One day, she notices that the house is running short of salt, candles, and drugs. She decides to send her first child, Pepé, to town to run errands for the first time. Having gone to town, he comes back to the farm with the things ordered but he has been involved in a clash. He escapes from the farm with the family support and dies in the shooting that takes place in his refuge on the mountains. These are the essential events making the materials needed for the analysis.

Scrutinizing the Torres family and its farm in the periphery of Monterey helps achieve the first concern with the construction of a folktale in "Flight." For Propp (1970, p. 36), to repeat him, a folktale often begins with the exposition of an initial situation. One mentions the members of the family, or the future hero is simply introduced by giving his name or describing his state. Though this situation is not a function, it remains an important morphological element of the folktale and it is applied to the form of "Flight." Here, the initial situation is followed by the introduction of the family. Of course, reading the text of "Flight" itself, one can note that the definition of the space opens the story. It is formulated from its first sentence: "About fifteen miles below Monterey, on the wild coast, the Torres family had their farm, a few sloping acres above a cliff that dropped to the brown reefs and to the hissing white waters of the ocean" (Steinbeck, 1938, p. 45). These are meaningful words announcing the location of the Torres family and its small farm. They start the illustration of the initial situation. In addition to this location clearly mentioned in the periphery of Monterey next to the sea, the time of the story is alluded to in a way common to folktales even if the absence of a formal expression of time like "Once upon a time" is noticeable. In fact, the use of the past tense (had, dropped) in the opening sentence specifies it by meaning events having occurred before the time they are told. The above-mentioned sentence ("About fifteen miles below...") opens the story but it first opens the story's initial paragraph which keeps on with a focus on the farm in the following words:

Behind the farm the stone mountains stood up against the sky. The farm buildings huddled like the little clinging aphids on the mountain skirts, crouched low to the ground as though the wind might blow them into the sea. [...] Two horses, a red cow and a red calf, half a dozen pigs and a flock of lean, multicolored chickens stocked the place. A little corn was raised on the sterile slope and it grew short and thick under the wind, and all the cobs formed on the landward sides of the stalks." (Steinbeck, 1938, p. 45).

As painted in a wild environment with a view of its crumbly building, the Torres' poor small farm ends the illustration of the initial situation. To draw a conclusion on the two illustrations practically making the opening paragraph of the story in "Flight," there is a need to underline that the precision of time and space made through preliminary words in one sentence defines the initial situation which even keeps on by describing the farm from outside and inside.

After the preliminary words and the description of the farm forming the opening paragraph, the story goes on with the introduction of the family. It begins with the mother whose name is followed by words of responsibility:

Mama Torres, a lean, dry woman with ancient eyes had ruled the farm for ten years, ever since her husband tripped over as a stone in the field one day and fell full length on a rattlesnake. When one is beaten on the chest' there is not much that can be done. (Steinbeck, 1938, p. 45)

This short portrait-paragraph wholly reads in two unbalanced sentences. From the first sentence, the longer one, the mother is well known by the name (Mama Torres), the state (a lean, dry woman with ancient eyes), and the title role (had ruled the farm for ten years). The mention of her responsibility ruling the farm not only suggests her marital status as a widow but, to refer to the second sentence, it also recalls the unforgettable scene of her husband's inevitable death after a snake's bite. That last sentence echoes the proverb "nobody can be expected to do the impossible" not to find her guilty looking at her husband passing away. It is relevant since that man, Mr Torres, the one after whom the family is called, was the only support for all of them. He died long before the events happening in "Flight" and left them that farm. The narration now turns into an evocation of a fatherless family headed by a lady, Mama Torres, playing a remarkable mother role among John Steinbeck's female characters even if Gladstein (2018, p. 137) has preference for Ma Joad of *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) with a justification: "In the mother category there is no one braver or more nurturing. She is always there for her family [...]" These words praising Ma Joad are also true for Mama Torres taking care of both the farm and the three children introduced in the third paragraph of the story:

