

Literary Quislings (Part 2 of 3)

by Earl P. Holt III

To his eternal credit, George Orwell once remarked that "*some ideas are so absurd that only an intellectual would believe them.*" By the 1930s for example, it became evident that many of the committees that awarded the more prestigious literary prizes often consisted of elitist dilettantes who had adopted the "*fashionable*" ideology of Marxism. As a result, certain celebrated American authors pursued a subtly Marxist agenda to improve their chances of winning such awards.

Among these celebrated authors were Ernest Hemingway, William Inge, Tennessee Williams, John Steinbeck, Harper Lee, Edna Ferber, and Arthur Miller. Most found their *niche* by obsessing on some trivial or peripheral aspect of American society, and then portraying it in an exaggerated and skewed manner that led inevitably to the conclusion that things were certainly rotten in America. Many had honors heaped upon them in return for their loyal service to what was essentially, a propaganda effort and early manifestations of Cultural Marxism.

Among these quisling authors, **John Steinbeck** may have been America's least subtle critic, a generalization especially evident in *The Grapes of Wrath* which was published in 1939. This novel probably represents the most exaggerated "*stacked deck*" in literary history, because its central characters endured more tragedies than a dozen *Jobs* from the *Old Testament*. Steinbeck poured it on so thick that the Joad Family became a **CARICATURE** rather than a **SYMBOL** of the miseries endured by many Midwest farmers during the Great Depression and "*Dust Bowl*" of the 1930s. His patently obvious socialist sympathies **DID** help allow him to garner both *Pulitzer* and *Nobel Prizes*, however.

The novel begins with protagonist Tom Joad's parole from prison following what Steinbeck implies is a wrongful conviction for homicide after defending himself against an attacker. When he and a childhood friend named Jim Casy become traveling companions, they return to Sallisaw, Oklahoma, only to find the Joad Family Home abandoned after greedy banks had repossessed it and evicted his extended family. Soon after their reunion at an uncle's home, Tom Joad violates his parole by joining the entire Joad Family as it sets out for California in an old car that's been converted into a truck. Not too long after, he becomes the family patriarch at an early age.



Along the southwest route to California, Grampa dies before they cross the Oklahoma state line and Granma dies of grief just short of California. In between these tragedies, the family is also abandoned by both Tom's older brother, Noah, and the young husband and prospective father of Rose Joad's baby after he becomes overwhelmed by the responsibilities of fatherhood. Worse yet, they quickly discover from those traveling in the opposite direction that conditions in California aren't as rosy as rumors implied, because the state has experienced a glut of labor that has driven down wages. In fact, they are told that farm workers are being ruthlessly exploited, nearly to the brink of starvation. Meanwhile, small and independent farmers are equally beset by collapsing prices.

Steinbeck continued to pile it on by depicting law enforcement as the henchmen of corporate agriculture, so Tom's friend Casy is arrested for interfering with a deputy sheriff when the latter attempts to shoot a worker merely for exposing the lies of a labor recruiter who promises fraudulently high wages. Although a preacher of the Gospel, Jim Casy eventually rejects God and becomes a labor organizer. However, when he is martyred during a labor strike, Tom Joad retaliates and kills Casy's murderer. This forces Tom Joad to flee the Joad Family after a tearful goodbye. As the remainder of the family courageously work for subsistence wages, their disasters continue to mount when winter rains flood their dwelling and their truck is no longer operable. They are then forced to seek higher ground and shelter in an old barn. Steinbeck even has the beloved family dog run over by a car on their travels west.



Apparently, Steinbeck attributes much of the catastrophe of the *Great Depression* to the evils resulting from what he perceives as a sinister collusion within corporate agriculture. As a true-believing socialist, he clearly intended *The Grapes of Wrath* to be a form of propaganda and stated: "*I want to put a tag of shame on the greedy bastards who are responsible for this...*," by which he meant the *Great Depression* and its consequences. Yet he fails to explain how a "collusion" among corporate agriculture managed to **REDUCE** the prices of commodities rather than **INCREASE** them, which is the standard rationale for collusions among competitors. (OPEC is a classic example.) He also fails to explain how declining prices for agricultural products don't seem to benefit those impoverished by corporate agriculture's collusion.

