

JOHN STEINBECK

The Moon Is Down

*Introduction by* DONALD V. COERS

PENGUIN BOOKS



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## THE MOON IS DOWN

Born in Salinas, California, in 1902, JOHN STEINBECK grew up in a fertile agricultural valley about twenty-five miles from the Pacific Coast—and both valley and coast would serve as settings for some of his best fiction. In 1919 he went to Stanford University, where he intermittently enrolled in literature and writing courses until he left in 1925 without taking a degree. During the next five years he supported himself as a laborer and journalist in New York City, all the time working on his first novel, *Cup of Gold* (1929). After marriage and a move to Pacific Grove, he published two California books, *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932) and *To a God Unknown* (1933), and worked on short stories later collected in *The Long Valley* (1938). Popular success and financial security came only with *Tortilla Flat* (1935), stories about Monterey's paisanos. A ceaseless experimenter throughout his career, Steinbeck changed courses regularly. Three powerful novels of the late 1930s focused on the California laboring class: *In Dubious Battle* (1936), *Of Mice and Men* (1937), and the book considered by many his finest, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). Early in the 1940s, Steinbeck became a filmmaker with *The Forgotten Village* (1941) and a serious student of marine biology with *Sea of Cortez* (1941). He devoted his services to the war, writing *Bombs Away* (1942) and the controversial play-novelet *The Moon Is Down* (1942). *Cannery Row* (1945), *The Wayward Bus* (1948), another experimental drama, *Burning Bright* (1950), and *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* (1951) preceded publication of the monumental *East of Eden* (1952), an ambitious saga of the Salinas Valley and his own family history. The last decades of his life were spent in New York City and Sag Harbor with his third wife, with whom he traveled widely. Later books include *Sweet Thursday* (1954), *The Short Reign of Pippin IV: A Fabrication* (1957), *Once There Was a War* (1958), *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961), *Travels with Charley in Search of America* (1962), *America and Americans* (1966), and the post-humously published *Journal of a Novel: The East of Eden Letters* (1969), *Viva Zapata!* (1975), *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights* (1976), and *Working Days: The Journals of The Grapes of Wrath* (1989). He died in 1968, having won a Nobel Prize in 1962.

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# INTRODUCTION

By the summer of 1940, a little more than a year after the publication of *The Grapes of Wrath*, the Nazis had engulfed much of Europe. John Steinbeck was by then a world-class author. He was also both a clear-eyed political realist who understood that U.S. involvement in the war was inevitable, and a patriot eager to contribute to the Allies' cause. That spring he had been in Mexico writing the screenplay for *The Forgotten Village*, and he had been troubled because it seemed to him that in Latin America the Nazis were outclassing the Allies in propaganda. He was so concerned, in fact, that on June 26, four days after France signed an armistice with Germany, he met with President Roosevelt to discuss the problem. There is no record to indicate that the president took any advice Steinbeck might have offered, but the writer's enthusiasm for fighting fascism was not dampened. Over the next two or three years he served voluntarily in several of the government intelligence and information agencies created between 1940 and 1942.

Two of the organizations Steinbeck worked for were precursors of the CIA: the Office of Coordinator of Information (COI) and the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). Both were headed by Colonel William J. "Wild Bill" Donovan, a Republican New York lawyer who was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor during the First World War. Despite his political conservatism, Donovan was an open-minded administrator who encouraged fresh ideas and was willing to employ unorthodox techniques and outré people to achieve his goals. He was also particularly interested in civilian morale and, consequently, in propaganda.

While Steinbeck was working for the COI, probably in midsummer of 1941, he and Donovan discussed the idea that Steinbeck might write a work of propaganda. At the same time, Steinbeck's duties at COI brought him into contact with displaced citizens from the recently occupied countries of Europe, among them Norway and Denmark (invaded in April of 1940), and France, Belgium, and the Netherlands (overrun in May and June). The refugees intrigued Steinbeck with stories about the activities of underground resistance movements in their native lands. Over twenty years later Steinbeck recounted in an article entitled "Reflections on a Lunar Eclipse" how the exile information helped him decide what kind of propaganda he would write.

The experiences of the victim nations, while they differed in some degree with national psychologies, had many things in common. At the time of invasion there had been confusion in some of the nations there were secret Nazi parties, there were spies and turncoats. [The Norwegian Nazi, Vidkun] Quisling has left his name as a synonym for traitor. Then there were collaborators, some moved by fear and others simply for advancement and profit. Finally there were the restrictive measures of the Germans, their harsh demands and savage punishment. All of these factors had to be correlated and understood before an underground movement could form and begin to take action.