"Mama Torres had three children, two undersized black ones of twelve and fourteen, Emilio and Rosy, whom Mama kept on fishing on the rock below the farm when sea was kind and when the truant officer was in some distant part of Monterey County. And there was Pepé, the tall smiling son of nineteen, a gentle, affectionate boy, but very lazy." (Steinbeck, 1938, pp. 45-46)

The narrator introduces Mama Torres with two of her children namely Emilio and Rosy who are respectively Pepé's brother and sister, both were under five when their father died. Now they are teenagers, they are among family members involved in the traditional activities, the most important one being fishing. Under the guidance of the dear mother, each of them has a role to play for the common welfare though they are still young. So, Emily and Rosy go fishing when possible since the right to work is not officially recognized for adolescents. As for Pepé, the elder child, he is not free from the necessity for everyone to do something for the family. The narration even keeps on telling more about him in the way of what Mama Torres expected from him:

Pepé had a tall head, pointed at the top, and from its peak, coarse black hair grew down like a thatch all around. Over his smiling little eyes Mama cut a straight bang so he could see. Pepé had sharp Indian cheek bones and an eagle nose, but his mouth was sweet and shapely as girl's mouth, and his chin was fragile and chiseled. He was loose and gangling, all legs and feet and wrists, and he was very lazy. Mama thought him fine and brave, but she never told him so (Steinbeck, 1938, p. 46).

The Torres' introduction naturally ends with a focus on Pepé who becomes the hero of the family by the will of his mother. The details of his portrait help identify a Mexican Indian. There is no doubt about such an identification because of his "sharp Indian cheek bones and an eagle nose" along with the Spanish names (if through the story one knows his first name, Pepé, one also guesses his last name, Torres). This identity is true for Pepé and all the Torres family. They represent Mexican Indians or, to get a precision, Mexican Americans, as the story is told in an ethnic fictional context of the United States of America. Even Laws (2009, p. 33) comes to support this representation by writing what follows: "With his portrayal of Pepé in "Flight" and later Mexican stories, Steinbeck was one of the first American writers to portray sympathetic Hispanic characters". Thus, the Torres in "Flight" are Mexican Indian born Americans. Under the cover of Steinbeck's inspiration, it is not a fictitious identity because the narrator only reports it and the Torres as characters really bear it. Over and above the recognition of their origins, they have no other life experience than that one of Indians living in a rural area where Mr Torres, a brave and craftsman, left them. Thinking about her late husband while looking at Pepé, to repeat what the narrator said at the end of his portrait, Mama Torres wanted him to be "fine and brave" (Steinbeck, 1938, p. 46), even though she kept it for herself. Mama Torres always remembers the past and wants her elder son to be a man so as to play main roles in the image of his late father. She wants everything for the sake of the family to mean that a man is always needed in an Indian family.

At this level, the development has gone through the first point making the analysis of the Torres family and its farm in the periphery of Monterey. It is necessary to note that the initial situation of the story and the introduction of the Torres coming next shape the elements that begin a tale. Reading the three opening paragraphs of "Flight" helps paying attention on the announcement of time. They sound as if one was told: "once upon a time, there was a mother called Mama Torres living in a farm in the periphery of Monterey with her three children: Pepé, Emilio and Rosy." These elements make the assimilation of "Flight" as a folktale possible and even clearer than in Steinbeck's *The Pearl* since in this novel the beginning of the story is not formally that of a folktale but it only "means it with the description of the brush house brought out from the first three paragraphs. And the initial situation is consequently recognized with Kino's family introduced later on" (Loumbouzi, 2019, p. 195). The comparison between the two Steinbeck's texts is not made by chance, "*The Pearl*, published in 1947, has much in common with "Flight" written eight years earlier" (Ariki, 2006, p. 85).

