

## On a Sexual Allegory Facing Civilization in John Steinbeck's *The Wayward Bus*\*

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Lee, Geon-Geun. "On a Sexual Allegory Facing Civilization in John Steinbeck's *The Wayward Bus*." *Studies in English Language & Literature* 43.4 (2017): 87-105. This paper aims to illuminate John Steinbeck's idea of sexuality by re-evaluating sexual images in *The Wayward Bus*, which have been criticized for its paste-up stories and vulgar characters. The detailed analysis of its texts in the light of psychology references reveals that the sexual desire is repressed by the civilization in the form of money, fame, and public relations. Also, it is found that such a situation causes the characters' negative aspects of sexual perversions, such as sex/love addiction, anxiety disorder, and hysteria. This story has relevance to the writer's stormy marriage life with his second wife, Gwyn. Steinbeck uses panoramic stories as a helpful literary technique in an allegorical style describing all the characters equally in the internal monologue of the mind. Notably, the symbolic structure of *The Wayward Bus* is similar to the sexual response cycle—excitement, plateau, orgasm, and resolution: The neurotic characters' sexual drive is stimulated in a closed space. The characters' desire increases up to the highest level of excitement, bursts up into the modes of intercourse, argument, assault, and rape, and finally recovers its initial condition. I hope this study will contribute to expanding the scope of research about Steinbeck's literature besides his tendency of social criticism around *The Grapes of Wrath*. (Chosun University)

**Key Words:** John Steinbeck, *The Wayward Bus*, sexuality, allegory, civilization

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\* Some parts of this paper were presented at 2015 ELLAK International Conference that was held in Bexco Convention Hall, Busan, Korea on December 12, 2015.

I pray you all gyve audyence,  
 And here this mater with reverence,  
 By fygure a morall playe;  
 The somonyng of Everyman called it is,  
 That of our lyves and endyng shows  
 How transytory we be all daye.

—epigraph to *The Wayward Bus* (from *Everyman*)

## I. Steinbeck's Manifesto of Sexuality

John Steinbeck, a Nobel Prize-winning author, is one of the most beloved writers around the world by readers, not necessarily by critics. The central themes of his works are said to be social protest (*In Dubious Battle*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *The Grapes of Wrath*), tragicomedy (*Tortilla Flat* and *Cannery Row*), and parable through pastoral or simple life (*The Pastures of Heaven*, *The Long Valley*, and *The Pearl*). Above all, as Arthur Miller praises that “[the writer’s] picture of American’s humiliation of the poor [. . .] challenged the iron American denial of reality” (Shillinglaw 66), a significant portion of his novels allegedly emphasize a strong sense of social responsibility. Besides this commonly accepted reputation, Steinbeck’s idea of wild sexuality against civilized morality is used as human nature in most of his works, which resembles Carl Jung’s collective unconsciousness, the structures of universal unconscious mind shared by all people. The central examples are Ysobel’s sexual symbol in *Cup of Gold*, the paisanos’ freewheeling lives in *Tortilla Flat*, Lennie’s sexual pursuit obsessed with something soft in *Of Mice and Men*, and the uncomfortable relationship between reason and desire in “The Chrysanthemums” and “The Snake” of *The Long Valley*. Particularly, *To a God Unknown* describes a mossy rock in a circular glade as a holy object of nature, where the protagonist Joseph Wayne had the first sexual intercourse with his new

wife, Elizabeth.

These seemingly obscene works emphasize the power of sexual drive in a mysterious way. This theme of primitive urge hidden behind the veil of civilization continued until Margie's sexually predatory behavior in Steinbeck's last novel, *The Winter of Our Discontent*. Notably, *The Wayward Bus* stands out by treating the eleven characters' sexualities as a concomitant denominator. In fact, this book enjoyed tremendous success in a market: Over seventy-five million copies, a fame of The Book of the Month, and the trade with *Warner Brothers* for a film in 1949. Nevertheless, like Steinbeck's other works, this novel has been underrated and misunderstood by many critics. For instance, Orville Prescott says, "It is a tired and tiresome reworking of a shopworn formula, the arbitrary throwing together of a group of strangers into one common danger so that each of them may reveal his character under stress" (17). Also, Frank O'Malley laments that this work virtually represents the fact that Steinbeck's artistry is severely deteriorating and ascribes its central reason to "the lure of Hollywood or the submission to the point-of-view, the literary fascism of the New York dictators over literature that vulgarizes and enfeebles them" (44).

