

**Travels with Charley and Later Novels 1947–1962:
The Wayward Bus / Burning Bright / Sweet
Thursday / The Winter of Our Discontent / Travels
with Charley in Search of America**

John Steinbeck , Robert DeMott (Editor) , Brian Railsback (Editor)

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John Steinbeck was never content to repeat himself, and his restless search for new forms and fresh subject matter is fully evident in the books of his later years. This volume collects four novels that exhibit the full range of his gift, along with a travel book that has become one of his most enduringly popular works.

In *The Wayward Bus* (1947), Steinbeck leads a group of ill-matched passengers representing a spectrum of social types and classes, stranded by a washed-out bridge, on a circuitous journey that exposes cruelties, self-deceptions, and unsuspected moral strengths. The tone ranges from boisterous comedy to trenchant satirical observation of postwar America. *Burning Bright* (1950), an allegory set against shifting backgrounds (circus, sea, farm) and revolving around the fear of sterility and the desire for self-perpetuation, marks Steinbeck's involvement with the drama in its fusion of the forms of novel and play.

Sweet Thursday (1954) marks Steinbeck's return, in a mood of sometimes frothy comedy, to the characters and milieu of his earlier *Cannery Row*. A love story set against the background of the local brothel, the Bear Flag, *Sweet Thursday* is for all its intimations of melancholy one of the most lighthearted of Steinbeck's books. It was subsequently adapted by Rodgers and Hammerstein into their musical *Pipe Dream*. Steinbeck's final novel, *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961) is set in an old Long Island whaling town modeled on Sag Harbor, where he had been spending time since 1953. The book breaks new ground in its depiction of the crass commercialism of contemporary America, and its impact on a protagonist with traditionalist values who is appalled but finally tempted by the encroaching sleaziness.

Travels with Charley in Search of America (1962) was Steinbeck's last published book. A record of his experiences and observations as he drove around America in a pickup truck, accompanied by his standard poodle Charley, it is filled with engaging, often humorous description and comes to a powerful climax in an encounter with racist demonstrators in New Orleans.

Travels with Charley and Later Novels 1947–1962: The Wayward Bus / Burning Bright / Sweet Thursday / The Winter of Our Discontent / Travels with Charley in Search of America Details

Date : Published February 15th 2007 by Library of America


ISBN : 9781598530049

Author : John Steinbeck , Robert DeMott (Editor) , Brian Railsback (Editor)

Format : Hardcover 1125 pages

Genre : Fiction, Travel, Literature, Classics, American

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From Reader Review Travels with Charley and Later Novels 1947–1962: The Wayward Bus / Burning Bright / Sweet Thursday / The Winter of Our Discontent / Travels with Charley in Search of America for online ebook

Brixton says

Dec 2010: *Travels with Charley*, 5 of 5 stars. Bill Bryson, *et al* can't hold a candle to Steinbeck. How low our expectations have become, this is how high they could be. Note to eighth grade American English teachers: if you want your students to learn about their country, their country's history, their people and the land no matter where in the country you are, where the nation is at right now and how we got here, AND become fond of John Steinbeck, give them *Travels with Charley* and trust that they'll go to *Grapes of Wrath* on their own when they're ready. This was in every aspect and detail what goodreads says 5 stars should mean: amazing.

Oct 2007: *The Wayward Bus*, 3 Of 5 stars (review here: <http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/...>)

Lindsay says

"...I do wonder whether there will come a time when we can no longer afford our wastefulness--chemical wastes in the rivers, metal wastes everywhere, and atomic wastes buried deep in the earth or sunk in the sea. When an Indian village became too deep in its own filth, the inhabitants moved. And we have no place to which to move." (p 782)

"And now a force was in hand how much more strong, and we hadn't had time to develop the means to think, for man has to have feelings and then words before he can come close to thought and, in the past at least, that has taken a long time." (p 787)

"...the very name Florida carried the message of warmth and ease and comfort. It was irresistible." (p 788)