3. Pepé's mission to town and its consequences

Tracing Pepé's mission to town and its consequences contributes to the materialization of the second concern with the form of the folktale in "Flight." It is a reference to the functions of characters which are the fundamental parts of a folktale (Propp, 1970, p. 35). In his study, Propp (1970, pp. 36-80) mentioned 31 functions of characters. For illustration in "Flight," they are taken into account without treating all details. In fact, their use is limited to the precision made in a footnote (Propp, 1970, p. 35) obliging the reader to look first what is printed in capitals, a kind of title-sentence announcing the function, before a deep scrutiny. Each function is then illustrated by an event defining a stage of the story. Concerning the case in study, the analysis deals with what happens to the hero, Pepé, while he is given a mission. He is a hero not as an exceptional man according to the classical understanding of the term but as a male character playing the main role in the events according to the story-telling process. So, instead of all functions presented by Propp, nine of them only are circumscribed for the analysis as they significantly shape the different stages of the hero's mission from the beginning to the end.

Function one: a member of the family moves away. It is precisely the hero who moves away. To mention Pepé, one of the Torres, it happens that he goes to town by the decision of his mother wanting him to be concerned with the family in the absence of the father who died ten years ago. Now the family is in need of some essential things which can only be bought in town, an area not common to the young Torres, Mama Torres has a mission for him: "Pepé, I have a labor for thee" (Steinbeck, 1938, p. 46). And she can justify it: "Look!" Mama cried. "Big Lazy you must catch the horse and put on him thy father's saddle. You must ride to Monterey. The medicine bottle is empty. There is no salt. Go thou now, Peanut Catch the horse." (Steinbeck, 1938, p. 47). The mission is vital for the family and Pepé must do it. He really goes to town alone for the first time to buy salt and medicines. The separation scene clearly reads:

"Adios, Mama," Pepé cried. "I will come back soon. You may send me often alone"
 "Thou art foolish chicken."

He straightened his shoulders, flipped the reins against the horse's shoulder and rode away. He turned once and saw that they still watched him, Emilio and Rosy and Mama. Pepé lifted with pride and gladness and lifted the tough buckskin horse to a trot (Steinbeck, 1938, p. 49).

He moves away from the family for a moment since his going to town announces his coming back to the farm where the things to buy are strongly needed.

Function two: the hero disobeys order. Of course, Pepé breaks Mama's instructions. At his departure, he is given some instructions by his mother for the success of the mission. Apart from things to buy, she limits Pepé's short stay in town to Mrs Rodriguez's house for dinner and sleeping and to church for praying. She said: "[...] Our friends Mrs Rodriguez will give you dinner and maybe the bed for the night. When you go to the church say only ten Pasternoster and twenty-five Ave Marias. [...]" (Steinbeck, 1938, pp. 48-49). In town, Pepé does not obey the order. He is not seen at church but at Mrs Rodriguez where he unfortunately has neither eaten nor spent a night. The conversation with Mama explains it:

"[...] I thought you would be sleeping at the house of Mrs Rodriguez." Pepé stood silently in the dark room. "[...] Did you drink wine?"
 "Sí, Mama." (Steinbeck, 1938, p. 51)

Rather than staying quietly in town, Pepé only drinks wine at the house of Mrs Rodriguez and no passage gives information about him to know if he goes to church, as required by Mama Torres who only requires him a practice common to most of Mexican Indians in such circumstances because of their deep attachment to catholic belief which main prayers are "Pasternoster" and "Ave Maria."

Function three: the hero kills someone. It is the case of Pepé who kills the unnamed man at Mrs Rodriguez. In truth, he kills the man who insults him while drinking wine at Mrs Rodriguez after buying what he was sent to town for. He tries to explain how it happened:

A few people came into the kitchen of Mrs Rodriguez. There was wine to drink. Pepé drank wine. The little quarrel—the man started toward Pepé and then the knife—it went almost by itself. It flew, it darted before Pepé knew it. As he talked, Mama's face grew stern, and it seemed to grow more lean. Pepé finished. "I am a man now, Mama. The man said names to me I could not allow." (Steinbeck, 1938, pp. 51-52)

Despite his young age, the hero drinks a lot while he is only supposed to have dinner at Mrs Rodriguez's and there is a quarrel pushing him to kill the insulting man who has also been drinking a lot. Beyond the fact that everything seems to occur under the effect of wine, the hero justifies his crime because he is an Indian who not only never tolerates racist insults but also bears a knife from his father and "it went almost by itself". Finally, the hero claims to be a man to justify his behaviour what Mama confirms after listening to his version: "Mama nodded. "Yes, thou art a man, my poor little Pepé. Thou art a man. I have seen it coming on thee. I have watched you throwing the knife into the past, and I have been afraid" (Steinbeck, 1938, p. 52). Does Pepé use the knife for reason? That is another debate. For sure, Pepé kills the insulting man with a knife.