Indeed, *The Wayward Bus* is delineated in a movie style through the writer's skills learned from his long experience in *Lifeboat*, *A Medal for Benny*, and *The Pearl*. Besides, his non-teleological thinking method, by emphasizing "what it is" rather than "what it should be," and neglecting the causality of the events, helps to make the realistic image quality. As the protagonist Juan Chicoy says that he likes what does not make any sense, this novel is based on a hypothetical reasoning, which is far from the instructive and cryptic properties of his previous works such as *The Grapes of Wrath* (Levant 210). Moreover, regarding its sexual image, when writing this novel, Steinbeck and his second wife Gwyn had an infelicitous marriage life, influencing the writer's negative treatment of the neurotic female characters, such as Alice and Bernice despite the fact that he dedicated this book to Gwyn.

The biographical story adds the thematic aspect of sexuality to the film image of

*The Wayward Bus*. With all the formal weakness of abstracted characters and a common background, its contents display the novelist's hindsight after his second marriage life as well as his lifelong idea of sexuality as a fundamental instinct. In such a context, Howard Levant insists that just a division between the illustrative system and the type-specimen characters is "the essential reason for the simple and puzzling impact" to critics, but the novel fuses "the two into a harmonious unity" (211). That is, the criticism that *The Wayward Bus* is merely made up of all the paste-up stories and vulgar people might be a shot in the dark without considering the author's private affairs and readers' massive response.

To re-evaluate its sexual image and illuminate Steinbeck's philosophy of sexuality partly caused by his inharmonious conjugal relations, I discuss the texts of *The Wayward Bus* in the light of psychological references of sexuality and study them in a new way the other critics have not tried. Through this analysis, the construction of the sexually charged novel is found to be similar to the sexual response cycle—excitement, plateau, orgasm, and resolution. To sum up, the neurotic characters' sexuality repressed by the civilization is titillated by their interaction, looking like going on a pilgrimage tensioned much enough to be highly sensitive, bursting up into the modes of intercourse, argument, assault and rape, and finally returning to its original condition.<sup>1</sup> These processes seem to allegorize the general pattern of the potential sexual desire against the morality and customs of the civilized society in that it "refers to a [sexual] image . . . concealed by the visible or literal meaning" (Childers and Hentzi 8). Also, it is noticeable that Steinbeck treats all the characters equally with the form of internal monologue to show their inner states of sexuality and concludes that the oppressed human sexuality cannot but return to the civilization after experiencing its natural eruption, making me write this paper.

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, the concept of civilization is based on Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*, where civilization, as an integrated form of superego, is understood as oppressing the fundamental nature of humanity called "oceanic" feeling. Also, the neurotic characters here are meant to be the people that use "forgetting, denial, displacement, rationalization, regression, and repression" for a defense mechanism to deal with the anxiety or stress caused by "the conflicts which exist between id, ego, and superego" (Kim 56).

## II. Excitement: Neurotics' Sexuality Freed from Civilization

Steinbeck conceived the name of *The Wayward Bus* to be *El Camion Vacilador* (the derisive van) based on the exotic background of Mexico, where the travel could be quickly intended to be rootless or directionally challenged. He writes about these words: "You're aiming at some place, but you don't care much whether you get there" (Steinbeck, *A Life in Letters* 284). As he says, the real aspects of sexuality of this novel are certainly an underlying desire dancing under the stage of human reason and also an allegorical feature. Indeed, at least to the writer's eyes, it might not be more interesting whether the people reach the destination of civilization, San Juan de la Cruz, than how they have their hidden desire released in the wild nature of trees and water.

