

IMAGINED CORNERS
RON SINGER

**Apt. 11F
8 W. 13th St.
NY NY 10011
212-675-5545
ronsinger@nyct.net
www.ronsinger.net**

IMAGINED CORNERS

**“At the round earth’s imagined corners, blow your trumpets...!” John Donne,
Holy Sonnet # 7.**

Imagined Corners navigates among three locations that can be conceived of as the angles of a very large, very irregular triangle: city (New York), nation (*Dine’tah*, or Navajoland), and continent (Africa). I hope this geometrical design is a useful schematic, both geographically and socio-politically, for our united and not so united planet, and that the ordering of the poems in each section will highlight these consonances and dissonances. *Imagined Corners* is designed as an exorcism.

Central to this purpose are *My Seven Poems in the Navajo Manner* (the untitled poems in the middle section). These are modeled after a Chantways (healing) prayer, translated by Washington Matthews (1907) and quoted in Paul G. Zolbrod’s *Dine’ Bahane’* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984). I quote only the translation:

*My feet for me restore.
My legs for me restore.
My body for me restore.
My mind for me restore.
My voice for me restore.*

*This very day your spell for me remove.
Your spell is now removed for me.
Away from me you have taken it.
Far off it is gone.
Happily I will recover.*

Together with their model, these seven poems comprise a prayer for healing, to which the rest of the poems add their voices.

Contents:

New York City	pp. 3-21
Navajoland	pp. 22-34
Africa	pp. 33-44
Acknowledgments	pp. 45-46

NEW YORK CITY

*My Father-in-Law, Eighty-Eight
(as he enters his apartment building)*

To die is to leave this beautiful city,
city of color and light:
the blue-black sky, dusk of early Summer,
day going grandly into night,
and the clear cutting light
of fine days in Autumn and Spring,
the light that gives the buildings
their full dimensionality.

Coming home from a walk in the park,
blue-black sky, the very edge of dark,
newspaper tucked under my arm,
I tip my hat to a neighbor,
a very old widow with a very small dog.
Ritual politesse, abiding civility.

Then I turn for a last look at the plane trees
standing in a crooked line across the street,
their new little leaves silhouetted
against the richly shadowed pink stone
of the wide solid buildings.

Every day now, every day,
these things I stop to see and feel
once more --and, oh, once again--
before I come up to this empty ...

Instructions to Be Followed at the Time of My Death

The service is optional.
Cremate me,
that would be best.
Have a party
in the living room,
but, for god's sake,
no matter how cold the day,
don't make a fire!
Not only would that be
in dubious taste,
but our faulty chimney
would smoke out the guests.

***Last Winter, One by One* p.1 (of 2)**

Last winter, one by one, the machines all died. Both our home computers crashed. Once a week, about, a light bulb flashed, four in all. Since we had spares on hand, both 60's and 75's, that part was almost fun. But it was also just the start.

Tape and CD players –both gone in a shot. We fell back on the radio, spun a few LP's. There were other consolations: stove, fridge plugged away, and when the boiler broke our four-square little heater stood fast like a rock.

But, alas, the failures mounted, becoming, you might say, systemic. It was a cold winter, very. The boiler, as I mentioned, needed close attention. Pipes burst – several—including the stand pipe on the roof, which connects the system to the water tower. Voices were raised, fingers pointed, the Super and the Manager just about went mad. All in all, a lot of aggro, as our British cousins say.

Then, early New Years Day, both elevators seized, freight and passenger, marooning us on eleven and threatening our party –sixty invited guests, ages two to ninety, plus all that food and work. But they did get one of them, the freight, up and running just in time, and, for sacrificing her holiday to ferry our guests up and down, we gave the Super five crisp twenties, plus a heartfelt message enfolded in a greeting card.

Yes, minor jobs, major jobs, two hours to a week, everything got done. Not just the Super, but plumbers, electricians, those who work with pipes, towers, computers, elevators –a lot of people logged a lot of overtime.

Last Winter, One by One (cont.)

All of these failures prompt me to call last winter hard or, even, cruel. As weak basketball teams are said to live and die by the jump shot, so we with our machines. But don't get me wrong, let's keep this in proportion: the season was no harbinger of some dreaded nuclear one. No, it was only a matter of lines and feet, of climbing flights of stairs and waiting for the water.