Function four: the hero comes back home. Pepé does it as he comes back to their farm. After a short stay in town, he joins back his family with salt, candles and medicines—and something more though invisible. He nightly returns to the farm. The mother is not really surprised by his coming back home but by the way he is coming into the house:

Pepé walked wearily up the three steps and into the house. It was dark inside. There was a rustle in the corner.

Mama cried out from her bed. "Who comes? Pepé, is it thou?"

"Sí, Mama."

"Did you get the medicine?"

"Sí, Mama." (Steinbeck, 1938, p. 51)

Pepé could be back from town earlier than he was supposed to come back provided that he brings everything needed. The problem is that he brings something more, something not ordered—that is trouble from town— which makes him standing for long even when Mama asked him to go to bed: "Well go to sleep, then. [...] Pepé stood silently in the dark room. Why do you stand there?" (Steinbeck, 1938, p. 51). Only the justification of his trouble in town makes him moving. Anyway, he is at home.

Function five: the family helps the hero escape. All family members, Mama Torres with her two other children, do not simply welcome Pepé, they also help him escape to the mountains. When he joins back the house, instead of going to bed, Pepé first suggests his escape before justifying it: "Light the candle, Mama. I must go away into the mountains" (Steinbeck, 1938, p. 51). He has to go because of the crime committed in town. What Mama does not reject calling her two other children to assist him:

"Come we must get you ready. Go. Awaken Emilio and Rosy. Go quickly."

Pepé stepped over to the corner where his brother and sister slept among the sheepskins. He leaned down and shook them gently. "Come, Rosy! Come, Emilio! The mama says you must arise." (Steinbeck, 1938, p. 52)

Like the mother, Emilio and Rosy break their sleeping for the elder brother, Pepé. Primary solidarity within this poor fatherless family, very poor as proved by their beds made of sheepskins, is then needed: "Mama was out of bed now, her long black skirt over her nightgown. "Emilio," she cried. "Go up and catch the other horse Emilio put his leg in his overalls and stumbled sleepily out the door for Pepé. Quickly." " (Steinbeck, 1938, p. 52). Mama Torres and her children are busy preparing things for Pepé's escape. No one of the Torres stands aside and looks. It is a family concern.

Function six: the hero escapes to the mountains. In the story, Pepé flies to the mountains. As soon as everything gets ready and advice given, the time for separation comes:

[...] Pepé kissed her [Mama] on both cheeks. Then he went to Emilio and Rosy and kissed both of their cheeks.

Pepé turned back to Mama [...] "Go now," she said. [...]

Pepé pulled himself into the saddle. "I am a man," he said.

It was the first dawn when he rode up the hill toward the little canyon which let a trail into the mountains (Steinbeck, 1938, p. 54).

Pepé has really left the farm for the mountains while Mama and the other children are looking at him. They seem to guess that he has gone for ever and the separation transforms into a wailing scene:

When the grey shape of Pepé melted into the hillside and disappeared, Mama relaxed. She began the high, whining keen of the death wail. "Our beautiful—our brave," she cried. "Our protector, our son is gone." Emilio and Rosy moaned beside her "Our beautiful—our brave, our son is gone." It was a formal wail. It rose to a high piercing whine and subsided to a moan. Mam raised it three times and then turned and went into the house and shut the door (Steinbeck, 1938,p. 54).

In reality, Emilio and Rosy's "formal wail" is only tracing the separation, the long separation between the family and Pepé whose only symbol of existence remains the mountains where he has to stop his flight for ever.

Function seven: the hero is hunted. That is Pepé who is tracked. The tracks of persons hunting the hero are visible:

Pepé looked suspiciously back every minute or so, and his eyes sought the tops of the ridges ahead.