By September 1941 Steinbeck had decided to write a work of fiction using what he had learned about the psychological effects of enemy occupation upon the populace of conquered nations. Because he “did not believe people are very different in essentials,” he originally set his story in America:

I wrote my fictional account about a medium-sized American town with its countryside of the kind I knew well. There would be collaborators certainly. Don't forget the Bund meetings in our cities, the pro-German broadcasts before the war and the kind of man who loves a little success: “Mussolini made the trains run on time.” “Hitler saved Germany from communism.” It was not beyond reason that our town would have its cowards, its citizens who sold out for profit. But under this, I did and do believe, would be the hard core that could not be defeated. And so I wrote my account basing its fiction on facts extracted from towns already under the Nazi heel.

Steinbeck submitted his “fictional account” for approval to another of Donovan's agencies, the Foreign Information Service. Officials there rejected it because they feared that postulating an American defeat might be demoralizing. Steinbeck's refugee friends, certain that his story would boost morale in their already occupied homelands, urged him to circumvent official objections by shifting the setting. He took their advice and placed the story in an unnamed country, “cold and sterile like Norway, cunning and implacable like Denmark, reasonable like France.”

Steinbeck finished his revised version just in time for Pearl Harbor, and Viking Press published it as a short novel, *The Moon Is Down*, in early March of 1942. The next month it played on Broadway, and a year later premiered as a movie. Its title comes from the beginning of act 2 of *Macbeth*. Just before Banquo and Fleance encounter Macbeth on his way to murder Duncan, Banquo asks his son, “How goes the night, boy?” Fleance replies, “The moon is down; I have not heard the clock,” foreshadowing the descent of evil on the kingdom. Steinbeck's allusion suggests that the Nazis had brought a similar spiritual darkness to Europe.

*The Moon Is Down* appeared in bookstores during the bleakest days of the war for the United States. While Americans reeled from Pearl Harbor, the Japanese overran much of Southeast Asia and seized strategic islands dotting vast expanses of the Pacific Ocean until they were poised within striking distance of the northern coast of Australia. The Doolittle raids, America's first flicker of hope, were still a month away, and it would be three months before the first Japanese defeat, the Battle of Midway. The picture looked equally grim for America's allies in Europe. Hitler's crushing offensive continued unchecked, and the first shots in the watershed Battle of Stalingrad would not be fired for another nine or ten months. As U.S. factories frenetically retooled from consumer goods to war matériel, German U-boats lurked along the Gulf and Atlantic coasts, sinking Allied ships faster than they could be replaced and threatening supply lines to Britain. The Allies' great fear in March 1942 was that they might not be able to hold out long enough for American troops and industrial might

help reverse the course of the war.

Understandably, when *The Moon Is Down* came out late that dreary winter, the critics were more interested in predicting its potential as propaganda than in weighing its merits as literature. But Steinbeck's method was far subtler than that of the overcooked rant customarily served up in the country at the time. His anonymous setting, for instance, is simply a peace-loving country, very much like Norway, which is invaded suddenly and without provocation by a much stronger neighbor, very much like Germany. To be sure, Steinbeck leaves no doubt whom he has in mind. Officers in the invading army allude to "the Leader" of their homeland and to his bringing a "new order" to Europe. There is a reference to the Leader's country's having fought Belgium and France twenty years earlier—an unsubtle reminder of Germany's repeat performance in the European theater. Beyond such hints Steinbeck refused to adopt the contemporary Teutonic stereotypes. There are no heel-clicking Hunns, no depraved, monocled intellectuals, no thundering *sieg heils* in his fable-like tale. Instead, Steinbeck depicts his putative Germans as human beings with normal feelings. They offer the citizens of the conquered country justifications for their invasion. They plead for understanding. They miss their families. They want their victims to accept them. Yet nothing can disguise their theft of freedom, and eventually the local patriots' desire to regain it impels them to resist. The militarily superior invaders retaliate, but the impression remains that ultimately the patriots will prevail because a society of free individuals is stronger in the long run than a totalitarian power dependent on herd men. In the mayoral words, "It is always the herd men who win battles and the free men who win wars."

Steinbeck's affirmative, toned-down approach to propaganda in *The Moon Is Down* touched off the fiercest literary battle of the Second World War. Many critics liked the novel, but some did not, and their number included such formidable names as Clifton Fadiman and James Thurber. In effect, the detractors accused Steinbeck of naïveté. The creator of the savvy, muscular realism of *The Grapes of Wrath* was now being soft on the Nazis by depicting them as human beings and by infusing his story with a fuzzy, fairy-tale atmosphere. Doubtless well-intentioned but poorly conceived, Steinbeck's propaganda would surely demoralize the victims of Nazi aggression in occupied Europe—the very people he wanted to help. The proper way to raise a fighting spirit among a brutalized populace, one critic intoned, was with hard-hitting hype bearing a title like "Guts in the Mud," not with "soft and dreamy" stuff like *The Moon Is Down*.