But, even so, nevertheless— and I hate to sound a whiner or, even worse, a wiener— last winter was, in fact, just a sort of sequel. For, the summer before, you may recall, a squirrel gnawed through a cable, and, the collective bungling of a gaggle of greedy big shots kicking in, the lights went out in twenty million homes, a quarter of the continent. Neither to over-, nor to under-react, but, sooner or later, the coordinated efforts of tycoon, squirrel and politico may run us all to ground.

The Shiny Pants Brigade

Early one morning on my way to work, I see a man sitting on a standpipe, just beneath a "No Loitering" sign. (You see such ironies all the time.) He sits on the red standpipe, an increasingly common type, a very black man, not too ragged, wearing a brand new watch cap. The man is mad: options limited, bent forward, hands clasped, rocking, rocking, back and forth.

Then, just as I am almost past, in common spring transformation (O season of jumps and whimsy), the mad man multiplies, becoming whole troops of mad old men, bobbing cheek by jowl, *dovening* in the *schul*, while I stand and watch, the bar-mitzvah boy.

To me, even then (thirteen, of course), these stale old men seemed participants in an archaic form of madness, inviting me to join, on a more-or-less permanent basis, The Shiny Pants Brigade.

An unattractive option, this --alarming, even-- yet an option for which some boys -- weak boys, obedient boys, god-knows-what boys-- might have chosen --did choose-- to trade away their Saturday morning freedom. (A good way, if you ask me, to have been fleeced and fleered, for god never once appeared, with or without beard, with or without sword, not even on a bubble gum card.)

Yes, even now, as I take the shortcut through the park, nevertheless taking my time, the madman, far --two blocks—behind, even now, I say, I consider the memory of those rocking men lingering in my mind, a nagging threat, a standing invitation to kneel, which I, a walking, working man (guilt edged, though no trader, keeping my options open), choose even now, as then, I say, firmly to decline.

Old Woman on an Elevator p.1 (of 2)

An old woman, dyed,
bejewelled, bejangled,
holds the elevator
door for me.
She's already pressed "six,"
so let me see:
she must be going
to one of several doctors,
eye or tooth,
assuming she has
something to fix,
or --one other,
different possibility--
something called
"The Honors Bridge Club"
(cards, not teeth,
presumably).

The elevator shoots
right up the shaft,
stops at six,
and, quick, she's gone,
into a maelstrom
of initials,
high-sounding, all,
also official:
"OD"
"FAAO"
"MD"
"FNAO"
"ABO"
"NCLE."
Plus "The Honors Bridge Club,"
which might be called,
for all I know
--or which I might dub--
"The HBC."

Old Woman on an Elevator (cont.)

Since the woman was in
neither obvious pain,
visible discomfort,
or heat at the prospect
of an afternoon's game,
why, you ask,
did I not ask,
before continuing on,
to my own stop --fifteen--
(to the place where I buy
discount airline tix)
her destination?
Would that have been
polite of me?
Hardly.
So let's just assume
that she belongs
to the HBC.

Politician Seen on a Bus

I love the look
of corruption:

fat man stuffed
into tan summer suit
three hairs combed
across his pate
(plus assorted fuzz)
Italian loafers
dangling tassels
shoe crossed over shoe
medicine-ball belly
stretches broadcloth
(sylphid shape once was)
thrusting forward
the tasteful tie
(that's Italian, too)
lives (alone)
in a five-room condo
on a Jersey lake
fights killer traffic
(never say die)
in and out each day
this man's feet
are coached in state
this man dances
cheek to jowl
this man enjoys
easy access
this man knows
the mayor himself
this man's middle
name is "Hassle."

Inside Out

The panel on the side of the bus says "Maidenform,"
but the models are clothed, their underwear, well, under.
The passengers, however –men, women-- are topless,
as you can see when the bus goes by at night, lit up.
I can't make out the driver. He's on the other side.
I'd like to ask, but it says "You may not talk to him."

The Psychic's Daughter

Before we left the old country, so-called,
Mom's tits were on the evening news.
She was bathing in the sea
--the Mediterranean.
Old folks were reading the paper,
while kids screamed and ran around.

When we came to New York,
she worked as a cleaning lady,
polishing brass, scrubbing floors,
making enough to keep us
in bad food and cold remedies.