Once, on a white barren spur, he saw a black figure for a moment, but he looked quickly away, for it

was one of the dark watchers. No one knew who the watchers were, nor where they lived, but it was better to ignore them and never to show interest in them (Steinbeck, 1938, p. 58).

In his flight, Pepé notices a human presence behind him. While the story is going on, the hunting of the hero is tracing itself progressively:

Pepé looked up to the top of the next dry withered ridge. He saw a dark form against the sky, a man's figure standing on top of a rock, and he glanced away quickly not to appear curious. When a moment later he looked up again the figure was gone (Steinbeck, 1938, p. 59).

Pepé is hunted as it happened to Kino running away through mountains in *The Pearl* telling a Mexican Indian story:

In the distance he could see three figures, two on foot and one on horse- back. But he knew what they were, and a chill of fear went through him. Even in the distance he could see the two on foot moving slowly along, bent low to the ground. Here, one would pause and look at the earth, while the other joined him. They were the trackers [...] (Steinbeck, 1976, pp. 77-78)

Pepé and Kino experience the same threat to mean their common destiny of Mexican Indian hero. The determination of the trackers does not make them stop running. The hunting is going on against the will of the Mexican Indian hero getting ready for the sacrifice of his life.

Function eight: the hero is confronted to his hunters. Pepé has to fight those tracking him on the mountains:

A moment later Pepé heard the sound, the faint far crash of horses' hooves on gravel. And he heard something else whining yelp of a dog.

Pepé took his rifle in his left hand and he glided into the brush almost as quietly as the lion had (Steinbeck, 1938, p. 67).

Pepé is facing the confrontation which ferocity makes him pray desperately: "Pepé bowed his head quickly. He tried to speak rapid words but only a thick hiss came from his lips. He drew a shaky cross on his breast with his left hand" (Steinbeck, 1938, pp. 69-70). As a catholic, he has just signed to leave the fight to God. However, the choice of the mountains as a refuge is meaningful: they represent a source of protection and survival for Mexican Indians very closed to nature. In fact, "Steinbeck's Mexican-Indians do not merely share a bond with nature but are one with it" (Skipper, 2004, p. 87).

Function nine: the hero dies in the mountains. Pepé is killed in the mountains during the fight. The last two paragraphs of the short story read about his death. The first paragraph describes the cause of the death:

"There came a tripping sound at his feet. A piece of stone flew up and a bullet droned off into the next gorge. The hollow crash echoed up from below. Pepé looked down for a moment and then pulled himself straight again" (Steinbeck, 1938, p. 70).

The second one describes Pepé's ultimate battle against death. It even has not been possible for Pepé to pray for the last time since another crash sounds while his hand is about to sign the cross on the breast:

His body jarred back. His left hand fluttered helplessly towards his breast. The second crash sounded from below. Pepé swung forward and toppled from the rock. His body struck and rolled over and over, starting a little avalanche. And when at last he stopped against a bush, the avalanche slid slowly down and covered up his head (Steinbeck, 1938, p.70).

Each detail of both paragraphs sounds significant that they are fully quoted to mean Pepé's tragic end due to the trackers because he is Indian and he has killed someone in town. Paying attention on Pepé's case, Ariki (2006, p. 94) notices that "In "Flight," [...] we can see Steinbeck's growing concern for the persecuted Indians and, on a broader scale, for persecuted people in general."

Having looked at Pepé's mission to town and its consequences, the development has gone all along the analysis of the second point. Nine functions have been identified to present Pepé's mission. All these functions define the different stages of "Flight" as a folktale may be going on in conformity with Propp's theory. They are mainly concerned with Pepé to talk about the hero's

functions. Playing his roles, he becomes the most visible character and is seen everywhere while the other main characters being members of his family are only seen in the farm located in the periphery very distant from both the town and the mountains where events also take place. The story in "Flight" is a sort of travel story as it is told following Pepé's actions from the farm to town, from town to the farm, and from the farm to the mountains. At this last step, in spite of the distance, mountains look as if they have only preceded Pepé and when he dies there they are symbolically together: the man plus the place where he dies form one. His death in the mountains denotes a Mexican Indian tradition as Skipper (2004, p. 78) explains it. This tradition founds the claim for land by Indian Americans or Native Americans in general and Mexican Indians in particular. They finally maintain a kind of survival with the mountains even in the case of their nowadays physical absence within or around the area. Anyway, "Flight" illustrates the regional dimension of the writer John Steinbeck whose stories tell more about California, his homeland bearing much from Mexico.

