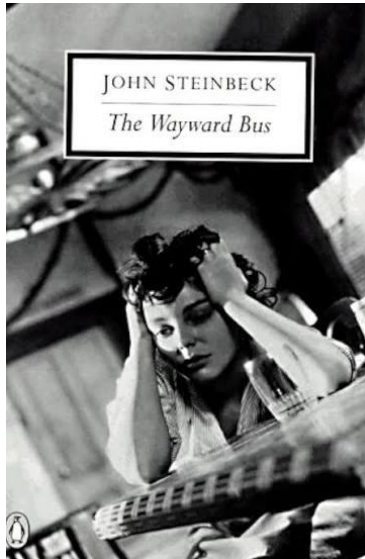


July 2026

The Wayward Bus was published in 1947, and was Steinbeck's 16th novel. While not considered one of his more acclaimed works, it was, apparently, a commercial success. Personally, I would read a shopping list if Steinbeck wrote it.



It was interesting to note, in a recent article by Paul Giles that, when Steinbeck was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1962, the NYT commented that the Swedish Academy should have chosen a writer who had *“made a more profound impression on the literature of our age.”*

This, apparently, expressed the general opinion of the east coast “intelligentsia” who found Steinbeck's work, including *The Grapes of Wrath* and *East of Eden*, a little too “folksy” for their taste.

The plotline of this book is incredibly simple. A group of individuals board a rather well-worn bus, “Sweetheart”, at Rebel's Corner, a roadhouse operated by Alice Chicoy and her husband Jaun. It soon becomes clear that the bus will be unable to complete its journey along the normal route to San

Jaun de la Cruz due to the weather, and by consensus, an alternate route is undertaken. A decision that ultimately leads the group to become stranded when the bus is literally “ditched” by its driver Jaun.

This narrative is totally character driven. The first three chapters are almost completely devoted to describing the landscape in which Rebel's Corner sits and its residents. Apart from the Chicoy's, there is Norah who works with Alice in the restaurant and Pimples/Kit Carson who helps Jaun in the garage. Nearly a whole page is devoted to a “little night laden fly,” who makes its way from the underside of a leaf to a coconut cake inside the lunch room, only to then meet its demise. That's the sort of detail that we are confronted with in this novel.

By the fourth chapter, we realise that “Sweetheart” has broken down the previous day and the passengers have spent the night at Rebel's Corner: The Pritchards, Mr and Mrs and daughter Mildred, emerge from the Chicoy's lounge/bedroom; Ernest, a travelling salesman from Norah's room and eventually, elderly Mr Van Brunt from Pimples/Kit's accommodation. They are soon joined by “Camille”, a dancer bound for Los Angeles.

With the exception of Alice Chicoy, this entire cast of characters board Sweetheart for the journey. Alice stays behind, with the intention of becoming completely inebriated. A goal she successfully achieves with a few more “fly” moments to break the monotony of her self-loathing.

By the time the bus leaves Rebel's Corner, the reader could be forgiven for thinking that they are more than well acquainted with those aboard, however, it is during the journey itself that we are confronted with the conundrum that makes us human: we are not one dimensional creatures. At times this makes for an uncomfortable read.

Ratings: Lesley 4.5, Margie 4, Hetta 4.5, Viviane 4, Janet 4.5, Sandy 3.5, Lynda 3.5, Kim 3.5.

Other Books We Read

John of John by Douglas Stewart, 4
Fierceland by Omar Musa, 3.5
Golden Child by Clair Adams, 3.5
Young Accomplice by Benjamin, 3.5
Betty by Tiffany McDaniel, 4.5
A Journey Through Time by Kate Grenville, 3.5
A Station on the Road to Nowhere by Benjamin Wood, 3.5
The Things We Never Say by Elizabeth Strout, 3.5
Johnno by David Malouf, 3.5
The News from Dublin by Colm Tóibín, 3.5
John of John by Douglas Stuart, 3.5
Every Wild Soul by Katherine Johnson, 3
The Boy from the Sea by Garrett Carr, 3
Warlight by Michael Ondaatje, 3
The Eleventh Hour by Salman Rushdie, 3
Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy by Douglas Adams narrated by Stephen Fry 4
Bleak House by Charles Dickens 5 (would give more if I could)
Shuggie Bain by Douglas Stuart 3
Train Dreams by Denis Johnson 5 (another book worthy of a 10!)
The Black Book by Orhan Pamuk, 4.5
Christ Stopped at Eboli, 3.5
Britain's Coastline by Ben Robinson, 4
Flashlight by Susan Choi, 3.5
The Midnight Train by Matt Haig, 3.5