This concept is deeply related to the epigraph from *Everyman* (1495, unknown author) noted in the foreword of this paper. Levant interprets the "mater" is sexuality and should be "placed in a moral context and expressed 'by fygure' or method as an allegory" (208). Besides, Frank William Watts says, "How utterly removed from the dignity of permanence are the daily lives of these modern pilgrims," and emphasizes there is nothing permanent except for "one inseparable unit man plus his environment" (88). To this, Louis Owens concludes, "Nature (sexuality) does not change, but humans' lives are transitory, which is called a triumph of Nature" (69). As the epigraph goes, superego is supposed to change like civilization required to meet the needs of the times. However, human nature is permanent as a natural being, and sexuality is its representative example.

Meanwhile, as Joseph Fontenrose says that this novel "symbolizes the contrast between appearance and reality" (110), neurotic characters are introduced that they do not find their ways out of sexual illusion into their real lives. It is likely that the power of civilization represses their free sexuality, transforming it into the unconsciousness. They do not realize themselves because "the past remains unverifiable, and, therefore, potentially non-existent," causing melancholia (Sorensen

129). As a result, their discontents seem to drive them into “impulse-control disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety, hysteria, dipsomania, bipolar disorder” (Lee 392) and other sexual aberrations. To such a situation, Sigmund Freud insists “neurosis is the negative of perversion,” and neurotics’ healthy infantile sexuality is directed by the civilizational interference in the way of “shame, disgust, pity and the structures of morality and authority erected by society” (31, 97), resulting in abnormal conditions.<sup>2</sup>

One example of neurosis in *The Wayward Bus* is Louie’s sex and love addiction. Almost all of Chapter Seven delineates Louie’s neurotic syndrome. “Nearly all his waking hours [he thinks] about girls. He like[s] to outrage them. He likes to have them fall in love with him and then walk away. He calls them pigs. ‘I’ll get a pig,’ he would say, ‘and you get a pig, and we’ll go out on the town’” (82). Additionally, Edgar, a ticket clerk, admires and has faith in him, and even the swamper and the punk working in the bus station follow Louie’s debased sexuality. Edgar always “ends up by going down the line”—to the whorehouses (89).

Owing to his sex/love addiction, Louie loses his sense of reality and even believes “if [he looks] directly into a girl’s eyes and smile[s], it ha[s] an effect” (82). During a ride to Rebel Corners, he puts Camille Oaks’s heavy suitcase down right behind his seat and tries to pick her up on pain of losing his job. However, her refusal gives him “a dry and grainy sense of loss,” and a massive burden to justify the failure. To such a sex/love addiction, Eric Griffin-Shelley insists its characteristics are dependent, obsessive, and compulsive. They might feel “only a sexual or romantic encounter will prevent the feeling of discomfort that signals the beginning of withdrawal and loss of functioning” (14), having “the obsessive thoughts and fantasies,” and their compulsion, as a driving force

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<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, they could lead to serious perversions: “homosexuality, fetishism, voyeurism, kleptomania, sadism and masochism, transvestism, coprophilia, undinism, frottage, chronic satyriasis and nymphomania, necrophilia, pederasty” (Weeks 70).

behind the behavior, even develops rather extensive and elaborate rituals [of sex/love] (26). Finally, Camille sees through Louie's sleazy sex/love addiction, and his love falls into a comedy.

Next, before the real ride to San Juan de la Cruze, this novel introduces characters one by one.<sup>3</sup> Juan and Alice Chicoy run a small restaurant and operate a shuttle bus. Pimples Carson, an assistant mechanic, is addicted to sweets as sex substitutes and sensitive to his facial disfigurement. Norma, a counter clerk, lives with her dream to meet her idol Clark Gable and enter the film industry. As their customer, Elliott Pritchard does a successful business and is traveling to with his bumptious wife Bernice and his freewheeling college-student daughter Mildred. The others are a veteran Ernest Horton, who received a Medal of Honor from the US Congress, a hypochondriac Old Van Brunt, who feels he is about to die of heart stroke, and Camille, who is a provocative stripper. Notably, their sexuality is mixed intricately in Chicoy's small bistro.

