American Jeremiads: The Winter of Our Discontent and Into The Woods

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John Steinbeck’s fiction earned him the Nobel Prize in Literature, though more than that his writings reached a vast audience through filmed versions of his most read novels, including The Grapes of Wrath and East of Eden. Among Steinbeck’s influences was Oswald Spengler, whose Decline of the West filters through Steinbeck and into other media, secondarily into the theatre. This piece examines one of Steinbeck’s later novels, The Winter of Our Discontent in light of the influences of Spengler, and compares it with the Stephen Sondheim/James Lapine play, Into the Woods with the inference that Sondheim’s play about the ills of materialism bears the traits of Steinbeck’s influence.

KEYWORDS: Steinbeck, Sondheim, Lapine, Materialism, Dysfunctional family, Spengler, The Decline of The West, Jeremiad.

Stephen Sondheim’s career in musical theater began decades after John Steinbeck published his first novel. Nonetheless, a close examination of

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