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“In die bus afgeluister”: The Intellectual in the City

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Many of N.P. van Wyk Louw’s essays address the role of the intellectual. In the 1930s, Louw struggled to define a place for the intellectual in relation to the Afrikaner *volk* and its cultural movements and political parties. At the end of “Kultuurleiers sonder kultuur” (Cultural Leaders without Culture) (1939), Louw turns to the simile of the cave from book seven of Plato’s *Republic*. There the cave represents the city and its people, who are trapped in illusion. Plato’s “philosopher” escapes the dark chamber where the prisoners observe only shadows, gains enlightenment, and returns to open the eyes of his fellow inhabitants. Returning is the duty of the philosopher. How did N.P. van Wyk Louw imagine descending back into the “cave,” into the midst of the city, to be among the people of his country? One answer lies in a pair of unpublished fragments dating from the 1940s entitled “In die bus afgeluister” (Overheard on the Bus). In these fragments, Louw eavesdrops, as he takes the bus to and from work, on the conversations of people of Cape Town of various races. We get a slice of city life, and a sense of how Louw tried to embrace that life rather than isolate himself from it. These two urban sketches nevertheless show that the task of enlightening one’s fellow citizens proves more complicated than Louw expects because the intellectual is more deeply implicated in the illusory play of shadows than he imagines. **Key words:** Intellectuals (role of), Afrikaner-intellectual, Afrikaner-*volk* (people).

N.P. van Wyk Louw wrote widely about the intellectual.¹ One of the first book-length studies of Louw’s work, by Rena Pretorius, detailed his concept of the intellectual. The title of Pretorius’s book, *Die begrip Intellektueel by N.P. van Wyk Louw* (1972), allows a play of two dimensions of the concept that, in English, are regularly reduced to one. Whereas an English rendering of the title of Pretorius’s monograph may have read “the concept of *the* intellectual” – “the concept ‘intellectual’” would be correct but unconventional – the Afrikaans title, unburdened by a definite article, is mobile enough to traverse noun, adjective, and adverb, figure, faculty, and activity. In fact, Pretorius observes, if we have become used to using the word “intellektueel” as a noun, a glance at old Afrikaans dictionaries reveals to us that this usage only became common after the word had been used for some time almost only as an adjective or adverb. The coinage of the Afrikaans noun “intellektueel” may, Pretorius proposes, even be attributed to N.P. van Wyk Louw, who departed from customary usage when he first used it as a noun in his essays in the 1930s (Pretorius 1972: 3, 8-9). Pretorius’s genealogy of the word in Afrikaans shows us vividly how the concept “intellectual”

connects the intellectual and intellectuality, and opens that connection to analysis. It broaches a series of related although somewhat different questions: Who is intellectual? Who is *an* intellectual? What does an intellectual do that makes him or her an intellectual? To ask *who* may imply not only a faculty and its activity but also a position in social space – even if such a position might not be describable strictly in terms of sociological categories. On the other hand, the question of *what does he or she do* implies a faculty and activity which, although analytically separable from it, may depend upon an intellectual's sociality – or at least upon how he or she apprehends it. There is thus, in our usual thinking, considerable interplay between two or more senses of the word "intellectual": figure and faculty, actor and act. These multiple dimensions are in constant play in all of Louw's writings on the subject.

This interplay is readily apparent in Louw's earlier essays, collected in his two books of 1939, *Berigte te velde* and *Lojale verset*. The title of the latter was, of course, a watchword bequeathed by Louw to successive generations of Afrikaans intellectuals, which inherited it with growing ambivalence. Nearly all of these early essays ponder, in one way or another, the intellectual: as faculty and as figure. Louw's essays of 1938, the year of the great symbolic Ossewatrek, and those of the following year, are particularly fertile. The figure of the intellectual implied in these writings is, typically, Louw himself – as he tried to align himself amid the Afrikaner-nationalist party politics and cultural-political activism of the period. This led him to define the intellectual according to a faculty and its activity. In "Volkskritiek," the intellectual is the berating conscience of the people. In "Die ewige trek," the intellectual is the mind that perceives and carefully weighs divergent courses of action open to the *volk* and its leaders.

In "Kultuurleiers sonder kultuur" (Cultural Leaders without Culture), dating from February 1939 and published in *Lojale verset*, Louw defines the task of the intellectual by turning to a classical example: the simile of the cave in book seven of Plato's *Republic*. Men are imprisoned in a cave where they sit immobilized in chains. They face a wall onto which shadows of people and things are projected by an apparatus involving a fire and a screen of cloth. Knowing nothing else, the prisoners take these shadows for reality. One day a prisoner escapes and stumbles out into the bright sunlight. Dazzled at first, he gradually learns to see things as they are. Eventually he is able to look directly at the sun, and to perceive the idea of the good (*agathou idéa*) (Plato 517b). Acknowledging that the enlightened one may be reluctant to rejoin his fellows in the cave, Socrates makes doing so a duty. Instruction of the others in what is right and good is, so the simile runs, the duty of every educated man. Performing this duty is essential to the realization of the state, insofar as it is to be founded on right and justice.

By invoking Plato's cave, Louw connects his meditations on the intellectual, or "kultuurmens," to themes of the city (*polis*) and the citizen (*polites*). What, he asks, is

the duty of the “man of culture” – the one who has undergone education or *paideia* – and who dwells in the city? Before it is Latinized as *Republic*, and rendered into Afrikaans as *Staat*, Plato’s book bears the title *Politeia* – that which pertains to the *polis*. *Politics*, in a word. When Louw quotes from Plato, he translates *polis* (or *city* or *state*, if he is translating from an English translation) as *stad*.² He insists, however, on a specificity of locale, of his own city – Kaapstad – even as the name of that place constantly echoes the “stad” wrought in the poetic imagination of Socrates and his interlocutors in the *Republic*. He even insists on the particular way in which his city-dwellers will orient themselves toward the sun, toward what in Plato is the source of truth and of the good: “ek glo (...) aan geen abstrakte, algemeen menslike ‘kultuurlewe’ wat in Londen of Amsterdam of Sjanghai of Kaapstad dieselfde sal wees nie; ons stryd sowel as ons sonlig sal in ons eie èrens moet deurbreek” [I do not believe (...) in any abstract, general human “cultural life” that will be the same in London or Amsterdam or Shanghai; our struggle as well as our sunlight will have to break through somewhere in our own] (Louw 1986a: 79). Cultural life is idiomatic (*eie*). Neither the rival English and Dutch metropolises, nor the Chinese city of refuge, can provide direction for “us.”