"For how can one know color in perpetual green, and what good is warmth without cold to give it sweetness?" (p 789)

"If I were a good businessman, and cared a little for my unborn great grandchildren, which I do not, I would gather all the junk and the wrecked automobiles, comb the city dumps, and pile these gleanings in mountains and spray the whole thing with that stuff the navy uses to mothball ships. At the end of a hundred years my descendants would be permitted to open this treasure trove and would be the antique kings of the world...The things we have to pay to have hauled away could bring fortunes." (p 794)

"Montana seems to me to be what a small boy would think Texas is like from hearing Texans." (p 872)

"I wonder why we think the thoughts and emotions of animals are simple." (p 876)

"It is impossible to be in this high spinal country without giving thought to the first men who crossed it, the French explorers, the Lewis and Clark men." While standing at the Continental Divide. (p 877)

Martin Hernandez says

El último volumen de la serie de 3 libros publicados por la Library of America recopila las siguientes obras de **STEINBECK** (mis comentarios de cada una, siguiendo las ligas):

The Wayward Bus

Burning Bright

Sweet Thursday

The Winter of Our Discontent

Travels with Charley: In Search of America

Shannon T. says

This collection solidified a fact I was unaware of - John Steinbeck is my favourite author. His command of language is flawless and captivating, I would even call it wholesome and satisfying. His characters, no matter their place in the story, are always explored in-depth and feel like real people. Steinbeck has a unique way of unspooling his character's psyche to his readers, through their actions and reactions towards other characters, their dialogue (particularly this - Steinbeck would have made a good playwright), and their inner monologue when written from their perspective.

His play with narrative structure, demonstrated in "Burning Bright" particularly, and his experimentation with expression through different social classes and issues make each of his short stories, novellas and novels original from each other. I could read all his texts a hundred times and still enjoy and discover new nuances and wits that either warm my heart or chill my soul, always sparking my brain and inspiration.

I always feel drawn in and captivated by Steinbeck's towns, and his innate understanding of the American 'way', and his people. I find it extremely difficult to put into words how much I appreciate his simple stories, what they teach me and how they change the way I see the world. His writing is what I wish to one day emulate in my own way - simple tales with everyday characters that wrench the reader's heart into the pages and pump it for all its worth. The simplest of stories can have the biggest impact, this is a lesson I am continually learning but also something that grounds me.

Thank you, Steinbeck, for your contributions to the literary world.

Rey Dekker says

...nice read...and remarkable that his concluding chapter deals with racism in the deep south...after last night's election results I noted how Romney solidly held Dixie, home of racism and segregation, and then bled westward encompassing much of the footprint of the Louisiana Purchase...which directly and indirectly led to the Civil War...the contention being new states = slave states or free???...this odd "coincidence" pretty much summed up my conclusion that much of the antipathy for Obama is really a thinly veiled vestige of racism...Colin Powell, Col. Lawrence Wilkerson ("Let me just be candid: My party is full of racists.") speaking openly about the crazy uncle in the attic while John Sununu pretty much called Powell a "racist" for supporting Obama...so to see The South almost solidly in the red and follow the swath across the middle of

the country to the near west pretty much ratified what I have contended all along...racism is alive and well in America...and needs to go away...middle-aged, affluent, large white guys are dinosaurs but still hold the wealth and power...OUTSIDE of the voting booth...and they nearly BOUGHT The White House for The White Guy...terrifying...then to finish up Steinbeck's writing as he searched for America some 50 years ago and see how little has really changed...disheartening...at least we dodged the White Bullet this time...next time...???...who knows.... <http://jeffwinbush.com/2012/11/01/wil...>

David Ward says

Travels With Charley: In Search of America by John Steinbeck (Viking Press 1962) (917.3). In September of 1960, John Steinbeck was an aging writer who feared that he was losing touch with the pulse of America. So he tossed his dog Charley into his pickup truck, and off they went in search of adventure – and America. They visited thirty states, including the South in the dead middle of the battle over integration. Steinbeck never wrote a memoir. Perhaps this will have to do. My rating: 7/10, finished 2009.