The controversy raged for months in major newspapers and magazines—most prominently *The New York Times*, the *Herald Tribune*, *The New Yorker*, *The New Republic*, and the *Saturday Review*. To be sure, *The Moon Is Down* had its defenders. In fact, more critics praised than criticized it. But the attacks blindsided Steinbeck. For years he had been praised as a skilled artist with socially enlightened views—a proletarian writer with polish. Suddenly he found himself savaged for a well-meaning contribution to the war effort. The criticism was corrosive, calling into question not only his artistic instincts, but, far worse, his political acumen, his credentials as an antifascist, and his very patriotism. Steinbeck was wounded, and his wounds were still tender over ten years later when he referred sarcastically to his detractors, chiefly Fadiman and Thurber, in an essay entitled "My Short Novels."

The war came on, and I wrote *The Moon Is Down* as a kind of celebration of the durability of democracy. I couldn't conceive that the book would be denounced. I had written of Germans as men, not supermen, and this was considered a very weak attitude to take. I couldn't make much

sense out of this, and it seems absurd now that we know the Germans were men, and the fallible, even defeatable. It was said that I didn't know anything about war, and this was perfectly true, though how Park Avenue commandos found me out I can't conceive.

The debate died long before the war ended, and after the war the political and philosophical issues had spawned were moot. There were early indications that, as Steinbeck had intended, *The Moon Is Down* had found a receptive audience in Nazi-occupied Europe. King Haakon VII gave him a medal honoring the novel's influence in Norway, and European scholars occasionally mentioned its wartime popularity, but for nearly a half century the supporting details remained scattered and anecdotal. No one knew how effective Steinbeck's contribution had been.

Over the last few years new evidence has emerged that documents the extraordinarily positive reception of *The Moon Is Down* in Nazi-occupied Western Europe, and confirms the novel's success as propaganda. Throughout Norway, Denmark, Holland, and France, it was translated, printed on clandestine presses, and distributed, sometimes under the very nose of the Gestapo. The underground operations involved lawyers, book dealers, retired military personnel, housewives, businesspeople, students, and teachers who took great risks to disseminate *The Moon Is Down* because it spoke directly to them and to their situation and so persuasively supported their cause. Their explanations of its effectiveness are remarkably similar: Somehow an author living thousands of miles away in a land of peace sensed precisely how they felt as victims of Nazi aggression. It never occurred to them that the novel was sympathetic to their enemy. In fact, they regarded it as far more effective than the prevailing formula propaganda, which struck them as comical because it was so absurdly exaggerated. And the Nazis certainly did not think the novel treated them favorably. They banned it wherever they were in control. A member of the resistance in Italy reported that mere possession of it meant an automatic death sentence.

In spite of the Nazis' efforts to suppress *The Moon Is Down*, hundreds of thousands of copies of the Norwegian, Danish, Dutch, and French clandestine editions circulated during the occupation. It was easily the most popular work of propaganda in occupied Western Europe. The efforts put forth by the resistance and by ordinary citizens to distribute the novel within their respective countries, and the risks they took in doing so, bear witness to the importance they attached to it.

The illegal Norwegian-language edition of *The Moon Is Down* was translated in Sweden by a forty-year-old exile named Nils Lie. Before the invasion of his homeland, Lie had been chief consultant for Gyldendal Publishers. Gyldendal had brought out translations of *Tortilla Flat*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *The Grapes of Wrath* in 1938, 1939, and 1940, respectively. Late in 1942, several thousand copies of Lie's translation of *The Moon Is Down* were printed by a Swedish press on tissue-thin paper, bound with soft covers, and smuggled into Norway. Some were spirited across isolated points along the thousand-mile border between Sweden and Norway, and a few were dropped from airplanes, but the bulk were cached in luggage carried by regular rail lines. Most of the small, easily concealed pamphlet editions got past the control stations; apparently, a few did not, because officials in the Nazi puppet government in Norway were almost immediately aware of the existence of the specific translation. They were so uneasy about its possible effects on the Norwegian people that, in December

when thirty-six copies were confiscated in courier luggage shipped to Oslo from Sweden, six were sent immediately to the head of the state police and to the president of the puppet government himself—the infamous Quisling. Thousands of unconfiscated copies were delivered by the Norwegian resistance to reliable citizens, who passed them along to friends. Frits von der Lippe, a wartime employee at Gyldendal in Oslo, related nearly forty years later how he became a typical “distributor of the novel:

An astonishing thing happened [to me] in 1943. In the middle of the day in Oslo’s main thoroughfare, Karl Johan Street, among uniformed people and civilians who might be dangerous, a man came up on the side of me and said, whispering, “Follow me. I have something for you. Something you shall distribute.” I knew the face, but not the name. I said to him, “Why here, now?” He said, “I came this morning, and I leave tonight, when I have delivered what I have in the suitcase.” “Back to Sweden?” I said. “Yes.” Then we went from Karl Johan over to Stortengade, the next street, and went into a house with an elevator with seven stops and traveled up and down, up and down, until we were alone. Then this man gave me four or five packages and said, “Go straight home.” And he put me out on the fifth stop and went down the elevator, and I’ve not seen him since. I went home and opened up one of the small packages and found the small copies of *Natt uten måne* [the Norwegian title of *The Moon Is Down*].

Such was the popularity of *The Moon Is Down* in Norway during the occupation that in the middle of June of 1945, just five weeks after the liberation, a new legal edition was in bookstores. At that time in Norway an average printing for a novel was between one thousand and two thousand copies. *The Moon Is Down* came out in two printings of ten thousand copies each, both of which quickly sold out. The play version was performed immediately after the Oslo national theater reopened, only four months after the liberation. A Norwegian critic hailed *The Moon Is Down* as “the epic of the Norwegian underground.”

A uniquely qualified witness to the novel’s effectiveness as propaganda in Norway was William Colby, later director of the Central Intelligence Agency under two presidents, Nixon and Ford. One of the few Americans on the scene during the occupation, Colby served during the early spring of 1945 in a special operations unit of ski paratroopers attached to the Office of Strategic Services. He had read *The Moon Is Down* three years earlier and was “tremendously impressed” by how well Steinbeck had captured the Norwegian national mood.

In occupied Denmark, the first illegal Danish-language edition of *The Moon Is Down* was translated by two young law students, Jørgen Jacobsen and Paul Lang. They had received a copy of the American edition shortly before Christmas of 1942, along with a request for a Danish translation from a student resistance group known simply as the Danish Students. Its members hoped that distribution of the novel in Denmark would embolden the resistance movement there. Jacobsen and Lang completed the translation in one week. They worked day and night with a concise *Oxford English Dictionary* in one hand and a glass of beer in the other, glancing over their shoulders for the Gestapo. An anonymous

comrade in the Danish Students delivered it to another member for printing. A short time after that other printers with connections to the student resistance were assembling separate clandestine editions of Jacobsen and Lang's translation. Perhaps the most productive of these printers was Moger Staffeldt, a Copenhagen bookseller then in his late twenties who had been involved in resistance activities from the day the Germans invaded his country. Staffeldt hocked his life insurance policy to buy the mimeograph machine he used to crank out copies of *The Moon Is Down* in his bookstore. The bookstore, located on the town square, was on the bottom floor of the building which housed Gestapo headquarters for Copenhagen. But the steady traffic of Gestapo entering and leaving the building twenty-four hours a day failed to slow Staffeldt's operations. At the time, the Nazis regarded Denmark as a "model protectorate" and were eager to mollify its citizenry. Staffeldt turned that attitude to his advantage. On several occasions when loyal Danish students came to his bookstore to pick up disguised bundles of *The Moon Is Down* and other forbidden titles for delivery to various distribution centers, Staffeldt stepped out of his store, summoned passing Gestapo officers, and enlisted their aid in loading the anti-Nazi literature. "Don't just stand there," he would scold; "help these kids!" The enemy's secret police invariably responded by scrambling about in unwitting service to the Danish resistance.

Staffeldt alone mimeographed fifteen thousand copies of *The Moon Is Down*. The Danish students delivered them to reliable contacts in other bookshops or in large businesses such as banks or shipping firms. These contacts in turn sold them to trusted customers or employees. The proceeds went to the resistance. Eventually the translation was in such demand that many citizens retyped it and ran off new mimeograph editions for further circulation among their friends. Each mimeograph master yielded a limited number of copies, so the entire novel had to be retyped again and again. Later in the occupation another Danish translation with a different title appeared. It too was widely distributed.

As in Norway, the appeal of *The Moon Is Down* in occupied Denmark was attested to after the war ended by the immediate publication of a regular trade edition. The first run was of five thousand copies. That was followed by a second printing of eight thousand copies in 1961, a third of ten thousand in 1962, and additional printings in 1974, 1976, and 1980—remarkable quantities for a country whose population today is only five million.