Yet Plato provides a handy allegory for Cape Town and for the “man of culture” who lives there. Louw, who does not hesitate to give the allegory yet another turn, makes the *polis* of Kaapstad a synecdoche for the *volk*: “Maar Plato se onsterflike woorde geld hier vir ons soos vir die ‘kultuurmens’ van weinig ander volke” [But Plato’s immortal words are valid here for us as they are for the “man of culture” of few other *volke*] (Louw 1986a: 79). Citizenship and membership of a *volk* are mixed in complex ways. His final paragraph is a peroration, in the form of a long quotation from Plato:

Julle moet dus om die beurt afgaan om saam met die ander mense van die stad te woon, en julle moet gewoon raak daaraan om die donker voorwerpe te sien; want as julle daaraan gewoon is, sal julle duisend maal beter kan sien as dié wat daar woon; en julle sal weet *wat* elkeen van die beelde is en *waarvan* dit ’n beeld is, omdat julle die waarheid gesien het van wat skoon en reg en goed is. En dan sal die stad wat julle en ons s’n is ’n werklikheid van die nugter-wakker lewe word en nie ’n droom soos die meeste stede wat bestaan nie... (Plato 520c-d quoted in Louw 1986a: 79).

[You must thus go down in turn to live together with the other people of the city, and you must grow accustomed to see the dark objects; for if you are accustomed to doing so, you will be able to see a thousand times better than those who live there; and you will know *what* each of the images is and *of what* it is an image, because you have seen the truth of what is beautiful and right and good. And then the city that is yours and ours will become a reality of waking life and not a dream as most existing cities are...]

In the context of Louw's essay, three interrelated elements stand out in this passage. The first is the prescription to "go down and live with the other people of the city." This conveys a certain populism – or, alternately, an elitism under negation. The second is that the ones who go down will have "seen the truth of what is beautiful and right and good." These are the ultimate stakes of the game. The third element is the making actual of the second: "And then the city that is yours and ours will become a reality of waking life and not a dream as most existing cities are." There will, through the descent of the philosopher to live with the other city dwellers, come to pass a "politics" that realizes the beautiful, the right, and the good.

Politics in the narrow sense becomes the substance of Louw's writings of the late 1940s and 1950s – his vision of apartheid as a *voortbestaan in geregtigheid* (existing forth in justice) in the essays collected in *Liberale nasionalisme*, and as set out in his lectures at the University of Amsterdam (see Sanders 2002: 57-92). The idea of "right" or "justice" has, to be sure, by the late 1930s already come to prominence in Louw's trek-festival play, *Die dieper reg*, and in "Die ewige trek" and "Volkskritiek," where an issue is made of the *bestaansreg* (right to exist) of the Afrikaans *volk*. It is, however, the later writings rather than the earlier that articulate a political vision or program – how, in the name of justice, a certain *polis* will be brought about as a reality in South Africa. Recall, for instance, the strains of Louw's radio broadcast on the Tomlinson report: total racial separation *can* be realized, if there is the will to do so (Louw 1986b: 593-594). This is still a decade or more down the road. Even as they broach ideas of right and justice, "Kultuurleiers sonder kultuur" and the other essays of the 1930s assembled in *Lojale verset* remain occupied with the *place* of the intellectual – in relation to the "other people of the city," and in relation to the rulers of the land. This is why "Kultuurleiers sonder kultuur" turns to Plato's prescription that the philosopher descend into the darkness in which those other people dwell.

Given Louw's sense of the intellectual's vocation, it is with great interest that, in the archive at the J.S. Gericke library at Stellenbosch University, one comes across a series of unpublished fragments of Louw entitled "In die bus afgeluister" (Overheard on the Bus). Although the fragments are not dated, they appear to come from the early 1940s. In the space provided for the owner's name on the cover of the red Croxley stenographer's notebook which contains them, Louw has written his address as "Sea-Girt, 2de Strand, Clifton." It is thus probable that the fragments date from after November 1942, when he and Truida, his wife, moved into Sea-Girt, their new house at the beach (Steyn 1998: 362). Louw would have taken the bus home from the University of Cape Town, where he lectured, via Sea Point, to Clifton. He would thus have descended from the lofty slopes of Devil's Peak down into the city – from the rarefied precincts of Universiteit Kaapstad down and into the *stad*. Although Louw never made a great deal of his tie to the University – where he was for nineteen years passed over for promotion in the Education faculty – tacitly the claim is made that there is

more of a relationship than a name, that the university has something to do with the city from which it takes its name, even if not all academics imagine that to be so.

In an introduction drafted for the editor of a periodical (*blad*) named D. du Plessis (I have not been able to identify the person in question), Louw presents his sketches as excerpts from his notes on conversations and encounters aboard the Camps Bay bus. If Plato's cave was a place populated by the unenlightened, the bus as a microcosm of the city has, in addition, a specifically local significance. In a racially segregated polity, it is one of the few public places where a white person may, even if he or she is not quite comfortable doing so, rub shoulders with people of other population groups: "Busse in Kaapstad [is die] enigste plek in S.A. waar 'n mens monsters v[an] ons hele bevolking kan kry. Ek het geen beswaar daarteen dat ons so saam ry nie. Soms [is dit] lastig as 'n dronk nat[urel] met sy kop teen jou skouer leun – maar dis die mooiste geleentheid om jou land te leer ken" [Buses in Cape Town are the only place in S.A. where one can find samples of our entire population. I have no objection against us riding together in this way. Sometimes it is a nuisance when a drunk native leans his head against your shoulder—but it's the finest opportunity to get to know your country.] (Louw [n.d.]). The excerpts, Louw writes, are specially chosen to "shed light on poli[tical] and social phenomena." Because they are "typical" (*tipies*) and "manifest tendencies that extend beyond the discrete incidents" they describe, his "pictures" (*prentjies*) "may have significance for the statesman and the sociologist in S.A." In contrast to him, Louw believes, neither the statesman nor sociologist "ever sees them, because [neither ever] rides on a bus." "When they move about," Louw adds, "(the ministers at least) it is always in separate (*aparte*) train carriages and in long, quiet motor cars."

The position of the intellectual is thus quite different to that of the men of state. If the latter are to be true statesmen they have to be aware of happenings in the *stad*. For them, Louw is prepared to be a set of ears and eyes.