Then, some uncle set her up
in a store window, luring
people in to have their fortunes told.
She's been doing that for years now,
perpetrating petty scams,
messing with old people's pensions.

We eat decent cuts of meat
and frequently buy linoleum.
My mother is a soft-core whore,
aging in the window of a store.
I, myself, am in high school now,
just another kid, pretty much,
long and giddy, at Math not bad.

The other day, this uncle -- same--
(skin coldly moist as worm or such)
leaned across the kitchen table
and ran his hand along my arm.
The floor creaked beneath his chair
--it may have said my name.
The steam came over from his tea.
I think this "uncle" is my dad.

Karma

I saw Medea exorcising her crimes,
a bag lady, collecting heavy glass bottles
for the children, a Diet Coke can for Jason.

Next came the Penguin, trying to kick
the habit of evil at an A.A. meeting.
“I swear, I swear, I swear.” “We’ll see, we’ll see.”

Then, Nero, cowering behind a bush
on the African Plains at the Bronx Zoo,
hiding his thumbs in the folds of his tunic.

Presiding judge, author of the first treatise
on bowling, Maurizio Gutterballis.
“Mow them down,” he decrees. “Get them both.”

“AL,” blue letters, yellow shirt, glides down the lane
toward the seven-ten split, father and son.
Pins jump like a “W,” puff of dust, they’re gone.
Al pumps his fist, slicks back his pompadour.

Motherfuckerless Brooklyn

Thanks to vegans, yuppies, hipsters, muffies,
the lurid and the florid give way to
“Oh my God, these diaper prices!”
and “Isn’t inflation the poo!”
From “lick my dick,” to “macrobiotic,”
from “asshole,” to “alternative,”
the mother tongue is sucking hind tit:
Brooklynese is lexiconically depleted.

Thank god we still have our immigrants:
性交,, Chinese, for “fuck”; *mierda*, Spanish, for “shit.”
But mark my words, motherfuckers, at this rate,
how much longer can batty Brooklynites echolocate?
Fucking A! If not for jerk-offs like me and you,
the expletives would all be deleted.

Say What?***A Reply to Mr. Ron Singer's "Motherfuckerless Brooklyn"***

Yo, Ronnie. Say what, illiewhacker!
You gotta lotta shit wit' you, gavoon.
Do you really know fuck-all about
that of which you speak, you skank ho?
This "poem" of yours takes it up the coolee.
What's with the baby Spanish and Chinese?
No estes chingando, you *mamzer*, you!
Or *manzo le gausha*, perhaps, Mon-soor?

Duh-ta-duh, put it in your pocket, Ron.
"Deplete the lexi-fucking-con"?
I mean, not to give you leather, fuckweed,
but you don't even *know* the "lexicon."
You think you some badass motherfucker,
but I bet you just some poo-sie from The Ci-ty.

(acknowledgment:

Many terms are borrowed from "Brooklynisms,"
compiled by James Lampos and Michaelle Pearson:
<http://www.lampos.com/brooklyn.htm>)

Flash Poetry

He lurks in the station
of imagination,
dark, dank, skanky,
waiting for the trainful
of readers to appear.

He stands at the ready,
then whips open
his trench coat (dirty)
to display
the trenchant figure,
the erect iamb
and oratund spondees,
mega-meta-physical conceit,
the vehicle of metaphor.
Then, he whirls around,
lifting coattails to show
the flaccid, bumpy field,
the saggy butt end, the O,
that constitute the tenor.

“That should get a rise out of
those sleepy tabloid-suckers!”
Down the platform rush
the Keystone Prose Cops,
brandishing their critical nightsticks.
Coat still open, he turns to meet them,
smiling, unabashed, erect.

Odysseus in Manhattan (p.1 of 2)

I sail through my own neighborhood,
Odysseus tied to the mast,
heedless of Triple-X emporia,
indifferent to Victoria's Secret,
FCUK, and bus shelter ads
for unisex underwear
with burgeoning genitalia.

Earplugs mute the city's roar,
construction cacophony,
siren songs of causes.
"Have you got a moment for:
the Democratic party,
plight of the homeless,
animal, gay, and women's rights?"

Gold merchants with gold teeth, I see,
smiling men of Samarkand, Trebizond.
I glide up to a skateboard shop.
"To ride in triumph through Persepolis,
bust an Ollie with Po Pos at my wheels."
I stall in the sea of human traffic,
a salmon struggling upstream to spawn.

