

Minor Arts Taking the Bus¹

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People think taking a bus is a pleasure, a necessity or an affliction, depending on their candor and optimism. I consider it more an art that one must learn and master. In my long years as a bus passenger, I have discov-

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ered and substantiated the rules that I am going to explain, so that if any reader is interested, he or she may use them.

To wait for the bus: you have to do this while simultaneously saying your rosary, asking God that it not be too full and that the driver will want to stop. While waiting for a bus, you must



Drawings by Héctor Ponce de León

constantly run from one end of the block to the other, trying to read the signs on each of the buses lined up one immediately in front of the other. You also must watch the stoplight regulating vehicle movement along the block, move toward the middle when it's red and move back toward the corner when it's green.

To get on the bus: you must be the first one on, if necessary beating back arthritic women and mothers with children who are in your way, paying no attention to shouts of, "There are no gentlemen left in Mexico!"

Once on board: you must block the entrance and pay with a large denomination bill, thus forcing the driver to accelerate before all the passengers get on. Remember this maxim: every passenger is your enemy; the fewer of them, the better.

If the bus is full, you elbow your way back, always remembering to say, "Excuse me please," until you get to the side seats where nobody is sure if three or four should fit. Once there, you say, "Make a little room for me," and without further ado, sit on the two seated passengers and start reading the newspaper. Most of the time, one of the two victims will get up, furious, and leave. Then you can comfortably settle into the free seat.

If the seat next to you is vacated, you must open your legs as wide as possible and pretend to be asleep or start drooling to make sure nobody will sit down next to you. The further you are from the rest of the passengers, the better.

Behavior toward women: on buses, women have no priority (we've done enough letting them vote and do silly things in public). If an old lady

stumbles over to you and says, "Oh, sir, won't you have pity on me?" you answer, "No."

If the bus is empty and you're young—very young—high school kids, for example, you have to all get on at once and party. The moment you get on a bus is one of the few opportunities a young person has of expressing him or herself in public and letting everyone see his/her personality. To do that, you have to screech at the top of your lungs and come up with some really original quips like, "The last one on pays, driver," run to the back of the bus, all the while kicking your fellow students and sit on the back seat, jostling each other.

Once you're seated, if some of your friends are still on the street, it's a good idea to call out to them, but something clever like, "That Shooter! Where did you leave Jaws?" If you don't have any friends on the street, it's appropriate to take the pen away from the slowest kid in the bunch and threaten to throw it out the window. This will cause immediate screaming and a struggle that will inevitably create a good impression among the other passengers. It raises their spirits and makes them long to be young again so they, too, could party.

If you're a beautiful young girl, you must get on the bus swishing your long hair, with an expression on your face that says, "Bummer! Me here! I belong in a Jaguar!" Then, you have to sit down next to another woman just to avoid anyone touching your legs.

If you get on with children, you mustn't be selfish. You have to let the little mites come into contact with all the passengers, whom Mother Nature has probably deprived of the joy of





being mothers or fathers. You have to let your children play with the lapels of the gentleman next to you and with the hair of the lady sitting in front of you and lick the hand of whoever is holding on to the railing.

The bus is our home, even if only for a moment. While we ride in it, we must act completely naturally, as though we were in our own house. If we're tired, we take a nap; if we have a cold, we spit on the floor; if we're hungry, we eat a mango. If people get on and begin to sing or recite poetry, we must pay attention to them, even if afterward we don't put a nickel in their tin cup.

While we must maintain them at a distance, it is a good idea to be friendly to our fellow travelers. If one of them has been spitting, for example, when we get off the bus, it is appropriate to say in farewell, "Congratulations. You spit 14 times.

That's a record." These little things raise the spirits. If someone is standing in the stairwell, instead of saying, "Move over, you nuisance," it's a good idea to say, "You're fine there. You're not blocking anybody's way," and then stomp on his foot.

Lastly, you must remember that the bus driver is like the captain of a ship. He knows where to stop and you must accept his decisions, even if he takes you three blocks past your stop, drops you off in the middle of the block two lanes from the sidewalk, in the middle of a traffic jam or forces you to step down into a puddle. **MM**

NOTES

¹ This short story is reprinted from Lauro Zavala, comp., *La ciudad escrita. Antología de cuentos urbanos con humor e ironía* (Mexico City: Solar, Servicios Editoriales, 2000), pp. 64-68.

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