Drafts of two of Louw's "pictures" for "In die bus afgeluister" appear in the red notebook. Ideas for five more are jotted down there. The first of the two drafts, entitled "In vino veritas?," recounts a conversation in English between two men about Smuts, and his relative beholdenness to English and Afrikaans sections of the white electorate. There is a fair sprinkling of bad language, which Louw does not spell out, and the general train of their drunken talk is anti-Afrikaner. The more strident of the pair refers, in the same breath, to "all the bl[oody] nigs & jiddles & Dutchmen." The speaker is aware, though, that he might be overheard by those whom he is defaming: "You never know when one of the b[astard]s is listening." Not particularly arresting as a slice of life, the first fragment nevertheless does, by including this remark, establish the fidelity of the one who listens in on their conversation.

Like the first fragment, the second of the two belongs to the genre of the urban sketch. It thus differs from Louw's usual didactic essays. It includes an element of low

comedy that, I presume, brings it in line with the journalism of *The Wayfarer* and the *Man on the Spot*, two columnists alluded to in the conversation in "In vino veritas?" Louw's authority depends, as does that of other practitioners of the genre, on a claim to be in place, or better still, under way.

The rubric "In die bus afgeluister" is a rich one. As a topos, the bus resembles the cave in Plato's simile. The passengers sit beside one another in rows, facing forward, just as the prisoners do in the cave. Their position is fixed. What the bus passengers are thought to observe is less fully sketched; although, of course, almost any element in the talk of the two tipplers may be regarded as a shadow mistaken for a thing in itself. "Bus" is also an evocative semanteme. A contraction of "omnibus," an old name for a bus, it comes from the Latin: *omnibus*, the dative plural of *omnis*, means "for all." The bus is thus a place where *all* of the city's people gather, or at least where their ways meet and paths cross. As Louw says, "Busse in Kaapstad [is die] enigste plek in S.A. waar 'n mens monsters v[an] ons *hele* bevolking kan kry" [Buses in Cape Town are the only place in S.A. where one can find samples of our *entire* population.] (my emphasis). The bus is, in another sense, a counter-topos to the ossewa (ox wagon) and its progress "op die pad van Suid-Afrika" (on the path of South Africa) which was mythologized in the 1938 centenary trek and continued to be a powerful mobilizing event for Afrikaner nationalists. The bus is a vehicle not of the country but of the city. Anyone may step aboard. In the city of Cape Town, where in 1939 trolley buses replaced trams on the route from Adderley Street to Sea Point, the bus is public transport. As long as one pays the fare, one may ride. One person's money is as good as that of another.

Let us attend to the word "afgeluister." The verb "afluister" (to overhear, to eavesdrop) is related to the verb "afloer" (to observe secretly, to spy on). In both these verbs, the prefix "af-" indicates a positioning to the side (*para-*) as well as a certain furtiveness. As the tippler says, "You never know when one of the b[astard]s is listening." The one who "luister af," unless unpracticed, does not disclose the fact that he is doing so. The writer is incognito, taking notes in his red Croxley steno notebook. Eavesdropping on the conversation of his fellow passengers, he is not ostensibly the addressee of their talk – although he might be – but intercepts it and sounds out what sense it has for him. At the same time, he may also employ the talk that he hears as a kind of irony, even a self-ironizing parabasis that could perhaps alter his own perception of himself. In the two sketches that Louw drafted (though not in all of the ones he outlined), he is a silent participant, but he is by no means a passive one.

The writer is "in die bus" (in the bus). It is this specific place, distinct from the private railway carriages and sleek automobiles of the ministers, that lends cogency to what is overheard. The latter may long (*verlang*) for the bus but they do not know (*ken*) it. Thus the writer, who rides the bus each day to and from work, has something unique to say. He is the one among the all. He is the one who travels in the vehicle that

is “for all” while the rulers of the land impose an apartheid between themselves and the ruled.

The second of the fragments (see appendix) begins in medias res: “Langs my kom sit ’n naturel, nie te naby, nie te ver nie, volkome ongeërg.” [A native comes and sits down next to me, not too close, not too far, with complete nonchalance.] The series of negatives expresses distance; it also expresses proximity. “Nie te naby, nie te ver nie” conveys an ambiguity: Is he near? Is he distant? The distance assumed by the fellow passenger is a tactful one; the one already seated cannot tell whether it is small or great. Yet he notes the difficulty of measuring it; it makes him search for language to convey the tact of the one who has come to join him. Bus passengers were not racially separated in Cape Town in 1942. City Tramways only segregated its vehicles in 1956, a few years after the Separate Amenities Act was passed. (Cape buses were desegregated again in 1977.) (Bickford-Smith et al. 1999: 167, 205). The city as a whole had not yet been re-engineered through forced removals – of which the Tramway Road community of Sea Point is an example. The “native” may sit down beside N.P. van Wyk Louw if he likes.

“Volkome ongeërg,” Louw adds, as if to contrast his own self-consciousness of racial distinctions with the artless tact of the other. The word “ongeërg” is an interesting one – not quite without “erg,” which would be without deliberation, premeditation, or forethought. But indifferently, with nonchalance, with no apparent performance. “Erg,” cognate with the German “Arg,” comes from an Old High German word for agitation or excitedness, stemming perhaps originally from the Greek *orchesthai* – to dance. He does not make a song and dance about it. Or break a sweat. The “native” plays it cool – which is, of course, in itself a performance, as Louw will show us before long.

What of the word “naturel?” One the one hand, it is a respectable word, a polite word compared, say, to “nig,” and to “kaffir,” which is the epithet that will be slung at Louw’s fellow passenger in a just a few minutes. “Native,” the English equivalent of “naturel,” is the word used by liberals – for instance, in Hoernlé’s *South African Native Policy and the Liberal Spirit* (1939) – and in official discourse of the segregation era: Native Affairs Department, Natives’ Representative Council, and so on. “Naturel” is not supposed to be pejorative. By using this word, Louw establishes a certain neutrality – to the extent that any word could ensure this – but, more accurately, the word is a token (like A, B, C, or D) used to categorize someone racially. By itself it says nothing of interest about the one categorized. This tokening is so ingrained that, in a passage I quoted a few moments ago from his notes for an introduction to “In die bus afgeluister” Louw employs the abbreviation “nat.” instead of spelling out “naturel” fully. Once he has dealt the token, Louw has a stable point from which the tact of the fellow passenger, his coolness and other phenomena may be measured. It allows Louw to gauge the extent of his divergence from type – and in the end to stage his reversion to it.

