

## War Setting In Steinbeck's play & Novel *The Moon Is Down*

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The Moon Is Down a play and a novel carrying the same title and written by the same writer - John Steinbeck. They hold differences and of course similarities.

Two different literary genres (play & novel) naturally make the reader

live the same story but in different atmospheres, two different worlds for each has its own characteristics that display the story differently.

The play is divided into two parts; each has four scenes. The novel is divided into eight chapters. Each scene equalizes a chapter. They contain the same events but with differences, or sometimes similarities; they even may reflect the same events but with a reshuffling of their sequence.

First of all let's deal with the beginning of the story in each the play and the novel. The novel begins immediately with the invasion . It happens and it is finished and now the town is under the invasion (whoes nationality and identity are not specified in both) . There is an introduction about the invasion (speaking briefly about the officers, the troops, Mr.Corell the traitor ,the town ,the people).The play begins directly with Mr.Winter's speech without this introduction preceded by the description of Mayor Orden's room (which is presented also in the novel).

Description (whether the outer and inner descriptions or the description of characters) represents a feature in comparing the novel and the play .It appears mostly different but sometimes similar.

In the beginning of part one , scene one of play there is a detailed description of the Mayor's room (a page and a half ) ; while in the novel (chapter one ) it is limited (one paragraph only) .The description of the novel concentrates on colours , describing the major things (fire place , clock ). The one in the play shows more than that : how the room is comfortable , beautiful ; it also reflects wealth and luxury .

The description of the Mayor's room on pp.19-20 (after a while of the invasion) in the novel differs entirely from the one

in the play .The description of the novel is simple .It does not give the same implications as in the play .War setting and ugliness are more intensive : the feeling that we are in a war , a military office , and an operation room . Every thing beautiful is removed (pictures ,curtains , ... ).We can see only a table ,clock , ash-tray ; these things refer to work , time , and the gray colour of cigarettes respectively.

At the beginning of chapter three in the novel we have first a description –an outer description –of the town , the streets , the people how the town is calm and dark and how its people are depressed and helpless.

The whole description is not found in the play. Scene three begins immediately with the description of the room that gives really, clearly, and deeply the impression of the war .There are additional aspects which reflect more the military atmosphere and its “disintegration” (p. 39 play) <sup>1</sup>: military equipment replaces furniture.

The description of the room in the novel , on the other hand, is very simple .

Again at the beginning of scene four in the play , there is a detailed description that concentrates on the darkness of the room and the ugliness of the place , it is drier than the one in the novel “ the room has been stripped of all its pictures” (p. 50

play).Chapter four in the novel begins with an outer description : snow , coolness , the calmness of the town . In this chapter ,again, there is an indication of the quiet town whose people are in their houses watching . In the play there is no reference to snow and coolness that make the atmosphere of death and war more intensive .

There is another difference between the beginning of part two , scene one in the play and the one in chapter five in the novel . In the latter , there is a concentration on the outside and in the former the concentration has been on the inside .

The novel portrays empty street and the cold and snowy weather . There is always a connection between the snow , coldness , and silence of winter and the misery and melancholy of both people of the town and the soldiers of the enemy .The silent anger and revenge of the people and the silent misery of the soldiers who are eager to their home , fun , and easy free life; as the novelist puts it beautifully:

**... a man can be a soldier for  
only so many hours a day and for  
only so many months in a year , and  
than he wants to be a man again ,  
wants girls and drinks and music**

and laughter and ease, and when  
these  
are cut off, they become irresistibly  
desirable .

(p. 47 novel)<sup>2</sup>

The darkness of winter (no sun) is connected with the inner darkness inside houses, room of the Mayor , inside the people and soldiers as well . There is no warmth neither inside nor outside.

The description in the novel is panic and more melancholic. Death is presented more widely: “there was death in the air, hovering and waiting” (p.46 novel). Conquerors kill the conquered if they resist and the latter kill the former for revenge.

