
Review of The Moon is Less Bright Play

“The Moon Is Less Bright” was brought back to the stage since its first stage in 1964. As a retrospection to history, the play described the stories happened to two families, who come from different social classes and carried their respective perception to survive under the same roof. It was set under Japanese invasion period when British surrendered to Japan and people in the city fled to the countryside.

Choo Leng, one of the main characters, was raised up in a middle-class family and was fascinated by everything in the farm. However, as she witnessed the cruelty of Japanese troop and the consequent calamity, she was filled with sadness and lost faith to life. Her young cousin, Ah Huat, encouraged her to stay hopeful even in the disastrous period. It was the leaving of her cousins that changed Choo Leng to become an independent and positive girl. At the end of the play, both sons from the peasant family left home to defend for the country and to avenge their friend's death. Their parents were alone with the farm and Choo Leng decided to stay with them.

We began the analysis with Barthes' semiotic system as a lot of signifiers could be identified in this play. Firstly, the white paint brushed sporadically on the floor represent the sands on the land on which farmers have been working on. This special setting could quickly bring the audience into the play. Secondly, the peasant family were Chinese, as seen from their names, however, they spoke rhetoric English throughout the play. “The Chinese speaking English” is a sign in Barthes' first-order semiotic system, but analyzing from his second-order semiotic system, it also indicates the great power of British on its colony in terms of language and culture (Figure 1). Thirdly, the most important signifier is the moon, which appeared several times in the play. It first was described as “impossibly white”, later waned in Choo Leng's eyes because of the cruelty she witnessed in the town. In fact, the appearance of moon is a sign of the situation of that time.

The bright moon started to wane because innocent people began to be killed by Japanese entrance, implying the invaded state of the country. On the other hand, the moon is not only a sign of the political situation, it is also a reflection of individual state of mind. Before Choo Leng was exposed to the evil side of human nature, she thought the moon was extremely bright as everything was wonderful to her. However, after seeing so many sorrow happened to people around her, she started to lose faith to life and the moon seemed darker to her.