For it is his *type* that already occupies a seat on the bus: “Op die bank voor my sit reeds ’n ander, netjies aangetrek (...) met (...) ’n bottel (...) in die hand, toegedraai in koerant maar hoegenaamd nie verberg nie.” [On the seat in front of me already sits another, neatly dressed (...) with (...) a bottle in his hand, wrapped in newspaper but by no means concealed.] Eliding the racial index, “’n ander” indicates that, whatever differences there are, the one and the other will share a *basic* similarity, an essence even. They occupy the same space in the periodic table, and will, ultimately, react in the same fashion. There is a foreshadowing. And, indeed, “Die kêrel wat langs my sit is ook baie netjies geklee en het so bietjie-bietjie baard; hy het ’n donkerrooi nekdoek aan met wit stippels.” [The fellow that sits next to me is also very neatly clothed and has a little bit of a beard; he wears a dark red neckerchief with white dots.] The details that Louw provides are signs of African urbanization and urbanity, even of a dandyism embracing British and American fashion. The latter would be celebrated in the pages of *Drum* in the 1950s. The adoption of metropolitan styles spread with a consumer culture facilitated by increased income, as black men replaced white men who left their jobs to fight during World War Two. A fact of the time, its description here is surely also a stereotype – a new edition of the “jollie Hotnot” portrayed by the early Afrikaans writers, as discussed by Jakes Gerwel (1988: 20-73) in his seminal study of race in the Afrikaans novel. If an attention to striking dress is not always a part of this tradition, the reference to alcohol and to an “almost archetypal craving for drink” (Gerwel 1988: 67) surely is. Louw’s sketch strains under the weight of hackneyed colonial genres and a set of stock characters that compete for their places on the page of his notebook. He is a relative latecomer, and they will not allow him through without a struggle.

A fourth figure makes its entrance: the conductor. Like the “naturel,” he also comes “langs.” The word “langs” is, as we will observe, an important one – if we connect it to the *af-*, the *para-*, of eavesdropping, and to what the “native” will say when he is finished with the conductor.

The presence of the conductor is indispensable to the continuation of the performance – which is, for Louw, who is for the moment taken in by it, not quite a performance – because he identifies with the one “langs” him and wishes to *be* him. He does not want it to be a performance, if that means artifice instead of artlessness. The one next to him is also Louw’s double, just as Raka is for Koki in the long poem that Louw published in 1941. Raka, however, *behaves*, but because he “cannot think” (*hy wat nie kan dink*), he can, beyond a rudimentary capacity for mimicry (he is the “aap-mens,” or ape-man) (Louw 1981: 95), presumably also not *perform*. The fellow passenger is thus a more plausible *semblable*. What happens on the bus takes place in slow motion, with its tempo dictated by the “naturel.” It gives rise to an identification that the jostling genres and their characters rudely fight to spoil:

Die kondukteur kom langs. Die naturel langs my begin hom baie stadig en rustig regtrek om te betaal: lig sy knie op, trek die broekspyp hoog op, en toon 'n heldergroen sokkie wat netjies aan 'n ophouer vassit. Hy werk so langsaam dat die kondukteur al by mense voorlangs knip en eers toe almal klaar is, terugkom. My bankgenoot is nog besig: uit die sokkie het hy 'n wit sakdoek getrek en dié vou hy nou omstandig oop; binnein is 'n paar banknote: ek sien 'n vyfpondnoot en 'n paar ponde. Hy haal een van die ponde uit, blaas 'n paar keer daarop, skiet-skiet dit met sy pinkie en presenteer dit dan.

"Why don't you spit on it?"

Stilte.

"How far are you going?"

"Seepunt. Enkel."

Ek is verbaas dat hy Afr[ikaan]s praat.

"Haven't you got smaller?"

"Ek wil Seepunt toe gaan, en ek betaal."

"You bl— kaffir . . ." mompel die kond[ukteur,] maar hy begryp seker genoeg Afr[ikaans] om te weet wat Seepunt beteken.

Hier word gehandhaaf, dag ek; en 'n bietjie daarvoor gely. Hoekom het ek self maar ewe laf Camps Bay i.p.v. K[amps]baai gesê?

[The conductor comes along. The native next to me begins very slowly and calmly to get himself ready to pay: lifts his knee, draws his trouser leg high up, and displays a bright green sock neatly attached to a suspender. He works so unhurriedly that the conductor is already clipping the tickets of people down in front and only returns when he is finished with everyone else. My seat-mate is still busy: from out of the sock he has drawn a white handkerchief and this he folds open ceremoniously; inside are some banknotes: I see a five-pound note and a few pounds. He takes out one of the pounds, blows on it a couple of times, flicks it with his little finger, and then presents it.

"Why don't you spit on it?"

Silence.

"How far are you going?"

"Seepunt. Enkel." ("Sea Point. One way.")

I am astonished that he speaks Afrikaans.

"Haven't you got smaller?"

"Ek wil Seepunt toe gaan, en ek betaal." ("I want to go to Sea Point. And I'm paying.")

"You bl— kaffir . . ." mumbles the conductor, but surely he understands enough Afrikaans to know what Seepunt means.

Here is a holding of one's own, I think to myself; and suffering a little for it.

Why did I prove a coward in the same situation and say Camps Bay instead of Kampsbaai?]

The conductor can be sacrificed to the fellow passenger's performance. The comedy allows him to be brought down to size, to be made the villain of the piece – so that, left together on stage, at least for the moment, are only the two of them as equals – or as *semblables*. Louw refers to the man as his “bankgenoot,” and later as “my maat” and “my Vrystater.” The “naturel langs my” presents a picture of composure that gives way, if one follows the changes in the adverbs, to a sense of his careful deliberation: “stadig,” “netjies,” then “so langzaam,” and, to cap it all, “omstandig.” This deliberativeness is at odds with Louw's initial impression of a personage who is “ongeërg.” Louw knows how the episode will end – or how it will draw to a close as far as he is concerned – and drops clues that anticipate this ending. In the meantime, the conductor, an Anglophone churl, can be taken down a peg or two. In fact, Louw appears to wish that he was the one doing the taking down.

“Ek is verbaas dat hy Afrikaans praat.” Louw registers his surprise, his astonishment, after his fellow passenger has made his request: “Seepunt. Enkel.” Why is he astonished? Because on buses to Sea Point and Camps Bay, nobody transacts in Afrikaans – despite it having become an official language in 1925. It is, of course, also wartime, and to insist on using Afrikaans in parts of the city where English is the dominant language may connote anti-British sentiment. It may even be construed as unpatriotic.