At sidewalk cafes (shades of Pylos),
corporate, suited Nestorians
wielding sun-flecked knives and forks
cut into steaks and hamburgers made from
cattle that have never known the plow.
Cheek by jowl, artists, writers, Suits,
even a priest, raise glasses to the sky.

Odysseus in Manhattan (cont.)

In front of office buildings, bars,
men and women stand in doorways,
elbows cocked, cell phones, cigarettes in hand,
politely exhaling sideways
past each others' heads. Risky, brash, risqué,
they push their cares away. Laughter, smoke,
conversation, hang in the humid air.

My welcome home looms ever closer.
I reach a block-long store, Men's Wearhouse,
a bad sight pun spun by idle suiters.
The mature customer, they cater to,
or, if you like, the business swine:
Hawaiian shirts, designer ties,
eight suits for the price of nine.

The salesmen stand inside, sedated,
peering through the open doors.
"Restrooms for customers only."
The Manager, fatso Cyclops,
sits in the bowels of the cave-like store
starving for a customer. Giving up,
he'll call out for a ham-and-Swiss on rye.

Home, at last, I see, at last,
my Penelope in the kitchen,
after all our wedded years
faithfully making dinner,
bending, lovely, at the counter,
chopping up the vegetables
for something that looks Chinese.

My son is in his room,
playing video games.
The courteous boy invites me in,
pausing to glance at me.
Sitting down beside him,
I grab the second joystick
and try to string the bow.

***Cat Scrabble Ode* p.1 (of 2)**

While you were out tonight
the cats played Scrabble.
Of course that's not to say
they played it the way
you and I would play.
But that's a cavil:
the cats played Scrabble.

Once they'd knocked it to the floor,
of course they ignored the board.
Playing as a team, together no slouch,
if you assume intention from proximity
and count the "L" half under the couch
as an "I," their best word was "GTIER"
(by chance), though neither spotted "TIGER,"
which would have been obvious to you or me
(as obvious as that little irony).
But humans are mammals of a different stripe,
and each mammal plays according to type.

Asleep, myself, on the self-same couch,
from a hard day's work and a beer, I avouch,
catatonic, completely zonked,
contemptuous of concerns ergonomical,
while the cats spelled "MIA" and "AWOL,"
I dreamt of old ladies in the Bronx.
At a big green table on a summer's day,
having tired of manifold hands of cards,
to gossip continuo, a buzz-saw of words,
they slapped away at a game of mah jong
while a small red radio sang them a song.

Cat Scrabble Ode (cont)

My dream was triggered by battled tiles,
the cats cavorting all the while.
In scribble-scrabble, mix and match,
they skidded, scampered, in and out of turn.
Little Albert takes a pipe while at play.
Claude the Orange likes to scratch,
to pill and pull at cloth and fern.
In chaos and fury their play is war,
though no one dies or even keeps score.

Well, dear, how's life at the old PTA?
I'm glad you're home, it gets lonely here,
my only company two cats and a beer.
If we could but find some twenty-odd tiles,
might we ourselves try a bit of play
(admittedly not in feline style)
to wile the rest of the night away?

You Can't Write Fast Enough

You can't write fast enough
to chronicle the visible world.
A pair of breasts on
the subway platform
pass before
you can chart their jiggle,
let alone properly
gauge the whole girl.
And before you can even
compass the girth
of a fat man's hips
or guess his living wage,
you've crossed him on the pavement,
swift as a giggle.

And to turn again, in either case,
would excite opprobrium
or --best case-- mirth:
breach of form, loss of face.
Thus squadrons and battalions
of corpulent men
and comely girls
are gone before
the flag of Art
can be unfurled.

NAVAJOLAND

Sheep along the road, an old man with a cane.
Goats along the road, the old man with his cane.
No herd dog on the road, the old man with his cane.
Bells tinkle on the road, the old man limps along.

Sheep and goats, goats and sheep,
one old man, dusty, thin.
Sheep and goats, one old man,
slowly, slowly, down the road,
around the bend, they are gone.

Wind blows through the canyon,
roaring, whistling, squalling,
winding through the quiet.
Footsteps in the canyon,
slapping, tapping, crunching,
through the crust of quiet.
A car heard from the canyon,
rolling, humming, whining,
way up on the road,
framed against the sky.
Up the road, around a bend,
rolling, humming, whining ends,
bringing back the footsteps,
bringing back the wind,
bringing back the quiet.