The illegal Dutch-language version of *The Moon Is Down* was prepared by Ferdinand Sterneberg who was a forty-three-year-old actor living in Amsterdam when the Nazis overran his country in May of 1940. Early in 1944 a friend with ties to an underground publishing firm known as De Bizige E (the Busy Bee) brought him an English-language edition and asked him to translate it. Sterneberg, a longtime admirer of Steinbeck, agreed. The Busy Bee edition came out later that year in a run of over one thousand copies. These sold at a high price—today roughly equivalent to between two and three hundred dollars apiece—because the proceeds were directed to a resistance organization providing relief for actors and actresses thrown out of work for refusing to join the Nazi-sponsored cultural guild.

Sterneberg, who used the nom de guerre Tjebbo Hemelrijk, also prepared a Dutch-language stage version of *The Moon Is Down*, from which he gave dramatic readings in Amsterdam, in The Hague, and in the countryside. According to Sterneberg, he presented his one-man show to audiences of between twenty-five and fifty people, whom he always prepared for the possibility of a Gestapo raid. Immediately before and after these readings Sterneberg and his friends sold copies of his translation. After more than fifty performances he was forced to quit. He had been hiding in his apartment two

Jewish friends, a brother and sister. They lived with him throughout the occupation, and escaped discovery during those years only because of meticulous precautions. “Untrustworthy” neighbors lived in the apartment below, so Sterneberg’s friends could not move around, use the bathroom, draw water, or even talk when he was gone. Sterneberg could not in good conscience continue leaving them in such danger and discomfort for the long periods of absence his readings required.

After the war Sterneberg and his fellow actors gave many performances of the dramatic version *The Moon Is Down*. The Busy Bee also brought out a new edition of the novel. Ironically, because the publishers had access to better quality paper during the war than immediately following the liberation, the new edition was inferior to the one published secretly during the occupation. Several fine Dutch editions have been published since.

The French clandestine edition of *The Moon Is Down* was released in February 1944, six months before the liberation of Paris. Its printing of fifteen hundred copies was the largest of the entire war undertaken by a Parisian underground press aptly named Editions de Minuit (Midnight Editions). The translation was by Yvonne Paraf, a young woman who had adopted the nom de guerre Yvonne Desvignes. She was a childhood friend of the printer for Midnight Editions. Paraf worked from an English-language edition of *The Moon Is Down* published two years earlier in Sweden. She knew that a French translation had already been published in Switzerland in 1943, but she and other members of the French resistance wanted a new one, because Swiss officials had censored passages that might have offended the Germans. The Swiss had deleted Steinbeck’s references to England, to the war in Russia, and to the occupation of Belgium by the invading army of the same country that had occupied it twenty years previously, all of which served indirectly to identify the unnamed country to which that army belonged. At that time the Swiss felt vulnerable to German invasion and were trying hard to avoid displeasing their powerful neighbor.

In France, as in Denmark and Holland, sales of illegal editions of *The Moon Is Down* helped fund the resistance. The money earned by Paraf’s translation was turned over to the National Committee of Writers, which used it to support the families of patriotic printers and typographers shot or deported by the Nazis. According to the French patriotic press, the impact of *The Moon Is Down* in occupied France was “immense and incontestable.” Immediately after liberation, Midnight Editions published the novel in a volume identical in every detail to the clandestine version. It was included, in fact, as one of several works in a special collection constituting Midnight Editions’ first public issue. The single printing of *The Moon Is Down* was of 5,325 numbered copies.

*The Moon Is Down* also enjoyed unusual popularity in European countries that escaped German occupation. The expurgated French-language Swiss edition mentioned earlier was published in Lausanne in 1943 by Marguerat. A German-language Swiss edition appeared in Zurich the same year, published by Humanitas Verlag. Theaters in Basel performed the play version to enthusiastic audiences, and then the Schauspielhaus in Zurich produced a highly acclaimed run of approximately two hundred performances. In England, Heinemann published its first edition of the novel in 1942, following with a so-called “Middle East Edition” the next year. The English Theater Guild published the dramatic version in 1943, the same year the play opened at London’s Whitehall Theatre. The Swedes brought out two editions in 1942 besides the one intended for distribution by the resistance in Norway: a Swedish translation published by Bonniers and an English-language version printed by the Continental Book Company—the edition Paraf used for her French translation. Soviet magazines serialized two different Russian translations of the novel in 1943: a complete version published

*Znamya*, and excerpts in *Ogonyok*. Despite the virtually unanimous disapproval of Soviet critics, who regarded it as vague and unrealistic, *The Moon Is Down* was the best-known work of American literature in the Soviet Union during the war.