Read1000books says

[Note: I did not read the entire book, just the section entitled "Travels With Charley: In Search Of America".]A sometimes wonderously humorous account of Steinbeck's three month tramp across the U.S. with his large poodle dog Charley and the people he met along the way. It starts off in September of 1960 just as Hurricane Donna comes roaring through his home area of Sag Harbor, Long Island and nears its conclusion during the school racial strife in New Orleans (a sad, very unhumorous section to say the least). My favorite sections included: when he went to church (p. 818-819), the almost crossing the border into Canada [a must read](p. 823-825), and about Lewis & Clark (p. 877) which included this hilarious jab: " And if we get to thinking we are men, we might remember that in two and a half years of pushing through wild and unknown country to the Pacific Ocean and back, only one man died and only one deserted. And we get sick if the milk delivery is late and nearly die of heart failure if there is an elevator strike". At times, Steinbeck drifts off into the witty style of my favorite travel writer, Mark Twain; at others he pens the sage statements of a man pondering the approaching winter of his life, such as when he says that discussing controversial subjects "skims the joy off a pan of conversation". An interesting look at small parts of America exactly fifty years later.

Erik says

Final Steinbeck collection from the Library of America. The Wayward Bus is an enjoyable character study. Burning Bright is an admirable but failed experiment. Sweet Thursday is an attempt to recapture the magic of Cannery Row but doesn't quite live up to it's predecessor. The Winter of Our Discontent is a very good look at the declining morals of midcentury America and deals with similar issues to those Steinbeck explored in his Dust Bowl works. Travels with Charley was Steinbeck's last major work and gives readers a good look into his thoughts on America and Americans.

Brian says

Steinbeck is often skipped by many people: Grapes of Wrath spoiled him for so many 13 year olds. He is a lovely writer, and his non-fiction should be taken, liberally. Travels with Charley is the first thing I read from this edition. The trip that inspired the book (published in 1963) was taken in 1960. He won the Nobel in 63 the same year Charley died.

He undertook the solo road trip as break after the first draft of The Winter of Our Discontent and a failed attempt to draft Stevenson as a presidential candidate. Jacqueline Kennedy asked him to write a biography of JFK, after an extended correspondence he declined, but shortly after wrote LBJ's presidential acceptance speech. He led a very full life and his wit speaks to his wildly varied experience.

This book propelled me back into reading books again, or maybe it was just winter in New York. Snapshots of America(ns) taken from the back of his rig (Rocinante) in fall of 1960 will always be worth a look to me.

This all sounds so trite. May I never again deface a book I adore with such a horrific review.

Frank Scozzari says

Steinbeck's "Travels with Charley" takes you across America in a pickup truck with an oversized poodle as your companion. Through Steinbeck's eyes we see desert, mountains, forests, & oceans, and most importantly, common people, which he describes best. "Sweet Thursday" is an awesome follow-up to "Cannery Row," in which he gives his best friend, Doc Ricketts, the best gift of all, placing him eternally in literature with the perfect soulmate.

Molly says

“To find not only that this bedlam of color was true but that the pictures were pale and inaccurate translations, was to me startling. I can’t even imagine the forest colors when I am not seeing them. I wondered whether constant association could cause inattention, and asked a native New Hampshire woman about it. She said the autumn never failed to amaze her; to elate. ‘It’s a glory,’ she said, ‘and can’t be remembered, so that it always comes as a surprise.’” – Pages 789-790