Louw's seat-mate continues to reply in Afrikaans. And he does so abruptly: “Ek wil Seepunt toe gaan, en ek betaal.” [I want to go to Sea Point. And I'm paying.] He has the *banknoot* that entitles him to be Louw's *bankgenoot*. His stubbornness, his repeated use of Afrikaans, because it is his right, even when the city official insists on English, is what excites the writer. It is the pass in the story that he most wants to reach; it is the turn that he most powerfully invests – even if, once he gets there, he does not remain for long for it is a hazardous place.

When we examine the page in Louw's notebook, we see that this brief exchange has been amplified after first being written down. Dialogue is added and the effects on the one who overhears it are developed. The result is that several paths of identification make themselves felt—and “felt” is the right word since the paths are paths of suffering, even martyrdom. The reaction that he writes down first is “Hier word gehandhaaf, dag ek; en 'n bietjie daarvoor gely.” [Here is a holding of one's own, I think to myself; and suffering a little for it.] The connotations of the word “handhaaf” – to uphold, to maintain, to defend in the face of threat, to hold one's own, to insist on one's due – in the Afrikaner-nationalist lexicon exceed the meanings that I have just given. We have a Handhawersbond, which split from the Broederbond in 1930, and the motto of the FAK, founded in 1929, is “Handhaaf en Bou,” a phrase

echoed for several generations of Afrikaans schoolchildren in “Die lied van jong Suid-Afrika.” What is being “gehandhaaf” is Afrikaner cultural identity. “Handhaaf” is a big, heavy nationalist word – and, given the tenor of “Kultuurleiers sonder kultuur,” not one with which one would immediately expect N.P. van Wyk Louw to have associated himself – or at least not unconditionally. But here he is – the poet and didactic essayist and occasional playwright – writing in a genre in which he is relatively unpracticed. And that genre dictates a certain popular Afrikaner-nationalist sentimentality. It is, given the overtones of the word, almost incredible that a “naturel” would be said to “handhaaf” – except if the word conveyed something about *Louw* rather than the “other.” And this is precisely what it does convey, when Louw adds: “Hoekom het ek self maar ewe laf Camps Bay i.p.v. K[amps]baai gesê?” His self-acknowledged cravenness is in direct contrast to the suffering of the other – the one who, if truth be told, is prepared to “handhaaf” his right to conduct public business in Afrikaans, and thus to “handhaaf” the language. He is, to all intents and purposes, a “handhawende Afrikaner,” one of the examples of usage given in the *HAT*. Louw wishes that he could be (like) him; even suffer as he suffers.³

A second path of identification is more consequential. Louw’s wish to be (like) him is intensified by the second amplification he makes to the exchange. When his seat-mate says “ek betaal,” the conductor replies with what Louw himself, one assumes, would be an unacceptable racism, and which the conductor himself half suppresses, or at least utters *sotto voce*: “‘You bl— kaffir . . .’ mompel die kond[ukteur].” The mumbling Englishman turns the handhawende Afrikaner into a kaffir. Hence Louw, when he passes for an Englishman on the bus is not merely letting down the *volk*, but is a crypto-kaffir. His deeper fear is that, should he stand up to the conductor, he will be called out as a kaffir, that the illusion that he is any different will evaporate. Kaffirphobia – fear of the kaffir within, the part of me that, despite myself, identifies with the “naturel” sitting next to me. And, as Breyten Breytenbach emphasized when he hinted at the underlying dynamics of apartheid as he discussed the relationship between detainee and interrogator in *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* (1984: 341), I do not want this even though I want it. So I vote for apartheid – to stop him from sitting down beside me and reminding me that I am no better and no different than he is.

The rest of the sketch is bitterly anticlimactic. It brings the seat-mate down to size – assimilating him to the “other” native on the seat in front. But before this happens, there is another, hardly believable, moment.

Once the conductor has laboriously counted out nearly a pound’s worth of change, and has walked off, Louw hears the “native” say – to himself, but surely also for the benefit of the neighboring passengers, who are now his audience: “Ek is ’n Vrystater en ôrlaam.” [I am a Free Stater and an old hand.] (The word is spelt in an unusual way, with a *kappie* on its single “o,” a long “aa,” and the final “s” is elided, perhaps to render

what Louw hears as an idiosyncratic pronunciation of the word “oorlams.”) “Dit verklaar vir my die handhaaf,” Louw adds. Does it explain, though? Not really. Or not a great deal. Again we have a statement – this time in the mouth of the “naturel” – that claims for him a cultural identity that is radically split – between one that would be equally or more readily available to a white person (*Vrystater*), and another that a white person would be unlikely to claim. Given the racist overtones of the word in the recent past, to find someone of color describe themselves as “oorlams” is virtually unbelievable. Yet perhaps it is not impossible. Although it means “sly,” “cheeky” or “uppity,” *oorlams* also means acculturated – acculturated into Dutch (and later Afrikaans) rather than Anglicized – and referred, historically, to various groups of people of color throughout South Africa and parts of Namibia.

The word itself is an etymological curiosity. It comes from the Malay *orang lama*. *Orang* means human being. *Lama* means long. *Orang lama* is, in a literal sense, someone who has been around a long time, as opposed to a green, raw individual. “Lank in die land” would be an idiomatic Afrikaans rendering. “Oorlams” thus adds to the series of *langses* than punctuate the piece. *Oor-langs* – the *orang/* fellow next to me? (Or the ear next to me? The ear of the other?) Generating this near homophone, the word *oorlams* feeds an obsession with proximity and distance. For the time being, it holds sway in this space of *Unheimlichkeit*. There is a superficial irony, of course, if one takes “lank in die land” in its temporal literalness – for, compared to the native alongside of him, Louw is the Johnny-come-lately. The word *oorlams* also reveals that Afrikaans, the language that is to be “gehandhaaf,” is a hybrid tongue – that it is a tongue of the “naturel” who is always already “oorlams.” The word, after all, did not come from the Netherlands. Louw, incidentally, was quite fond of adopting certain Capeisms. One that comes to mind is “olanna,” as in “groot olannas,” which means an important person, a big shot, and comes, as he explains somewhere in a letter, from “Hollander.” Significantly, “olanna” is a word that refers to one in authority, and when Louw uses it to refer to his superiors, he is playing with and at a more profound subordination and subjugation. Yet, despite a linguistic history of which Louw is by no means oblivious, the “handhaaf” of the native still needs to be *explained*. It, and the very fact that the native speaks Afrikaans, is astonishing. Either there is a massive forgetting of history here – or, as I have been suggesting, a massively disavowed identification. That the latter is more likely is given support by the context of another occurrence in the series “In die bus afgeluister” of the word “verbaas.” The fifth and last of the ideas for additional sketches reads: “Iemand wat verbaas is dat ek my dogtertjie Afr[ikaans] leer!!!” [Somebody that is astonished that I am teaching my little daughter Afrikaans!!!]. (Louw is being a father by remote control; following their separation in 1937, his first wife, Joan Wessels, and their two daughters moved to Windhoek. He may be referring to their younger daughter, Anna Cornelia, or Nakkie, who was born in 1933 [Steyn 1998: 202, 212, 105].) The triple exclamation marks that