There is also evidence that the novel was distributed within the Axis itself. During a visit to Florence more than a decade after the war ended, Steinbeck was approached by an Italian who had opposed Mussolini. He had translated *The Moon Is Down*, mimeographed five hundred copies, and then circulated them among fellow members of the resistance. They had been in great demand.

The Nazis were not the only fascists against whom *The Moon Is Down* served effectively as propaganda. Far to the east, a well-known Chinese professor of literature, Chien Gochuen, had obtained a copy of an English edition through the office of the British press attaché in Chongqing, China's wartime capital. Chien recognized immediately its potential propaganda value for his country, much of it then occupied by the Japanese. He completed his translation in 1942, and beginning early the next year it ran as installments under Chien's nom de guerre, Ch'in Ko Chuan, in the first seven issues of *New China* magazine. Ten thousand copies of each of those issues were published—a remarkable number given the formidable wartime shortages in China. Shortly after the last of the installments appeared, the publishers compiled them in a single edition for circulation throughout China. Forty years later, a spokesman for the book company that published *New China* magazine remembered that the Chinese people were encouraged by “the patriotic eagerness of [Steinbeck's] characters to resist their conquerors.”

Today, at a half century's distance from the controversy ignited by the publication of *The Moon Is Down*, it is clear that Fadiman, Thurber, and other critics who had prophesied its failure as propaganda were entirely wrong. Evidence of its success in Nazi-occupied Europe and in China is compelling: the dedication of those who translated, printed, and distributed it at considerable risk; the impressive number of editions and copies published—during the occupation, on makeshift machinery and under taxing conditions, as well as after the war by recently liberated publishing houses; and the accounts of former members of the resistance and others who witnessed firsthand the force of its ideas.

But beyond the obvious conclusion that Steinbeck was right and his critics wrong about what would constitute effective propaganda, several questions arise. Why were the hostile American critics so mistaken, and how do we account for the difference between their reaction and that of the Europeans? Why did the American detractors fail to appreciate what so appealed to the Europeans? And finally, what does the stunning wartime European reception of *The Moon Is Down* tell us about the genius of John Steinbeck?

The French writer and philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre offers a theory that probably accounts for the critics' divergence of opinion. In his postwar essay *What Is Literature?* he contends that we can have no true understanding of a literary work unless we know who an author is writing for. To illustrate his point, Sartre recalls a wartime literary controversy similar to that surrounding *The Moon Is Down*. Another highly popular work of anti-Nazi fiction published in France during the war was a short novel entitled *The Silence of the Sea*, written by Jean Bruller, a member of the French resistance better known by his nom de guerre, Vercors. Like Steinbeck, Bruller portrayed the Germans as human beings, often intelligent, if misguided, and frequently polite and likable. *The Silence of the Sea* succeeded as propaganda within occupied France, but it found a hostile audience in French men and women living abroad, many of whom in fact accused Bruller of collaboration. Sartre's explanation for the mixed reception is that Bruller was writing for compatriots living under the Nazis. He was among



them, sharing their feelings and the routines of their existence. He realized that to stereotype a Germans as ogres would have been laughable to those who had daily contact with the enemy and who knew better.

Like Bruller, Steinbeck revealed in his approach to propaganda not only a shrewd psychological perception of what would work and what would not, but also a respect for his European audience. The crude oversimplifications of most propaganda are, after all, patronizing. There is no such condescension in Steinbeck's approach. But Steinbeck's understanding of what would appeal to a European audience under the unusual conditions of the day is all the more remarkable because, unlike Bruller, who had the advantage of being on the scene and of writing about people he knew well, Steinbeck was a foreigner living thousands of miles away.

Steinbeck's own explanation for the perceptiveness that made his propaganda so effective is simple. During his visit to Norway in 1946 to receive King Haakon's medal, he was asked on several occasions how he knew so well what the resistance there was doing. His answer was, "I put myself in your place and thought what I would do." That reply explains more than the success of *The Moon Is Down* in occupied Europe; it reminds us what readers of Steinbeck all over the world had already recognized as among the writer's major attributes: his sure sense of audience, and his empathy with the oppressed. European partisans who ran considerable risk to publish and distribute *The Moon Is Down* because they believed it would help their cause agreed about the source of its power: a Danish publisher ascribed it to "Steinbeck's sincere sentiment ... a human quality which penetrates"; a Norwegian reviewer to his ability to capture "our feelings ... our problems, our hopes, our sorrows"; the Dutch translator to Steinbeck's insight, "especially into [our] reaction against the ones who took over the country"; and the French translator to the author's masterful understanding. All are acknowledgments of the sympathy and the social intuition that John Steinbeck had already demonstrated in works of the middle and late 1930s, most notably *Of Mice and Men*, *In Dubious Battle*, and *The Grapes of Wrath*. The success of *The Moon Is Down* as propaganda, then, underscores Steinbeck's signal literary strengths.