Vultures on Route One-Six-Three,
lifting roadkill just at dusk,
the feast will last for hours.
Three prairie dogs in a row,
eating shrubs beside the road,
they've stopped to smell the flowers.

We kill, they eat, man and bird,
a cow, a fox, two deer, a sheep,
man and bird in harmony.

Two live horses on a ridge
above the road as I drive past:
Don't come down to cross this road,
or those big crows will eat you fast!

Man and bird, they kill, they eat,
a fox, two deer, a cow, a sheep,
two live horses on a ridge,
prairie dogs as witnesses:
this ceremony at close of day
--suppose we call it "Roadkill Way."

Nature Seldom Flies as Does the Crow

Nature seldom flies as does the crow.

That's not the way most things go.

The wash, the river, the goose-necked coast,
all strive to swerve and meander most.

*Yebichei** at Shiprock,
dancing, chanting, bringing rain,
chanting, dancing *Yebichei*,
their dance brings down the rain.

Stumblebum at Shiprock,
cigarette a second nose,
asking for a match,
so he can light his nose.

Yebichei, up and down,
chanting, dancing, bringing rain,
stumblebum among the crowd,
he tries to light his nose.

*masqueraders

***Names of Rock Point High School Graduates and
Members of the Navajo Tribal Council (1999)
(a secret poem, not to be published or recited aloud*)***

“Begay Benally Yazzie Lee
Mailboy Nez Cowboy Chee
Tso Tom Nakai Tsosi
Descheny Yabenni
Bitsi Hoski Tsinojinny”
And finally
“Laughter.”

*Navajos have two names, a private and a public one. Since the ones listed here are the public names, and since the proscription against naming applies only to the private ones, the poem is a joke.

In Spring comes hard male thunder,
bringing hard male rain;
other seasons, times of year,
a softer kind of thunder
with softer, female rain.

Not inviolably separate,
these thunders and these rains;
sometimes separate, sometimes one,
sometimes, female turns to male,
then turns back again.

Pushed by pride asunder,
First Man and First Woman,
after years of suffering,
finally joined again,
each to each more dear.

First Man and First Woman,
male and female thunder,
male and female rain,
turn away, then back again,
each to each more dear.

Farewell Kiss

The Navajo way to say “kiss” is
“Two round objects meet.”
When we kissed, it was more like
two pairs of parallel lines
meeting at various points.
Of course, the geometry was complicated
by the fact that arms were also wrapped
around bodies which pressed each other,
all of these parts, too,
being somewhat straight
as well as somewhat round.

Now since this was a farewell kiss,
the straight round objects were parting
as well as meeting.
Yet by meeting as we parted
--and I believe some of the objects
also parted as they met--
we --and they-- were perhaps agreeing
or even asking
to meet again.

The Old Couple Flies in a Dream to the Still Red Desert

We fell asleep holding hands that night,
in bed, mind you, facing each other
side by side, my right hand atop your right.
That's how it was, make no mistake.
With our sleep masks on, mine red, yours black,
you, Liz, or Lizard, turned to Zorra;
I, Ron, *Gordo*, *Hombre Chiropteran*
(*más loco que una cabra*). *

Off we flew into the dream ethereal,
stars kissing, pulling at, our wind-stiff capes.
Below, the soft red clay hacienda
eroded brick by brick into red dust,
which flew up into the twin chambers
of our noses — our nostrils — four rooms, in all.
Nothing was rent-, or otherwise, controlled,
that night the world became a still red desert.

* *Gordo* = Fatso

Hombre Chiropteran = Bat Man

más loco que una cabra = crazier than a goat

Red rock lifts my heart:
slabs and towers, pinnacles,
they startle me and lift my heart.

Gray rock painted by the rain:
painted streaks run down the rock,
their folds like folded paper,
black streaks down the rock,
painted by the rain.

Red rock startles, lifts my heart,
gray rock painted by the rain,
slabs and towers, pinnacles,
rocks with folds, streaks of rain.

Petroglyphs

Petroglyphs:
Anasazi riffs
in clefts
on cliffs.