follow indicate that one ought to be *verbaas* not at the *handhaaf* of the language but rather at the *verbaasheid* of the anonymous “iemand.” Yet, as one sometimes forgets, the Louw family anglicized and sent their boys to SACS.

But the minute that “Ek is ’n Vrystater en ôrlaam” explains things for Louw, it explains nothing – or, it appears to explain nothing because another, simpler, explanation is nearer at hand and is wrapped in newspaper. Like the “other” native, his seat-mate is inebriated; the manner of speech and not its content is an explanation: “En van die praat kom ek agter dat hy al iets in het. En nou sien hy wat die ander vóór ons in die hand hou.” [And from his speech I detect that he has had a little. And now he sees what the other one in front of us has in his hand.] From “handhaaf” to a bottle that the other “in die hand hou.” A sleight of hand. Louw has been manoeuvred into thinking that his seat-mate and *semblable* has spoken up for his rights – when, all the time, it has been drink that has been talking. Dutch courage. All of Louw’s hopes – or projective identifications – have gone up in a puff of smoke – in a puff of Cape Smoke.

The last part of the fragment is devoted mainly to the efforts of “my Vrystater” to purchase the other’s bottle from him, offering him as much as five shillings for it. His bargaining is cut short when the bus reaches Sea Point and he has to get off. Louw’s final observation is of a loss of tact, of a making of excessive contact – and it is here that women make their only appearance. And they are white women. They are the ones at risk when the native leaves the bus – “val-val teen twee wit vroue wat naaste [he had written “langs” but changed it] aan die paadjie sit.”

It is time to step off Louw’s bus and return to Plato’s cave. In it, as in William Kentridge’s *Shadow Procession* (see Benezra et al. 2001: 63, 137), where objects such as a pair of scissors and a coffee pot resemble people and their possessions when their shadows are projected, an illusion assumes a life of its own. Louw and his seat-mate are like the prisoners in the cave. Louw sees a *handhaaf* but, as he grows to realize, it is an illusion. The fact that the man is a “Vrystater en ôrlaam” does not *verklaar* – by bringing things into *aletheia* – but is part of the illusion. Yet Louw is taken in by this shadow play, and accepts distinctions from which conclusions follow: Vrystater and oorlams, therefore *handhaaf*. Astonishment is dispelled for a moment through racial typing. Then, when he sees that the man is inebriated, he thinks that he has seen what the shadow is a shadow of. In vino veritas, he might have thought. But has he seen anything other than a shadow? When a craving for drink appears to be an “inherent characteristic of the type” (Gerwel 1988: 33), is alcoholism/ sobriety not just an alternate scale for racial typing?

A number of implications flow from this sketch for the idea of the intellectual or “man of culture” as imagined by Louw in “Kultuurleiers sonder kultuur” and which comes down to him and to us from Plato. The figure of the philosopher from book seven of the *Republic*, although so rich in import, particularly if detached from the details of the political system imagined in the book as a whole, has its limits. It presup-

poses a philosopher who has seen truth, the light for which the sun is the ultimate source and of which it is the figure, who has seen what is right and good, and who can go back and sit with his erstwhile seat-mates and make distinctions of which they are incapable. Louw embraced this model in "Kultuurleiers sonder kultuur," setting it in his *polis*, in his stad, under his sun. We see, from his sketch for "In die bus afgeluister," however, that discriminating between shadows and what they stand for is not necessarily within reach of the "man of culture" either. Demon drink is no final explanation at all. If the seat-mate has deeper motives for his actions, they remain opaque. So instead we have a "man of culture" who, in an uncontrolled phantasy of identification, for a few moments at least, does not quite know *who* he is: Is he a (on)handhawende Afrikaner, or is he a kaffir? In order to discover these dynamics, one must board Louw's bus. Plato's cave has no inkling of them, unless one interprets competition among the prisoners to discriminate among shadows as a sign of a more pervasive rivalry – which, in terms of René Girard's schema, adopted frequently by J.M. Coetzee in *Giving Offense*, is a mimetic one: I want to be he, because I desire what I imagine he desires. There is a doubling. Koki is drawn into this by Raka. Louw is drawn in by the "naturel." The object of desire is displaced – *handhaaf, lyding* – and may, finally (if there is a finally), be the white women (plural, always?) that the "naturel" brushes up against as he leaves the bus.

But there is another way of reading the fragment. What Louw prizes about the bus is that it is a space unlike any other in South Africa – it is, being an *omnibus*, "for all." And, to a certain extent, it is a free-for-all – "my Vrystater," Louw calls his companion, reiterating the conjunction of freedom and *polis*. In a free state or city, there must be free citizens. On the bus the rules do not apply in quite the same way as elsewhere. That is why Louw finds it such a powerful topos.⁴ The "bus" takes us from the cave toward a different Platonic topos, one in which traits of light and truth and knowledge, although not absent as values, do not dominate the discourse as they do in the *Republic*.