Among the characters, the Pritchards, Van, and Alice can be classified as neurotics. For a start, Elliott Pritchard has sacrificed sexual desires to the social life surrounding his company while his wife, Bernice, is distinctive of hating making love with him. Over time, her interests, such as a fur coat, a greenhouse, and trips, seem to replace her sexual love, one aspect caused by civilization like the following.

[Bernice's] married life was fairly pleasant and she was fond of her husband. She thought she knew his weaknesses and his devices and his desires. She herself was handicapped by what is known as a nun's hood, which prevented her experiencing any

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<sup>3</sup> It is interesting that Steinbeck tended to drive a lot of people, whose personalities are remarkably different from one another, into one crowded or isolated space. The examples are: *The Grapes of Wrath* has twelve people in a truck; *Lifeboat* nine survivors in a small boat; *The Pastures of Heaven* some denizens in a remote village in the mountains; *Tortilla Flat* six paisanos (Mexican Americans) in a small house; *Of Mice and Men* some laborers in a small lodging; *Cannery Row* homeless people in a shelter; and *The Moon Is Down* a lot of invaders in a residential building. Each of them always makes a microcosm, and the writer describes the people and their relationships in detail.

sexual elation from her marriage [. . .] Her husband's beginning libido she had accepted and then gradually by faint but constant reluctance had first molded and then controlled and gradually strangled, so that his impulses for her became fewer and fewer and until he himself believed that he was reaching an age when such things did not matter. (51)

However, Elliott's sexual desire has not disappeared entirely. On seeing Camille coming into the diner, he approaches her and asks if she has seen him somewhere. In fact, still not remembering that she is a stripper he saw at a stag party, he even says he may remember sooner or later. Indeed, his sexual interest in Camille has already been hardened or erect as soon as she enters. After this, his sexuality continues to increase. For example, when the bus turns a curve, he pretends to miss clutching at the seat-back, and his right hand "whip[s] Camille's short skirt up and his arm [goes] between her knees" (126).

Next, Van Brunt shows a neurotic syndrome based on the anxiety from a genetic disease. His twisted mentality and body make him cynical, and he complains about Juan's driving all the time. In other words, with his self-righteousness, he tries to hide his vicious and filthy soul. "He [has] his head bent permanently forward on the arthritic stalk of his neck so that the tip of his nose pointed straight at the ground," and "his long, deeply channeled upper lip [is] raised over his teeth like the little trunk of a tapir. The point over his teeth [seems] to be almost prehensile" (63). Interestingly, although he feels his health is in crisis—a series of mild strokes and numb hands, his remaining sexual desire attracts him to women and even young girls.

In Elliott's and Van's case, "aphanisis" is the underlying concept of their neuroses. Ernest Jones insists that it is "the total annihilation of the capacity for sexual gratification" and "consists of total inhibition, the death of desire" (Stein 37). Also, their decline of sexuality can be interpreted to intensify their fears and makes them more humble, guilty, and obedient (162). Nevertheless, Van's sexual feeling is more awakened in that Elliott is too timid and dishonest to pursue romance and not



so aware of his crisis as Van. Elliott, with higher status and more responsibility in the society, is conditioned to obey the super-ego of their society more remarkably, “[consisting] of the conscience and the ego-ideal,” and “conscience causes the guilt feeling, which primarily has the function of binding [his] human psyche to authority figure” (Hwang 67).

Lastly, Alice is a typical hysteric, revealing the symptom of bipolar disorder and “exaggerated sexual craving and excessive aversion to sexuality” (Freud 31), partly thanks to her fear that Juan might carry on with other women. “All relations and all situations [are] person-to-person things in which she and the other were huge, and all others were removed from the world. There [is] no shading” (27). Also, she habitually drinks in a closed lunchroom when she is left alone. Steinbeck adds a delusional disorder to her like this:

[Alice] imagined herself in bed with Juan, but her mind slipped on past that. “I could have had any man I wanted,” she boasted. “Enough made passes at me, God knows, and I didn’t give in much.” Her lips writhed away from her teeth a little salaciously. [. . .] She saw the fly. [. . .] Her flesh crawled with hatred. All her unhappiness, all her resentment, centered in the fly. With an effort of will she forced the two images of the fly to be one image. “You sone of a bitch,” she said softly. “You think I’m drunk. I’ll show you.” (149)

While drunken, Alice is attempting to kill a fly with a wet dish towel, the room is reduced to a shambles. At last, the tired fly “sense[s] in all directions for danger,” and makes a frantic last-ditch effort to restore its sexuality by “deliberately [dipping] his flat proboscis into the sweet, sticky wine” (150). This parable shows that Alice’s “cathected mental processes, wishes and desires,” which are repressed, not discharged to her consciousness, that is, “held back in a state of unconsciousness,” strive to break their way out (Freud 30).

All in all, the neurotic characters share the fear of aphanisis in their unconsciousness—like a hunger for food. Therefore, they are dishonest to their

sexuality, lacking a sense of reality and sexual attractiveness. Meanwhile, before leaving Rebel Corners, including these neurotics, the ten people's desire is excited more and more. For example, Mildred finds Juan's active nature; Pimples fills tremendous testosterone into his body by eating sweets—candy bars named “Love Nests” and “Coconut Sweethearts”; Norma is about to leave for Hollywood to meet her idol; and above all, Camille, the “Aphrodite of California” (Ditsky 94), acts as a catalyst to enkindle the other characters' sexuality, including Ernest and Juan—increased muscle tension, quickened heart rate and blood flow, accelerated breathing, and flushed skin. Now, during the bus ride, their nature of sexuality comes to fight the depressing worries caused by the civilization—money, religion, law, regulation, fame, family relations and other bodily dysfunctions.

### III. Plateau: Pilgrimage of Wayward Sexual Instinct

Next, Camille, a voluptuous stripper in a bar, makes a catalytic action to boost wayward sexual instinct in a closed space, causing so many sexually provocative atmosphere among the men. Nevertheless, it is significant that Steinbeck also portrays her as a brave and sensible person, and her dream just seems to be relatively dull or unattractive: “a nice house in a nice town, two children, and a stairway to stand on. She would be nicely dressed, and people would be come to dinner” (91).<sup>4</sup> Robert Morseberger criticizes that this characterization is a stereotype of female and bourgeois aspects of her dream, and the novelist's attitude is still a boring sexism (36-37).

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<sup>4</sup> Steinbeck treats sexuality as a fundamental basic instinct and does not assume that even prostitutes are the defeated against the traditional prejudice. For example, Dora in *Cannery Row*, a landlady of a whorehouse Bear Flag, helps the downtrodden and contributes to the community by her tax and volunteer work, and Suzy, a whore in *Sweet Thursday*, acts as a strong and independent role model and ends up being Doc's fiancée.

However, it seems that Steinbeck would like to attack a capitalist success-oriented point of view some women had at that time. This inference is related to his biographical fact: His second wife Gwyn was a beautiful girl with a long leg; she was eighteen years younger than Steinbeck and already had one son and another baby expected; her ambition, however, was much more than this comfortable family life, preying on his mind. Unlike Gwyn, Camille accepts that the dream of fame is just an illusion, and the writer seems to call her an intelligent and realistic person: "She [would] have a husband, of course, but she could not see him in her picture because the advertising in the women's magazines from which her dream came never included a man" (91).

To return to the text, Camille's existence, as her doctor tells her to put her sexuality in the air for her health, is supposed to bring her overpowering nature into other people so that they will not forget or ignore their passion. In a sense, she seems to be a missionary of sexuality. For example, she demonstrates clemency to peeping men in a conversation with Mildred by saying about Pimples, "He's just a little goaty. Most kids are like that. He'll probably get over it," and about Van, "He's pretty old" (165). This phase of the novel shows the characters' sexuality is being intensified. Most of the male passengers enjoy their sexual imagination by seeing the female bodies, except for Bernice. In this sense, Mildred also has an attractive and honest sexuality.