Antelope Ruin

Antelope Ruin sits on a shelf,
“The place where water paints itself.”*

*transliteration of the Navajo name for this Anasazi ruin

Eroded red rock looks like bone,
red rock swirled, wheeled and scored,
tipi-pinnacles, pots and cones,
red rock swirled, wheeled and scored.

Roadside cairn, a hitchhiker;
his knees, his pack, slouching hat.
Beside the road, a hitchhiker,
crouching cairn beside the road.

Tiny ruins cling to a cliff,
tiny ruins on massive rock,
dots and lines, a motherboard,
dots and lines cling to a cliff.

Eroded red rock looks like bone,
crouching cairn beside the road,
dots and lines cling to a cliff,
tiny ruins on a motherboard.
Humans, rocks: the "what," the "if."

AFRICA***Broccoli Rabe, Broccoli Rasta***

...sang the radio in Accra,
as we bumped along from where to where.
“What’s that?” I asked the driver.
“It sounds like reggae, but ...”
“*Ivoirien* reggae.”
“Ohhh, that’s why ... ah ha.”

On the day I broke my foot,
lost an eye, and didn’t say
“Good morning” to my wife,
Leo, three, grinned at me.
“Grandpa,” he said.
“What is it, my dear?”
“Broccoli Rabe, Broccoli Rasta.”

***Two Shrouds* p. 1 (of 2)**

Recently, there was a lunar eclipse, total,
the first to coincide with the
solstice
since 1638, second in the
Common Era.
Like solar, I expected,
a black-out.
Instead, like a
ragged, dust-colored shroud,
a wispy
cloud, was being dragged across
the
moon's very white, almost-round face.

...

I watched it start to sail across
for a minute, then back to bed.
Later, my wife said the shroud took
hours to dissipate, sail off into space.
In Addis Ababa these days, abundant greenery.
Generations ago, the dry plain was seeded
with eucalyptus trees, a species of colonization
for the good of the Ethiopian people.
Since then, plants, both indigenes and imports,
have flourished, creating bright tracteries of color:
green, yes, but purple, too, and more:

...

yellow, red, lovely, bougainvillea, jacaranda, not to
mention
Croton Macrostachys (Besana).* Come to think
of it,
some may antedate the eucalyptus.
Prevailing, however, is
dust: roads, people, too.
Dry-earth dust, together
with the fumes
from ancient vehicles --cars, trucks,
buses-- black
smoke, white, several varieties of noisome
exhaust

...

Two Shrouds (cont.)

Addis Ababa, like the moon, is shrouded.
These different shrouds are part of nature
(just as is the corpse-draping kind):
nature-nature, in the hidden moon's case,
and, in Addis Ababa's, clouds of dust,
the blowback factor from normal economic growth
(or that's what people--expert, lay-- say).
But, surely, *shroud's* too harsh a word
(when the lunar shroud was us, Earth).
Let's just call them – dusty city, eclipse—
“blankets.”

* *Besana* is the Amharic name for *Croton Macrostachys*.

The Race Question (Still)

An old man at a guest house in Free State,
South Africa, previously called "Orange,"
and still a bastion of old-time Boer-dom,
asks me where I'm from. "New York," I reply.
"Oh. A nigger and his wife from America stayed here once.
"She was white." When he sees me unswallow my teeth,
he adds, "I had a nice talk with that black guy.
Good people." Move (back) to the back of the bus, Rosa, dear.

Not Mentioned in Any Guide Book

When you strike a match in South Africa,
be sure to strike it just hard enough,
since only one in three has much of a head.
(Sulfur, they use, there as here, in safety matches.)
I think the wood is also soft. Common sense says
things go better when travelers learn the rules.
When you're away from home, it's easy to misfire.

In Westcliff Flats

In Westcliff Flats,
a poor township,
I found, at last,
a quiet, peaceful sleep,
hard to come by
in Fortress South Africa.
Perhaps, the dogs
had all been eaten.

The Poor Live Off Our Garbage

In New York,
they collect empties,
catch-as-catch-can
—and bottle—
a nickel a pop.

In South Africa,
young men glide up
to stopped cars,
bearing garbage bags,
sagging, wrinkled,
all the air let out.

In the mendicant position,
“Half a rand,”
they ask (seven cents),
“a quarter, anything.”

If you have no trash
(or prefer to litter),
“Half a buck, please, Sir,
for bread? I beg.”

[“Buck” is South African slang for “rand.”]

New York-Johannesburg Phone Conversation.