That topos is the *agora*, an open space and not a closed one – the fabled marketplace of Plato's Socrates – celebrated in the early dialogues, especially in the *Apology*, the defense of Socrates. In the *Apology* Socrates says that since he is unschooled in the formal language of the courtroom, he will speak in the plain language of the agora (Plato 17c). It is, he says, only *just* that he be heard in his own tongue. Socrates is the figure of irony, *eironeia*, dissembled ignorance – he knows the language of the court well enough. When Louw's fellow rider reminds the conductor that "[e]k betaal," he lets him know where they are – in the marketplace, where nobody is entitled to lord it over another; and any assertion of superiority will be put sorely to the test. Such assertions will even be provoked – through deliberate and excessive temporizing, for instance – in order to be tested. In this context the profession to be an Afrikaans speaker, and the claim of an entitlement to be addressed in Afrikaans, may just as well

be a fiction. This might, incidentally, apply even more to Louw, who is actively working against an anglicized upbringing and education, than to his double, who displays no signs of being able to speak English. It is the right to that fiction, and to fiction in general, to dissembling, and ultimately to the secret, that Jacques Derrida in his last book, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, associates with democracy: "is it not also democracy that gives the right to irony in the public space? Yes, for democracy opens public space, the publicity of public space, by granting the right to a change of tone (*Wechsel der Töne*), to irony as well as to fiction, the simulacrum, the secret, literature, and so on. And thus, to a certain nonpublic public within the public, to a *res publica*, a republic where the difference between the public and the nonpublic remains an indecidable limit. There is something of a democratic republic as soon as this right is exercised" (Derrida 2005: 91-92).

The right to the public use of reason, an idea from Immanuel Kant, is for Derrida also the right to fiction. And, in the series of texts from Plato's *Apology* down to Derrida's *Rogues*, this is not a fictionality opposed to truth. More important than it being a fictionality, however, is the fact that, "in the bus," in the *agora*, as a topos for the free state or *stad*, politics involves a continual give and take with the other – in which one continually guesses at the import (the tone) of words rather than simply at their truth-value. In this give-and-take – in this *Wechsel* – no single "man of culture" can have the final say.

In a number of his works, Louw groped towards this – seeking out a dialogue in *Die Huisgenoot*, for example, in "Die oop gesprek," in the 1950s. Yet, there, for lack of interest, he had at times to simulate one. Louw's "In die bus afgeluister" was never published. Perhaps he never got around to speaking to D. du Plessis. We do not know. The fragment nevertheless gives us an impression of what it might have entailed for Louw, a "man of culture," to descend into the "cave" and into the "city" – a duty that he embraced all of his life. It also shows how, when the intellectual does this, he may be as helpless as the next person to tell the shadows from what they are shadows of; he is, in sum, as a consequence, just as incapable of discerning the truth, and what is right and just. This is, however, not a lesson that he will ever fully acknowledge; his mind will, like those of most of his contemporaries, be captivated by the troupe of shadow players – black / white, native / European, and so forth – when it is other things that might show him his way out of the cave, towards a free state, a state of being unhemmed in by the imperative to *handhaaf* any particular cultural or racial identity.

Will the nationalist intellectual who professes "not [to] believe (...) in any abstract, general human 'cultural life'" (Louw 1986a: 79) always struggle at the level of human particularity – when the presence of the other, with all the attendant identifications, disrupts the population (*bevolking*) thinking of the social engineers and their fearful publicists, including Louw, who writes in "Kultuurleiers" of the Afrikaans *volk* as

lying “in between the powerful English culture and the black mass of Africa [*swart massa van Afrika*]” (Louw 1986a: 79)? Plato assumes that the philosopher will know the difference between shadows and what they are shadows of – but when the intellectual actually descends, we see that he cannot tell, that he is deceived by appearances (clothing, language), by his own categories, and most of all, about *himself*. For a moment, he has no idea who he is. Is he N.P. van Wyk Louw of “Sea Girt, 2nd Beach, Clifton,” or is he a “bl— kaffir?” He has to choose, as did the white voters who, disdaining “kafferwerk” (kaffir work) when the Carnegie investigators asked them, voted out Smuts and elected Malan, disavowing all similitude to their seat-mates – what, in *Complicities* (Sanders 2002: 203), I term a foreclosure of folded-together-ness in human-being. Plato writes about competition among the prisoners in differentiating the shapes of the shadows. This is the competition that Whites will win when they set themselves apart from other South Africans. We see from Louw’s sketch how the intellectual, although superficially against apartheid, may nevertheless be powerless to elude this game. How, then, can he profess, as he did in so many of his writings, to be the arbiter of right and good?

Recalling that the concept of the intellectual involves both figure and faculty, actor and act, we observe how closely those elements are interlinked. Figure and faculty, actor and act, imply each other in turn. An intellectual’s coordinates in social space may influence the specific character of their co-implication. If you are somebody who travels on the bus, perhaps you will adopt an ironic mode – exposure of error, of pretension to knowing the truth, and what is just and right. This is perhaps what Louw implies when he contrasts his eavesdropper’s awareness to the isolated cogitations of the statesman and sociologist. What is so striking about Louw’s outline for “In die bus afgeluister” is that it advocates almost exactly the opposite of what has been canonized as Louw’s final word on the intellectual who mixes with the common people. I allude to “’n Lewenshouding vir ’n moderne mens” (1939), where Louw writes that “Die gevaar vir die intellektueles vandag is nie dat hulle te ver van die volk af staan nie, maar dat hulle te veel binne in hom staan, deel van hom is, deurtrek van sy vooroordele, sy waardes, daarop ingestel is om sy guns te verwerwe” [the danger for intellectuals today is not that they stand too far away from the *volk*, but that they stand too much in the midst of it, saturated by its prejudices, its values, ready to curry its favor] (Louw 1986a: 171). It may, on the contrary, be the case that being among the people, and not merely among people of one’s “own” *volk*, will help to expose the prejudices, values and vanities that the intellectual shares with everyone else. Perhaps if you travel by bus you will be open to question. Louw certainly realizes this when he contemplates his series of sketches as a counterweight to the isolation of the ministers and social scientists (a healthy one, considering the professional background of Geoffrey Cronjé and H.F. Verwoerd). But, it would appear, that is not exactly what he does (or recollects doing) when he is on the bus. He finds identifica-

tion with the *oorlams* ironist momentarily, but it is intolerable because the ironist is a *naturel* who will reveal to him who he is. So Louw plays the philosopher, back in the cave with the dupes, better than whom he professes to see. He knows the truth, he thinks. He can clarify. But if we are still in the dark, so is he.

Notes

1. This paper was presented as the N.P. van Wyk Louw Memorial Lecture at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa, 15 September 2005. I thank Willie Burger for inviting me to deliver the lecture, and for the warm hospitality of him and his colleagues on the occasion.
2. Judging from the particular phrasing of the passages that he quotes from Plato, it is likely that Louw was translating from A.D. Lindsay's 1909 English translation of the *Republic*, reissued in a 1935 Dent and Dutton edition that Louw owned. I thank Hanna Botha for finding this information for me.
3. In a remark in "Kultuurleiers sonder kultuur," Louw (1986a: 73) writes that culture "is also powerful, but with the power of the martyr rather than the hangman."
4. As Derrida (1978) reminds us in "The *Retrait* of Metaphor," the word for "bus" in modern Greek is "metaphora." Let this be an emblem for the topic power of "bus."