She had remembered that Van Brunt had never missed any show of legs all morning. [. . .] "I'll go out and fix my strap." She looked at [Van] and then, deliberately, she said, "You see, there are two straps on each shoulder. One is for the slip and the other supports the brassiere and the brassiere holds the breasts up firmly." She saw Van Brunt's color come up out of his collar. "There isn't any below that until the panties, if I wore panties, which I don't." Van Brunt turned and walked away and Mildred felt better. Now the old fool wouldn't have a comfortable moment. (161)

Meanwhile, Mildred, in contrast to her parents, is a freewheeling college girl, who

knows how to enjoy her sexuality and feels her heart rate, breathing, and blood pressure continue to increase from the moment she saw Juan, meaning that her sexual drive goes wayward.

Another case of excited sexuality is perceived in the teenagers Norma and Pimples. Their sexual drives are immature and developing as is seen in Norma's hives and Pimples' pimples, and their sexuality and morality are still vague and unformed. They are on the bus because Juan suggests an outing to Pimples, and Norma decides to leave there permanently after a fight with Alice. Peter Lisca says that "[Norma's] soul is an odd combination of sexual frustration, illusions, and clichés," and "[Pimples'] is made up of advertising slogans and clichés of the 'You too can be successful' type" (235, 239). And also their sexual experiences are on the level of imagination: Norma keeps Clark Gable's picture on her dresser, going to bed wearing a gold wedding ring, loving her image of sexy pose in the mirror, which might be auto-erotic, and Pimples eats prodigious amounts of sweets rich in food energy, producing sexual urges, showing even a symptom of voyeurism.<sup>5</sup> His nature was focused on Camille's curvy body and shifted toward Norma's. The reason is Camille invokes sexuality from Norma by changing her face with a beauty make-up, in other words, Norma and Pimples come to give a shape to their abstract sexuality.

Lastly, Juan and Ernest are healthy men who are honest and realistic in their and others' sexuality—Juan and Mildred succeed in fulfilling theirs, and Ernest

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<sup>5</sup> In 2000, Clay Calvert pointed "the World Wide Web is awash in more pornographic and graphic voyeurism pages" and "this type of voyeurism is akin to the voyeurism defined as a sexual disorder or form of sexual deviance" (10). Additionally, he exemplified <http://www.voyeurweb.com>, where "further levels of sexual, voyeuristic fetishes—pictures of unsuspecting women taken while they sit on a toilet, pictures of women's underwear shot from underneath their skirts (so-called upskirt voyeurism), and pictures taken from above women looking down their blouses (downblouse voyeurism)" (51). Now, over a decade after Calvert's paper, this tendency of voyeurism is so rampant that we could say it is "banality of sexuality" borrowed from Hannah Arendt's "banality of evil." On the contrary, a healthy person's looking at the other sex is supposed to be just a preparatory behavior and his or her sexual energy is not only in eyes but also the whole body, most in the genital organ. That is, "the normal sequence of courtship is: seeking a partner, pretactile interaction, tactile interaction or foreplay, and finally intercourse" (Langevin 78).

might go out with Camille after reaching their destination. Ernest stands out with his honesty, “frankly gazing at the blonde’s legs” (102), and Juan is reasonable enough to control his violent nature by asking a question of a small metal Virgin of Guadalupana on the dashboard, but not religious. The two strong-willed men deserve to save the others from the wayward condition, but their sexuality is swollen enough to burst out by Mildred’s and Camille’s.

Now, right before the climax, the bus “Sweetheart” reaches a bridge over San Ysidro, but the heavy rain has caused them to make a detour along the past road although it is more slippery and longer. While driving, Juan suddenly feels like running away from the current moment and going to Mexico not to return to his hysterical wife. In this plateau phase of the novel (when analogized to the sexual response circle), the busy water of San Ysidro River feels like the overwhelming power of civilization, and the bridge is where weak human sexuality can cross to the collective unconscious or the whole humanity. As the civilization prevents the passengers from accessing their universal nature, Juan, their leader, makes a wise decision to choose a mountain road. And there, the mountain infuses the people’s old souls with abundant sexuality.