4. Conclusion

The conclusion on this analysis is supposed to draw a significance from Steinbeck's suggested concern with the folktale. It may first be recalled that the first cover page of the collection from which "Flight" is extracted fully reads: "*The Long Valley/Stories* by John Steinbeck/Including *The Red Pony*." No doubt that being among stories presented as such by the editor and the author, "Flight" remains a short story as accepted by critics, but it has inspired a debate on its own form. The organisation of its text shows particularities drawing attention to look at it through a structuralist perspective. The first three paragraphs clearly announce that events start in the periphery of Monterey where is located the Torres whose identity is given at the same time. In so doing, "Flight" brings out the initial situation as well as the introduction of the hero and his family which keeps on with what the hero does as reconstructed in chronological stages to mean his functions, in other words, Pepé's functions embodied in his mission to town and its consequences: salt, candles, and medicines bought, the insulting man killed, the escape to mountains, and lastly fatal confrontation with trackers. This structural aspect of "Flight" as a folktale or simply a tale according to Propp's theory is strengthened by its cultural aspect to the extent that a tale is always related to a given people's tradition. The tradition in question here is that of Mexican Indians defining people among Natives of Mexico much closed to nature, using Spanish and deeply catholic. Since those Mexican Indians are involved in events occurring in the U.S. context, "Flight" tells a Mexican-American tale. By its shortness and its process, "Flight" undoubtedly matches both a folktale structure as the functions of characters sustain it and a Mexican Indian reality as the Torres family expresses it. The writing of a story in folktale form should be taken into account as an illustration of Steinbeck's both "instinctive feeling for folklore [...]" to quote Covici, Jr (1971, p. 2) and "intimate tie to Mexican culture and history," to cite Pugh (2018, p.132). In fact, Steinbeck has created "Flight" in a form which helps Mexican Americans express themselves to mean his compassion towards them as marginalized people. Shortly speaking, he renders a folktale not a short story in writing "Flight."

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Acknowledgement: sincere thanks are expressed to colleagues who read this paper for their contributions.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Ariki, K. (2006). From "Flight" to *The Pearl*: A Thematic Study. *Steinbeck Review and Steinbeck Studies* 3 (1), 85-95.
- [2] Augenbraum, H. (2017). Translating Steinbeck. *Steinbeck Review* 14(1), 52-64.
- [3] Covici jr, P. (Ed). (1971). *The Portable Steinbeck*. Viking Press.
- [4] *Encarta Encyclopedia International Edition*, 2008.
- [5] Gladstein, M. R. (2018). An Artist of Range and Breadth: Commemorating Steinbeck. *Steinbeck Review* 15 (2), 136-146.
- [6] Laws, D. A. (2009). The Settings for the stories: A Tour of John Steinbeck's "Valley of the World." *Steinbeck Review* 6 (1), 27- 43.
- [7] Loumbouzi D. A. (jan-juin 2019). John Steinbeck's *The Pearl*: A Structuralist Approach. *CLASS* (7), 192-198.
- [8] Propp, V. (1970) *Morphologie du Conte*. (2nd ed). Seuil.
- [9] Pugh, S. (2018). Greatness at a Distance: A Commemorative of the Work of John Steinbeck. *Steinbeck Review* 15 (2), 122-135.
- [10] Skipper, E. (2004). Death in the Hills: The Mountains as Place of Refuge and Dying for Steinbeck's Mexican Characters. *The Steinbeck Review* 1 (2), 78-88.
- [11] Steinbeck, J. (1938). "Flight" in *The Long Valley*. Viking Press, 45-70
- [12] ----- (1939). *The Grapes of Wrath*. Viking Press.
- [13] ----- (1976). *The Pearl*. (2nd ed). Pan Books.