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Langs my kom sit 'n naturel, nie te naby, nie te ver nie, volkome ongeërg. Op die bank voor my sit reeds 'n ander, netjies aangetrek; hy het binnegekome met wat duidelik 'n bottel is in die hand, toegedraai in koerant maar hoegenaamd nie verberg nie. Die kêrel wat langs my sit is ook baie netjies geklee en het so bietjie-bietjie baard; hy het 'n donker-rooi nekdoek aan met wit stippels.

Die kondukteur kom langs. Die naturel langs my begin hom baie stadig en rustig regtrek om te betaal: lig sy knie op, trek die broekspyp hoog op, en toon 'n heldergroen sokkie wat netjies aan 'n ophouer vassit. Hy werk so langzaam dat die kondukteur al by mense voorlangs knip en eers toe almal klaar is, terugkom. My bankgenoot is nog besig: uit die sokkie het hy 'n wit sakdoek getrek en dié vou hy nou omstandig oop; binnein is 'n paar banknote: ek sien 'n vyfpondnoot en 'n paar ponde. Hy haal een van die ponde uit, blaas 'n paar keer daarop, skiet-skiet dit met sy pinkie en presenteer dit dan.

"Why don't you spit on it?"

Stilte.

"How far are you going?"

"Seepunt. Enkel."

Ek is verbaas dat hy Afr[jikaan]s praat.

"Haven't you got smaller?"

"Ek wil Seepunt toe gaan, en ek betaal."

"You bl— kaffir . . ." mompel die kond[ukteur,] maar hy begryp seker genoeg Afr[jikaans] om te weet wat Seepunt beteken.

Hier word gehandhaaf, dag ek; en 'n bietjie daarvoor gely. Hoekom het ek self maar ewe laf Camps Bay i.p.v. K[amps]baai gesê?

Die kondukteur gee stadig vir hom sy kleingeld, en hy tel saam, sjieling vir sjieling.

Hy het byna 'n pond in sy hand, en die bus is reeds in Seepunt waar hy moet uitklim. Toe die kondukteur wegstap, hoor ek die naturel[:]"Ek is 'n Vrystater en ôrlaam." Dit verklaar vir my die handhaaf. En aan die praat kom ek agter dat hy al iets in het. En nou sien hy wat die ander vóór ons in die hand hou.

"Haai, wat het jy daar?" en hy val byna vooroor op die voorste bank.

Geen antwoord.

“Komaan, waar klim jy af?”

Geen antwoord.

“Wie’s jy dan so danig?”

Baie deftig: “I am English alone.”

“Is dit brandewyn?”

Geen antwoord.

“Kom jong, ek gee jou four-and-six vir die bottel wyn!”

Stilte.

“Vyf sjielings!”

Stilte.

My maat lê nou mooi op die ander se skouer.

“Kyk, dis ’n handvol geld! Klim saam met my af.”

Maar die ander hou wat hy het. En nou moet my Vrystater ook afklim – dít onthou hy darem – val-val teen twee wit vroue wat naaste aan die paadjie sit.

1. Getranskribeer deur Mark Sanders uit: N.P. van Wyk Louw, ongepubliseerde holografiese nota-boek 2.X.10 wat gehuisves word in die Dokumentesentrum, J.S.Gericke biblioteek, Universiteit van Stellenbosch.

N.P. van Wyk Louw Overheard on the Bus

A native comes and sits down next to me, not too close, not too far, with complete nonchalance. On the seat in front of me already sits another, neatly dressed; he got on with what is clearly a bottle in his hand, wrapped in newspaper but by no means concealed. The fellow that sits next to me is also very neatly clothed and has a little bit of a beard; he wears a dark red neckerchief with white dots.

The conductor comes along. The native next to me begins very slowly and calmly to get himself ready to pay: lifts his knee, draws his trouser leg high up, and displays a bright green sock neatly attached to a suspender. He works so unhurriedly that the conductor is already clipping the tickets of people down in front and only returns when he is finished with everyone else. My seat-mate is still busy: from out of the sock he has drawn a white handkerchief and this he folds open ceremoniously; inside are some banknotes: I see a five-pound note and a few pounds. He takes out one of the pounds, blows on it a couple of times, flicks it with his little finger, and then presents it.

"Why don't you spit on it?"

Silence.

"How far are you going?"

"Seepunt. Enkel." ["Sea Point. One way."]

I am astonished that he speaks Afrikaans.

"Haven't you got smaller?"

"Ek wil Seepunt toe gaan, en ek betaal." ["I want to go to Sea Point. And I'm paying."]

"You bl—kaffir . . ." mumbles the conductor, but surely he understands enough Afrikaans to know what Seepunt means.

Here is a holding of one's own, I think to myself; and suffering a little for it. Why did I prove a coward in the same situation and say Camps Bay instead of Kampsbaai?

The conductor slowly gives him his change, and he counts along with him, shilling for shilling.

He has nearly a pound in his hand, and the bus is already in Sea Point where he has to get off. When the conductor walks off, I hear the native: "Ek is 'n Vrystater en

ôrlaam." ["I am a Free Stater and an old hand."] That explains for me his holding his own. And from his speech I detect that he has had a little. And now he sees what the other one in front of us has in his hand.

"Haai, wat het jy daar?" ["Hey, what have you got there?"] And he nearly falls over onto the seat in front of him.

No answer.

"Komaan, waar klim jy af?" ["Come on, where are you getting off?"]

No answer.

"Wie's jy dan so danig?" ["Who do you think you are, then?"]

Very dignified: "I am English alone."

"Is dit brandewyn?" ["Is it brandy?"]

No answer.

"Kom jong, ek gee jou four-and-six vir die bottel wyn!" ["Come on, old chap, I'll give you four and six for the bottle of wine!"]

Silence.

"Vyf sjielings!" ["Five shillings!"]

Silence.

My friend is now pretty much lying on the other one's shoulder.

"Kyk, dis 'n handvol geld! Klim jy saam met my af." ["Look, it's a handful of money! Let's get off together."]

But the other one holds onto what he has. And now my Free Stater must also get off – this he *does* remember – staggering against two white women sitting closest to the aisle.

Translated by Mark Sanders – presented as an appendix to his article in this volume, "In die bus afgeluister": The Intellectual in the City".