Steinbeck is talking about his amazement at the splendor of New England fall foliage. How stunning it is when you watch it transpire around you. The way the sunlight makes it glow. Or how the rain darkened bark makes the colors pop. How the leaves falling softly to the ground around your feet make you feel a part of the action. Making it come alive; a gorgeous death for the regeneration of leaves. But beyond his knack for painting a picture so perfectly for your mind, what he does best in this travel memoir is to engage the folks in his path so succinctly. To know the perfect question to ask, in the most appropriate way. Do New Englanders appreciate the gift that nature graces them with every single year? Or do they overlook what is right in front of their nose? Too annoyed to notice the beauty because of the work involved in clearing up the mounds of mess? Is their focus more on the piles of dead, crunchy leaves clogging up their windshields, driveways and gutters? Or do they get blindsided by the beauty in the middle of their raking tasks by looking up on a crisp,

clear day? As his subject so beautifully puts it, we notice. And we forgive the extra work, due to this breathtaking display that sneaks up on us every year and distracts us from the inevitable challenge that is winter. The view out of my own window knocks the wind out of me on a daily basis right now. And by the time I remember that fall is a harbinger for the snow plow, it is too late to do anything about it. Mother Nature is clever that way. And Steinbeck is clever in reading people, engaging them and capturing their essence.

This was the last published book by Steinbeck. In health that was sketchy and with his aging Standard Poodle, Charley, by his side, he set out to visit the America he was fond of exposing through written works of fiction. I'm sure that much of his memoir here is fictionalized as well; conversations embellished, persons perhaps placed more strategically in his travel recounts. But what I felt was that he went to explore the regions of our country and to find out what linked or differentiated the regions to or from each other. I felt that the experiences he captured held legitimacy because when he described his encounters with the places I knew myself, a connection was made. Author Bill Barich has said that in *Travels With Charley*, Steinbeck's "perceptions were right on the money about the death of localism, the growing homogeneity of America, the trashing of the environment. He was prescient about all that."

My understanding is that Steinbeck's novels cover extremely depressing or tragic times and topics. But his language and description is so piercing that it is magnetizing, above the sadness. I have yet to read anything other than *The Pearl*. This edition that I read contained a collection of some of his most popular fictional works. I did not have the chance to delve into them because my reading time is limited enough with *Sammy the Toddler*. I had to renew this book multiple times from my library just to get through this brief gem of descriptive discovery. *Travels With Charley* was far from unsettling. It was quite hysterical and left me laughing and reading passages aloud all along the way to whomever was near me at the moment. Steinbeck certainly espoused on his political views of the time through his dog and his encounters nationwide. He often became melancholy with memories of a different time and world. And near the end of his journey, he delved into a very dark part of our country's history with race. His travels were more lighthearted in the beginning and became heavy-hearted nearing the end.

I admire and appreciate the courage, time and effort involved in condensing one's cultural, physical and emotional experience with traversing this country. Though it is obvious from reading that it took place in a very specific time, it demonstrates how similar we all still are to our ways, our regions, our dreams. And it was damn fine writing from one of this country's giants. I loved getting to know him, his quirks, his passions and his dog. That he waited until the final chapters of his life to share this journey created a stronger impact for me. And that sense of humor didn't hurt.

"I let Charley out, and suddenly an angry streak of gray burned across the clearing in the pines and bucketed into the house. That was George. He didn't welcome me and he particularly didn't welcome Charley. I never did rightly see George, but his sulking presence was everywhere. For George is an old gray cat who has accumulated a hatred of people and things so intense that even hidden upstairs he communicates his prayer that you will go away. If the bomb should fall and wipe out every living thing except Miss Brace, George would be happy. That's the way he would design a world if it were up to him. And he could never know that Charley's interest in him was purely courteous; if he did, he would be hurt in his misanthropy, for Charley has no interest in cats whatever, even for chasing purposes.

"We didn't give George any trouble because for two nights we stayed in Rocinante, but I am told that when guests sleep in the house George goes into the pine woods and watches from afar, grumbling his dissatisfaction and pouring out his dislike. Miss Brace admits that for the purposes of a cat, whatever they are, George is worthless. He isn't good company, he is not sympathetic, and he has little aesthetic value.

'Perhaps he catches mice and rats,' I suggested helpfully.

'Never,' said Miss Brace. 'Wouldn't think of it. And do you want to know something? George is a girl.'" –
Page 799

Dr.J.G. says

Sweet Thursday:-

Sweet indeed!
.....

