



John Steinbeck As Propagandist: The Moon is Down Goes to War

Donald V. Coers

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In March 1942, a desperate period for the allies in World War II, John Steinbeck published his propaganda novel *The Moon is Down*—the story of ruthless invaders who overrun a militarily helpless country. Throughout the novel, Steinbeck underscored both the fatal weakness of the “invincible” unnamed aggressors and the inherent power of the human values shared by the “conquered” people.

The Moon is Down created an immediate sensation among American literary critics; fierce debate erupted over Steinbeck’s uncommonly sympathetic portrayal of the enemy and the novel’s power as a vehicle for propaganda. Fifty years later, Coers continues the debate, relying heavily on unpublished letters and personal interviews with the lawyers, book dealers, actors, publishers, and housewives associated with the resistance movements in Western Europe. Clandestine translations of *The Moon Is Down* quickly appeared and were widely circulated under the noses of the Gestapo. Coers documents the fate of Steinbeck’s novel in the hands of World War II resistance fighters and deepens our appreciation of Steinbeck’s unique ability to express the feelings of oppressed peoples.

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