All these ideas are not aroused in the play. In the play there is only a description of the room of the Mayor then the dialogue between Prackle and Hunter. The description takes one page and a half (pp.57-58 play) while the description of the novel extended into more than four pages (45-48 novel) .

**The snow was beaten down on  
the walks and in the streets, but  
it piled high on the fence and**

**it puffed on the roof peaks. It drifted against the shuttered windows of the little houses. And into the yards paths were shovelled .The night was dark and cold and no light showed from the windows to attract the bombers .**

(p. 56 novel)

The description, similarly, refers to the misery and loneliness of soldiers:

**The patrol talked as they walked, And they talked of things that they longed for-of meat , and of hot soup and of the richness of butter, of the prettiness of girls and of their smiles and of their lips and their eyes. They talked of these things and sometimes they talked of their hatred of what they were doing and of their loneliness .**

(p. 56 novel)

The description mentions the patrol and walking of soldiers every little while which are not mentioned in the play, emphasizing by that the atmosphere of war, fear, and watching. The outer description is not found in the play (part two scene two). The only indication that connects the outer atmosphere (winter) with war is Annie's note to Molly:

**It's cold out , all right . The  
Soldiers brought the winter  
early . My father always said  
a war brought bad weather, or  
bad weather brought a war .**

(p. 70 play)

The same thing is applied to the description at the beginning of chapter seven and part two, scene three.

So, the description ( the introductory description ) is a recurrent difference between the novel and the play. The novel emphasizes the outer description and the outer atmosphere of war rather than the inner description (the description of the Mayor's room ) whereas the play emphasizes the inner rather than the outer . The description in the novel appears as if deeper, and it makes things clearer . It makes the reader live in

the atmosphere of war more than the play which expresses war and its destruction and negative consequences through the inner atmosphere . In words , it emphasizes the inner description .

Noticeably, Steinbeck repeats in the novel the same description one after the other using even the same images and words. This is for the sake of emphasizing and reflecting the atmosphere of war, to make the reader live it more and more .

Play directions represent another major difference. As natural with a play, directions are indicated more than the novel: information like one sits , one goes there , one crosses to that place , one does that thing ...etc. They indicate movements : how the characters say that sentence or that comment reflecting their mood , reaction , looking , expression , ...etc. There are information indicated between brackets also, the directions ( R / L ) in the play are not mentioned in the novel , “[Crossing to door L]” (p.24 play) for instance .

Play directions give more details , and they make the situation clearer and more imaginable for the reader. Notice the following example , a same extract from the novel and the play :

**\_ “ They are looking through the door at Annie,”  
said Joseph – “she hater that .”**

**The colonel said : “They are carring out orders .They are  
doing no harm.”**



**“Well, Annie hates to be stared at,”**

**said Joseph**

(p. 14 novel)

**\_Joseph. There're looking through the door at Annie, sir.**

**She hates that.**

**Lanser. [ sighing ] They are carring out order. There're doing no harm .**

**[Mayor looks at madame helplessly .]**

**Joseph . well, Annie hates to be stared at, sir.**

**She's getting angry.**

(p. 16 play)

The novel begins immediately with the invasion which is happened already. This puts the reader directly in the atmosphere of war. He knows from the very beginning of the novel that it is a novel about war and invasion while he does not feel that in the play until the note in (p. 4):

Bentick comes with his sergeant making sure that there are no weapons in the Mayor's house to be sure of the colonel's safety before he comes. The play perparees the reader gradually to the atmosphere of the war

whereas the reader of the novel is shocked directly by it- there is an occupation and it takes place (p. 1 novel) and what one will read is merely what happens after it or the results of it.

The note itself on (p. 4 play) is an important difference between the two. It is not found in the novel. This note emphasizes the idea of the “officer”, “soldier”, “invader” irrespective of his nationality and rank.