My wife said, "I reached across the bed for you.
I reached farther, farther, across the wide bed.
I tried to reach all the way to Africa."
"Be careful you don't fall off.
The world is square, you know."

Just then, a half-grown cat, an older kitten,
black and white tiger, on the thin side,
skittered across the floor of my room.
Appearing from nowhere, like a loving wife,
she must have jumped in through the window.

Sexual Orientation (after Donne)

When I lie in bed at Sunbury House
in Johannesburg, South Africa,
on my right side, I am facing east,
and if you, back in New York, do the same
(lie on your right), would your breasts, imagined,
push into my back, your cunt, rub my ass,
and your arms spoon me up in slumber?
And when I turned ... you get the picture.

But this would only be true if you were facing
southeast, which is not the case:
you're sleeping due east. Not to mention
the time difference, seven hours, as well as
the hemispheres. (Are we upside down?
There might be something there.)

On the Road from South Africa to Botswana

When the speed limit slows,
you know they're coming up:
school children in bright uniforms,
goats, cows, sheep, and donkeys,
lots of donkeys, grazing, pulling carts.

The ratio of donkeys to riders varies.
I saw one cart with no passengers,
five donkeys and just the driver, standing,
a dude, sporting a kind of sundowner hat
with bells around the brim.

At five-to-one, he was really tearing along.
Still, cars, trucks, buses whizzed past him.
Perhaps, he thought, "One of these days,
I'll get up to speed, join the modern world."

Well, that's what I would have thought,
up there, precarious, sporting that jaunty hat.
More likely, though, the actual driver thought,
"My dears are frisky today. I should be right on time."

Acknowledgments

My Father-in-Law, Eighty-Eight	<i>Puckerbrush Review</i> , Summer/Fall 2001
Instructions to Be Followed ...	<i>Waterways</i> , 2006 <i>Poetic Voices without Borders-2</i> , 2009
Last Winter, One by One	<i>Waterways</i> , 2005 <i>New Works Review</i> (featured poem), Fall 2008
The Shiny Pants Brigade	<i>Great Works</i> , April 2009
Old Woman on an Elevator	<i>Waterways</i> , 2007
Politician Seen on a Bus	<i>Gander Press Review</i> , Fall 2008
Inside Out	<i>right hand pointing</i> & <i>Great Works</i> , both 2007
The Psychic's Daughter	<i>Word Riot</i> , 2007
Karma	<i>right hand pointing</i> , 2007
Motherfuckerless Brooklyn	<i>The Brooklyn Rail</i> , Dec 2009-Jan 2010
Motherfuckerless Brooklyn & Say What?	<i>The Weekender</i> , January 2013
Flash Poetry	<i>Evergreen Review</i> , 2011
Odysseus in Manhattan	<i>Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review</i> , Winter 2008
Cat-Scrabble Ode	<i>Waterways</i> , 2005 <i>New Works Review</i> (featured poem), Fall 2008 <i>Poetic Voices without Borders-2</i> , 2009
You Can't Write Fast Enough*	<i>Waterways</i> , 2005 (*quoted in <i>Small Press Review</i> , Mar-Apr 2006)

Acknowledgments (cont.)

Poems in the Navajo Manner (7)* (untitled poems)	<i>Windsor Review</i> , 2002 <i>New Works Review</i> (featured poems), Fall 2008 (*being set to music by John Eaton, 2013)
Farewell Kiss	<i>Borderlands: The Texas Poetry Review</i> , 2000 <i>Poetic Voices without Borders-2</i> , 2009.
The Old Couple Flies. ...	<i>New Works Review</i> , 2008
Nature Seldom Flies ...	<i>right hand pointing</i> , April 2008
Petroglyphs	<i>Contemporary Rhyme</i> , 2007
Antelope Ruin	<i>Contemporary Rhyme</i> , 2007
Broccoli Rabe	Grey Sparrow, 2012
Two Shrouds	<i>Red Ochre Lit</i> , 2012
In Westcliff Flats	<i>ArLiJo</i> , Issue 36, 2010
The Poor Live off Our Garbage	<i>ArLiJo</i> , Issue 36, 2010
New York-Johannesburg Phone Conversation	<i>Red Ochre Lit</i> , 2012
On the Road from South Africa to Botswana	<i>Third Wednesday</i> , Spring 2012