Most works of propaganda do not survive the crises that produce them. *The Moon Is Down* is an exception. Since 1945 it has appeared in at least ninety-two editions in the United States, England, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Spain, Mexico, Hungary, France, Belgium, Turkey, Germany, Switzerland, pre-Communist Mainland China, Taiwan, Japan, Egypt, Sweden, Italy, Portugal, Brazil, Korea, India, Greece, Iran, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Burma. The novel's endurance suggests that while *The Moon Is Down* may have been conceived, written, and used as propaganda, it is probably best described as a work of literature that served as propaganda. Judged by purely artistic standards, it is not among the author's best efforts. Scholars and reviewers have most frequently criticized it for wooden characters and transparent didacticism, flaws characteristic of novels of ideas. But few literary works in our time have demonstrated so triumphantly the power of ideas in the face of cold steel and brute force, and few have spoken so reassuringly to so many people of different countries and cultures. Against the fiercest assault on freedom during this century, John Steinbeck calmly reaffirmed in *The Moon Is Down* the bedrock principles of democracy: the worth of the individual, and the power deriving from free citizens sharing common commitments.

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TO

PAT COVICI

A GREAT EDITOR AND

A GREAT FRIEND

By ten-forty-five it was all over. The town was occupied, the defenders defeated, and the war finished. The invader had prepared for this campaign as carefully as he had for larger ones. On this Sunday morning the postman and the policeman had gone fishing in the boat of Mr. Corell, the popular storekeeper. He had lent them his trim sailboat for the day. The postman and the policeman were several miles at sea when they saw the small, dark transport, loaded with soldiers, go quietly past them. As officials of the town, this was definitely their business, and these two put about, but of course the battalion was in possession by the time they could make port. The policeman and the postman could not even get into their own offices in the Town Hall, and when they insisted on their rights they were taken prisoners of war and locked up in the town jail.

The local troops, all twelve of them, had been away, too, on this Sunday morning, for Mr. Corell, the popular storekeeper, had donated lunch, targets, cartridges, and prizes for a shooting-competition to take place six miles back in the hills, in a lovely glade Mr. Corell owned. The local troops, big loose-hung boys, heard the planes and in the distance saw the parachutes, and they came back to town at double-quick step. When they arrived, the invader had flanked the road with machine guns. The loose-hung soldiers, having very little experience in war and none at all in defeat, opened fire with their rifles. The machine guns clattered for a moment and six of the soldiers became dead riddled bundles and three half-dead riddled bundles, and three of the soldiers escaped into the hills with their rifles.

By ten-thirty the brass band of the invader was playing beautiful and sentimental music in the town square while the townsmen, their mouths a little open and their eyes astonished, stood about listening to the music and staring at the gray-helmeted men who carried sub-machine guns in their arms.

By ten-thirty-eight the riddled six were buried, the parachutes were folded, and the battalion was billeted in Mr. Corell's warehouse by the pier, which had on its shelves blankets and cots for the battalion.

By ten-forty-five old Mayor Orden had received the formal request that he grant an audience to Colonel Lanser of the invaders, an audience which was set for eleven sharp at the Mayor's five-room palace.

The drawing-room of the palace was very sweet and comfortable. The gilded chairs covered with their worn tapestry were set about stiffly like too many servants with nothing to do. An arched marble fireplace held its little basket of red flameless heat, and a hand-painted coal scuttle stood on the hearth. On the mantel, flanked by fat vases, stood a large, curly porcelain clock which swarmed with tumbling cherubs. The wallpaper of the room was dark red with gold figures, and the woodwork was white, pretty, and clean. The paintings on the wall were largely preoccupied with the amazing heroism of large dogs faced with imperiled children. Nor water nor fire nor earthquake could do in a child as long as a big dog was available.

Beside the fireplace old Doctor Winter sat, bearded and simple and benign, historian and physician to the town. He watched in amazement while his thumbs rolled over and over on his lap. Doctor

Winter was a man so simple that only a profound man would know him as profound. He looked up Joseph, the Mayor's servingman, to see whether Joseph had observed the rolling wonders of his thumbs.

"Eleven o'clock?" Doctor Winter asked.

And Joseph answered abstractedly, "Yes, sir. The note said eleven."

"You read the note?"

"No, sir, His Excellency read the note to me."