In chapter seven in the novel again the patrol and the soldiers' misery speaking about home are mentioned at the beginning of the chapter after the description of the town and the outer atmosphere :

The six men of the patrol slogging  
**dejectedly up and down the street  
heard the singing of the dog , and  
one of the muffled soldier said :  
“ seems to me he's getting worse  
every night . I suppose we ought  
to shoot him.”**

(p. 70 novel)

The whole thing is not mentioned in the play. The description in the play is followed by a conversation between Annie and Loft (p. 83 play) that appears in the novel later on.

The reference to the patrol which is not there in the play hold an importance. The patrol by itself indicates the atmosphere of the occupation and war more directly. The walking of the soldier in the town makes the people remember always that they are occupied. The soldier's speech and longing to their home (which is not specified in both the play and the novel), on the other hand, show how the soldiers suffer just like the people. War is destructive equally to both the conqueror and the conquered.

War setting differs in the play from the novel. In the play, the winter often creates an inner war atmosphere through the description of the Mayor's room. Whereas the reader lives an outer war atmosphere in the novel through the outside description and the cool weather. Never the\_ less, the result is the same. For example, Steinbeck refers to the inner darkness inside the Mayor's room in the play; and he refers to the darkness of winter outside. He portraits two different atmospheres of darkness but with the same implications: the darkness of war. One even may connects the inside with the outside (the play with the novel) to get a perfect word of war.

Both of them display or carry the same ideas. It is obvious for the reader to see that each chapter in the novel equalizes each scene in the play. They have the same beginning and the same end.

In both, what is revealed about the invaders is that they are men of violence and blood. They have invaded many countries before but they face defeats one after another: “And these tendencies and practices have been proven wrong in every single test since the beginning of the world” (p. 48 play); “And these tendencies and practices have been proven wrong in every single case since the beginning of the word” (p. 40 novel). People resist but the invaders still think that they are winners and can control the world. However , they do not learn from their faults nor stop their cruel and failed political and military tendencies.

Steinbeck's novel and play show us how war is miserable, and destructive to both soldiers (invaders) and people invaded. The soldiers themselves seem longing to go home. They do not believe much in war, invasion, and violence. They like the people of the country, they think that they are nice people and the country is a beautiful country. It is indicated in both that this very country has been a peaceful

safe one and its people are peaceful, they have not known wars for years.

In his novel and play, Steinbeck makes the reader live in the atmosphere of war and the cruelty of the invasion. The reader lives it in the novel the way the novel presents a subject; and he lives it in the play the way the play presents a subject. If we search for a reason why Steinbeck writes the play after writing the novel, we will find no reason except presenting the same subject through two literary genres. As if he wants to emphasize his idea: the danger and severity of wars. Probably, he tries to warn the world to stop fighting by showing wars ugliness not only through one literary genre but through two: to the reader of the novel and the reader of the play.

Many of Steinbeck's works have been written as plays or become plays later including The Moon Is Down and, as Harvard states, their ritual quality often has served better on stage than in his fictions<sup>3</sup>.

In Harvard's opinion, one can know how American novelists have responded to the postwar world by considering four writers who have begun their career in 1920s and 1930s: one of them is John Steinbeck<sup>4</sup>. He has worked in some period of his life as a reporter. He has

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reported world war II battle fronts. That is why he creates the atmosphere of war in a factual way. He knows wars that is the way we feel through his work that he is against them. During his boyhood, Steinbeck has developed a love for nature and sensitivity to the world of birds and animals. He hates wars that destroy these beautiful things.

NOTES

1.For this and all the subsequent references to the text see John Steinbeck, The Moon Is Down (Binghamton: the vail-Ballou press Inc., 1942).

2. For this and all the subsequent references to the text see John Steinbeck, The Moon Is Down (London: The British Publishers Guild, 1942).

3.Daniel Hoffman Harvard, Guide To Contemporary American Writing (London: The Belknap press, 1979). , p.92.

4.Ibid. , p.87

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