#### **IV. Ejaculation and Resolution of Wild Sexuality**

The next scenes show that the passengers’ swollen and clogged sexuality cannot help but burst out freely in a natural environment they unexpectedly meet, which is one aspect of the writer’s sexual allegories. Juan drives his bus into the mud, leaving them, and saying he will ask for help. Bernice displaces her rage to Elliott hysterically, and Mildred gets out of them, following Juan. With her hatred against her parents’ neurosis, her sexuality is about to explode—needing a rapid intake of oxygen and ready for a sudden, forceful release of sexual tension. She bravely enters a barn of the abandoned Hawkins farm barn and meets Juan, who is resting on the

stack of straws. And then, they ejaculate their sexuality under an agreement, and their stress melts away with it.

Juan laughed. "What do you want?" "Why did you come down here? Did you think I'd follow you?" "You want the truth or do you want to play games?" he asked. "Well, I'd like both. But no—er—I guess I want the truth first." [. . .] Juan walked along and his face broke into a wide smile and the scar on his lip made the smile off-center. He looked down at her and his black eyes were warm. "I came down here because I hoped you would go for a walk, and then I thought I might—I might even get you." She wrapped her arm around his arm and pulled her cheek hard against the sleeve of his jacket. (242-43)

Another release of sexual tension is made by Elliott. The gentleman makes a bed for Bernice, who feigns to be sick, in a cave. After that, Elliott, exhausted by his wife's whining, is humiliated by Ernest's attack on his double-faced morality helped by the sense of achievement in the industry. Disappointed with it, Elliott seeks for Camille's response by offering a job to her, but she refuses it mercilessly by asking, "What'll your wife have to say about that?" (237). After all, Elliott's enraged sexuality breaks out its suppressing wall made by the civilization. He goes to the cave and rapes his wife.

"Elliott! what are you doing? Elliott!" "Shut up," he said. "You hear me? Shut up! You're my wife, aren't you? Hasn't a man got any rights with his wife?" "Elliott, you're mad! Someone'll—someone'll see you." She fought him in panic. "I don't know you," she said. "Elliott, you're tearing my dress." "I bought it, didn't I? I'm tired of being treated like a sick cat." Bernice cried softly in fear and in horror . . . Her eyes were ferocious. She raised her hand and set her nails against her cheek. She drew them down experimentally once and then she bit her lower lip and slashed downward with her fingernails. [. . .] She put out her hand and dirties it on the cave floor and rubbed the dirt into her bleeding cheek. (240)

In the next breath, Norma, the only virgin in this novel, experiences her first

physical contact from Pimples in the bus. After her makeover by Camille, as noted before, his sexuality has been focused on her. He uses the bait of marriage by saying “it’s good for a young guy to have a wife. It gives him kind of—ambition” (249) and tries to arouse her sympathy by pretending to sob for his facial disfigurement. And then, she responds by laying her hand on his arm and invites his sexual attack—throwing his arms around her and plucking at her skirt. Norma manages to repulse it by Camille’s appearance outside the bus. To this scene, Gonzales and Gladstein conclude “even for an insecure and unattractive man, a woman’s attractiveness and kind-heartedness will only be construed as invitations for aggression” (162).

Back to the barn, after Juan and Mildred’s gratifying intercourse, they wish it could go on a little more, but know it can not, which means their swelled and erect sexuality returns to its previous condition, resolution. They come back to the bus separately, and then Juan and the passengers dig the bus out of the mire and restarts to drive them to the destination. To this phase of resolution, Fontenrose negatively thinks that “the bus represents the world, whose inhabitants journey toward death” (109) and the town looks like the heavenly city covered with the civilizational traces—money, position, Hollywood glamor, and cosmetics. Besides, with a detached manner, Owens judges, “The novel ends on a note of triumph precisely because nothing has changed. Steinbeck’s message is that this is the way things are, and in spite of this the world will endure and flower and grow” (69).