The Winter of Our Discontent:-

Steinbeck is one of the greatest writers of our times, and this is more about human nature with its twists and recesses and subterfuges. He - this writer - gets to one's heart.
.....

Wayward Bus:-
.....

Burning Bright:-
.....

Christine says

My favorite Steinbeck book. He describes his trip all over the US during those election weeks before JFK was president elect. Steinbeck lived in a truck which he used for driving and sleeping while he was traveling from the US East coast to the West coast to talk to lots of people trying to find out the general mood in the country in the early sixties.

Many years ago I heard that there actually exists a movie or a documentary about this trip...if anybody knows more, please let me know at waldenpond66@yahoo.com. Thanks!

Gale says

“People Don’t Take Trips—Trips Take People”

Wow--this first-person travelogue takes the reader on a real, 1962 road trip across the USA in an awkward but amazing rectangle. At the age of 58 establish novelist, John Steinbeck, decides to undertake the ultimate automotive voyage of discovery, accompanied by his faithful canine companion, Charley (a large blue poodle). In Part One the Narrator luxuriates in the design and stuffing of his special-ordered truck with cabin, whom he whimsically names Rocinante (after Don Quixote’s old nag). Despite the harrowing experience of hurricane Donna, which nearly swamped his prize boat, Steinbeck sets out in search of the Real America.

During Four Parts the novelist/Narrator takes his readers on a rocky ride through autumnal New England, the wintery Midwest and rocky West. Glossing over San Francisco he wanders through landscapes that kindle boyhood memories south of San Jose in his hometown of Salinas—where he seriously debates if one can ever truly Go Back Home again. After facing the formidable Mojave Desert he tackles the long-ranges of Texas (his wife’s home state), and gives us a taste of a Thanksgiving orgy on a rich Texan ranch.

With some trepidation he tackles the South, where he insists on witnessing the street theater of the “Cheerleaders”—women who shout racial curses during school Segregation in New Orleans. After navigating the entire country he winds up lost in NY City. Through it all he has elderly Charley with him—to provide company, watchdog services and as bait for socializing with other campers. Hospitably he serves coffee and/or liquor to strangers, discusses events, weather and the countryside with transients, waitresses, truckers, and hotel folks. But did he actually find that elusive enigma of the real America? Readers can judge for themselves. A slice of the early 60’s preserved in a highly digestible literary format.

October 26, 2017

B says

I want to give this book one single review, but I decided that I can't.

Library of America books are very interesting and I probably like them most of all for the colorful tassels.

That said, this Steinbeck is a good writer.

So, the Wayward Bus -- Interesting because it doesn't really go anywhere. Most of the characters feel like types: archetype, stereotype, linotype? Some kind of type. They do not really seem very dimensional. But Steinbeck keeps the story and explanation moving fast enough that it seems like they're real people. And it is incredible that a story that contains so few events could show such crises.

Burning Bright - Really weird for such a mainstream author. It's almost post-modern in its act changes. The essential weirdness is unexpected and captivating. Here and in most of his work, Steinbeck seems to hold the masculine above all else.

Sweet Thursday - Fantastic. I don't remember Cannery Row well except my constant belief that Doc looked

and sounded like the Team Fortress 2 engineer. What Steinbeck does here is what he says he's going to do in the introduction: a series of very short little stories that come together to approximate one large story and the essential truth of living. Is it wrong that I think Hazel would be good for politics? (Yes, yes, it is. I think he could be misled as by Joe Elegant.)

Travels with Charley - This was a little disappointing. I think Steinbeck held out on some of his own personal feelings. And there are a lot of "so I was driving and driving" sections." And a lot of disclaimers not to take his journey as representative. Perhaps the most interesting question is what novel did Steinbeck hope to get out of this? As that's what he claims to be doing -- preparing for more writing.

Final thoughts - Steinbeck seems to have a real problem with people who write academic papers for fun. He also repeatedly turns to the subject of people who are motivated to do things by taxes and other legal requirements.