And Joseph went about testing each of the gilded chairs to see whether it had moved since he had last placed it. Joseph habitually scowled at furniture, expecting it to be impertinent, mischievous, dusty. In a world where Mayor Orden was the leader of men, Joseph was the leader of furniture, silver and dishes. Joseph was elderly and lean and serious, and his life was so complicated that only a profound man would know him to be simple. He saw nothing amazing about Doctor Winter's rolling thumbs; in fact he found them irritating. Joseph suspected that something pretty important was happening, what with foreign soldiers in the town and the local army killed or captured. Sooner or later Joseph would have to get an opinion about it all. He wanted no levity, no rolling thumbs, no nonsense from furniture. Doctor Winter moved his chair a few inches from its appointed place and Joseph waited impatiently for the moment when he could put it back again.

Doctor Winter repeated, "Eleven o'clock, and they'll be here then, too. A time-minded people, Joseph."

And Joseph said, without listening, "Yes, sir."

"A time-minded people," the doctor repeated.

"Yes, sir," said Joseph.

"Time and machines."

"Yes, sir."

"They hurry toward their destiny as though it would not wait. They push the rolling world along with their shoulders."

And Joseph said, "Quite right, sir," simply because he was getting tired of saying, "Yes, sir."

Joseph did not approve of this line of conversation, since it did not help him to have an opinion about anything. If Joseph remarked to the cook later in the day, "A time-minded people, Annie," it would not make any sense. Annie would ask, "Who?" and then "Why?" and finally say, "That's nonsense, Joseph." Joseph had tried carrying Doctor Winter's remarks below-stairs before and it had always ended the same: Annie always discovered them to be nonsense.

Doctor Winter looked up from his thumbs and watched Joseph disciplining the chairs. "What's the Mayor doing?"

"Dressing to receive the colonel, sir."

"And you aren't helping him? He will be ill dressed by himself."

"Madame is helping him. Madame wants him to look his best. She"—Joseph blushed a little.

—“Madame is trimming the hair out of his ears, sir. It tickles. He won’t let me do it.”

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“Of course it tickles,” said Doctor Winter.

“Madame insists,” said Joseph.

Doctor Winter laughed suddenly. He stood up and held his hands to the fire and Joseph skillfully darted behind him and replaced the chair where it should be.

“We are so wonderful,” the doctor said. “Our country is falling, our town is conquered, the Mayor about to receive the conqueror, and Madame is holding the struggling Mayor by the neck and trimming the hair out of his ears.”

“He was getting very shaggy,” said Joseph. “His eyebrows, too. His Excellency is even more upset about having his eyebrows trimmed than his ears. He says it hurts. I doubt if even Madame can do it.”

“She will try,” Doctor Winter said.

“She wants him to look his best, sir.”

Through the glass window of the entrance door a helmeted face looked in and there was a rapping on the door. It seemed that some warm light went out of the room and a little grayness took its place.

Doctor Winter looked up at the clock and said, “They are early. Let them in, Joseph.”

Joseph went to the door and opened it. A soldier stepped in, dressed in a long coat. He was helmeted and he carried a sub-machine gun over his arm. He glanced quickly about and then stepped aside. Behind him an officer stood in the doorway. The officer’s uniform was common and it had rank showing only on the shoulders.

The officer stepped inside and looked at Doctor Winter. He was rather like an overdrawn picture of an English gentleman. He had a slouch, his face was red, his nose long but rather pleasing; he seemed about as unhappy in his uniform as most British general officers are. He stood in the doorway, staring at Doctor Winter, and he said, “Are you Mayor Orden, sir?”

Doctor Winter smiled. “No, no, I am not.”

“You are an official, then?”

“No, I am the town doctor and I am a friend of the Mayor.”

The officer said, “Where is Mayor Orden?”

“Dressing to receive you. You are the colonel?”

“No, I am not. I am Captain Bentick.” He bowed and Doctor Winter returned the bow slightly. Captain Bentick continued, as though a little embarrassed at what he had to say. “Our military regulations, sir, prescribe that we search for weapons before the commanding officer enters a room. We mean no disrespect, sir.” And he called over his shoulder, “Sergeant!”

The sergeant moved quickly to Joseph, ran his hands over his pockets, and said, “Nothing, sir.”

Captain Bentick said to Doctor Winter, “I hope you will pardon us.” And the sergeant went to Doctor Winter and patted his pockets. His hands stopped at the inside coat pocket. He reached quickly in, brought out a little, flat, black leather case, and took it to Captain Bentick. Captain Bentick opened the case and found there a few simple surgical instruments—two scalpels, some surgical needles



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