However, all in all, after experiencing the ejaculation of their sexuality, Juan and some of his passengers seem to feel a general sense of well-being, enhanced intimacy with some fatigue. For example, Ernest, an honest and energetic man, and Camille, a beautiful and wise woman, are likely to have a romantic relationship after meeting each other at Hollywood Plaza. On the other hand, other passengers hear Juan call their arrival. All the passengers would have different lives and so forget how they spend time together because the power of civilization is too high for them to look back on this ride. This novel ends up in a sentimental way—“little lights

winking with distance, lost and lonely in the night, remote and cold and winking, strung on chains” (261).

## V. Sexual Allegory Learned from a Marriage Life

*The Wayward Bus* is indissolubly linked with Steinbeck’s stormy marriage life with his second wife, Gwyn Conger. The time of writing this was two years after their marriage (March 1943) and the film of *The Pearl* brought to completion. In contrast to his first wife, Carol Henning, Steinbeck’s work at that time isolated Gwyn in New York. Indeed, in the 1940s, the writer concentrated his energy on war-effort works and film production, which required him to travel a lot to Europe and Mexico. However, Gwyn was not a free wife to understand his career.

According to Jay Parini, Steinbeck confessed to his neighbor Benchley that “his marriage was a mess, a mistake, a wrong turn in his life” (375). From their friends’ interview, Parini writes, “Gwyn was deceitful and would flirt with other men,” and “Steinbeck was no model husband and put his writing first” (393). Notably, when he worked on *The Wayward Bus* in the spring of 1946, Gwyn had a difficult pregnancy with their second son, John Steinbeck IV. After that, she showed psychosomatic syndromes—hysteria and whining. It is said that she felt his son’s birth would repress her opportunity to become a showy singer. Furthermore, even after their divorce (August 1948), she was a thorough alcoholic, and under the influence of spirits, became somewhat grand and pretentious (Steinbeck John IV, and Steinbeck Nancy 10).

That is not to say that this novel describes a cheap misogyny, instead, it reveals the author’s anxiety over the decline of sexuality, male/female marital relationships, and the suppression of civilization or commercialism. Also, sexuality is his lifelong theme, and he showed the manuscript to Gwyn and she loved it.



In fact, revealing it in *Cosmopolitan*, he seems to have studied sexuality ceaselessly from Chaucer, the *Heptameron* and Boccaccio's *Decameron* (Van Gelder 123). To this matter, in fact, as its name suggests, Steinbeck confesses he "[does not] have any idea as to whether it is any good or not," and "the people in it are alive, so much so that sometimes they take a tack he did not suspect they were going to" (Parini 364). In other words, he does not wish to answer the question of what sexuality is and what humans should do with it. In the same context, Antonia Seixas says, "he is like an entomologist describing the antics of a group of insects; he neither praises nor blames. He understands them, as specimens; perhaps he even loves them in a way" (279), and Steinbeck's object is just *homo Americanus*.

His panoramic stories of *The Wayward Bus* are helpful for the exactness of observation, and sexuality should be seen to be an essential aspect of human nature. Thus, the criticism of paste-up stories and vulgar people is not too superficial. The neurotics in this novel show the negative aspects of perversion, and the reason is that their minds have been repressed by the civilization: Louie and his colleagues—sex/love addiction from lack of self-confidence, Elliott and Van—anxiety and rage from aphanisis, Alice and Bernice—excessive aversion to sexuality from hysteria. Also, Norma and Pimples are seen as a kind of young kids before neurosis, and Mildred possesses a healthy sexual appetite. Camille and Ernest are wise enough to be honest about their sexuality and control it. However, their sexuality is likely to be thrown into the domination of overwhelming civilization. Lastly, Juan has a transcendent or allegorical role of a shepherd. He does not interfere with others' relations or tries to sermon morality, but his unplanned acts of stalling the bus into a mud and returning after the happy intercourse with Mildred give the people the opportunity to receive sexuality from the mountain. At the last scene, Juan says, "That's San Juan up ahead," which means it would be time for the passengers to hide their sexual desire in the civilized world (261).

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