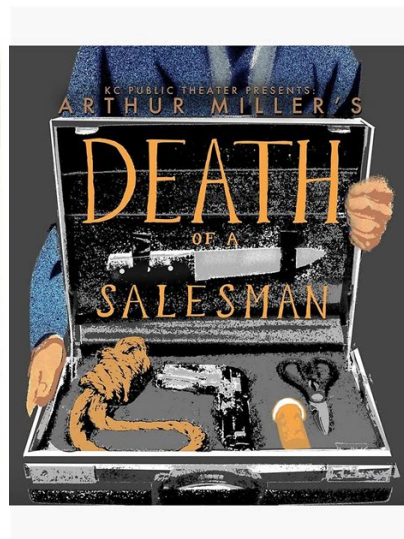
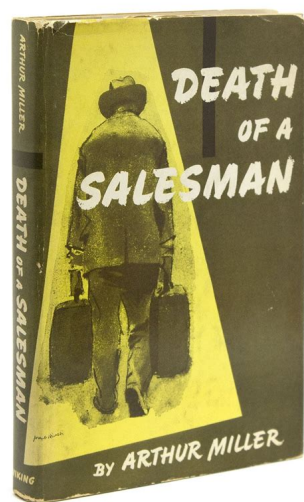
Steinbeck's juvenile understanding of economics is typical of Marxists, and his ideological enthusiasms are evident throughout the novel. For example, when Jim Casy loses his faith -- despite being a preacher -- it's an echo of Marxism's rejection of religious faith, which Marx, himself labeled "*the opiate of the masses.*" Likewise, when Jim Casy becomes a labor organizer and is gratuitously murdered by a camp guard, the event is treated as if he were a Christian Martyr. Naturally, the only place the Joads were welcomed on their odyssey to California was at one of FDR's *Resettlement Administration* camps, sponsored by the *New Deal*. And of course, corporate farming paid only subsistence wages to workers, which were barely enough to maintain a starvation diet purchased from those infamous "*company stores.*" Like many socialists who write about *The Great Depression*, Steinbeck was a fraud.

However, like most socialists he was a very ambitious and highly unethical fraud. Apparently, he was inspired to write *The Grapes of Wrath* after having been *secretly-but-dishonestly* handed the field notes of author Sanora Babb by her supervisor in the *Farm Security Administration*. That supervisor -- a man named Tom Collins -- was probably a fellow socialist of Steinbeck's. At that very same time, Babb

was working on her own book about displaced migrant farmworkers, which had been commissioned by **Random House** publishers. Those field notes were the first step in writing her own book.

After Steinbeck's publication of ***The Grapes of Wrath*** in 1939, **Random House** summarily cancelled its contract with Sonora Babb. Her eventual book, which she titled ***Whose Names are Unknown***, was not released until 2004, a year after her death. Not at all surprising, many critics familiar with both works find their similarities striking. One critic even accused Steinbeck of "*appropriating*" Babb's own book, while another scholar alluded to it as "*smash and grab*" plagiarism.

In ***Death of a Salesman***, **Arthur Miller** waged a subtle attack on democratic capitalism and the "*American Dream*" by slandering and demeaning a profession that often made *The American Dream* possible for average people. This earned him various awards, including a *Pulitzer Prize for Drama* in 1949. As a member in good-standing of the *League of American Writers* -- a clique dominated by communists such as Lillian Hellman, Dashiell Hammett, Izzy Stone and John Garfield -- this Brooklyn Jew probably saw it as his moral obligation to join in Cultural Marxism's assault on America's most significant institutions.



Miller devotes the play to denigrating the entire profession of salesmen, which he views as a symbol of democratic capitalism because it plays a critical role in connecting the producers of consumer goods with potential wholesalers or the ultimate consumer. He caricatured salesmen as losers armed "*with a smile and a shoeshine,*" and depicts their lives as empty, purposeless, and possessing little benefit to society. The pointless and contrived plot he fabricates is so absurd, it would be a waste of time to synopsise it here for readers.

Before there was an internet, **Amazon**, **E-Bay** or hundreds of cable TV stations, there was a crying need for salesman to connect the producers of a product with whatever potential market might exist among its prospective consumers. For normal people who aren't endowed with great attractiveness, athletic ability or genius, a career as a salesman afforded an opportunity for a comfortable living that frequently enabled one to support their family in a socially beneficial manner. It wasn't glamorous work -- like Miller basking in the acclaim he received for attacking the American institution of democratic capitalism -- but it was essential, sometimes lucrative, and usually honest work.

In ***Death of a Salesman***, Miller stacks the deck like Steinbeck did in ***Grapes of Wrath*** by making just about every character in the play an abject loser, for whom nothing ever seems to go well. Miller implies this is an inevitable failing of capitalism, because it allegedly produces these quiet lives of desperation that end tragically. Indeed, none of these characters seem able to lift themselves up by their bootstraps to achieve success in some manner or other. They seem content to flounder in their own failure, and accept it as their inevitable fate.



As a socialist, Miller failed to recognize that democratic capitalism affords nearly endless opportunities for nearly anyone, and a failure in one context needn't become a permanent condition except among those who give up and quit, or those willing to go on "*the dole*." Hard work and risk-taking will always be an essential element of capitalism or any other form of economy, but the freedom to strive for the *American Dream* will inevitably be accompanied by the possibility of failure. In his book, *The Spirit of Enterprise*, George Gilder wrote of a friend whose businesses had failed numerous times, until he eventually became a multi-millionaire.

Miller's jaundiced view of democratic capitalism was probably forged during the *Stock-Market Crash* of 1929 and the *Great Depression* that followed. His father owned a very prosperous garment-manufacturing business in Manhattan that employed about 400 people, but the business was lost during the *Crash of 1929*. The family then moved to Brooklyn, and lived in far more meager circumstances. Like many socialists, Miller attributed the *Stock Market Crash* and *Great Depression* to some fatal flaw inherent in democratic capitalism, as if economies

were subject to the formulae of Greek Tragedies. In the fevered imaginations of such ideologues, that systemic flaw could only be corrected or repaired by Marxism.

(To be continued...)