Expressions
Help Create Order; Beggars Opera; Communication

George Snedeker
SUNY College at Old Westbury, New York

Received November 2011; Accepted January 2012

It is against the law
to beg in the subway.
Help us create order.
Don’t give money to lawbreakers.

I heard these lines the other day
while riding the downtown no. 6 train.
They reminded me
of an announcement
I used to hear
some twenty years ago
during the Koch era.

The point then
was about the same,
that homeless people should go away
and leave decent middle-class people alone
to read their newspapers
and contemplate
the course of history
while the stock market
melts
along with the polar icecaps.

After Koch
there was Dinkins
then there was Giuliani
and now there's Bloomberg.
Mayors come and go
but some things don't change.

Homeless people
are here to stay,
so you'd better get used to them.

Their stories aren't bad
as theater,
if you think about them
as tragedy
that grips us all.

Soliciting
in the subway
is against the law.
don't give to beggars!

The NYC
subway system
belongs to
paying customers
who work for a living
and don't
make up
stories
of phony
tragedies
trying to get
paying customers
to give up
their hard-earned cash
to beggars.

Remember
That the NYC subway
belongs to those
who can pay.

Dave has been living in the streets
for five years.
He begs every day
to get money for a bite to eat.

He has a crutch that he uses
just like in The Three Penny Opera
that he's never heard of.
They didn't assign Brecht
in Dave's high school.

The other day
on the F train,
Dave was telling the story of his accident
and how he just got out of the emergency room
of Beth Israel Hospital,
when a blind man offered to give Dave
a dollar.

Dave said,
"No man, that's ok!"
and quickly made his way out the door
and back into the next subway car,
as the train moved on.

I LIKE IT

He claimed to be
a Vietnam vet.
He was raving.

I thought that the cop
who patrols this area
of Penn Station
would tell him
he'd have to leave.

I've seen him hanging out here
before,
talking too loudly,
but not
out of control.

He walked
up to me
and said
loud and clear,
"How long have you
had that beard?"

I told him,
"About forty years."

He smiled and said,
"It's Cool!
I like it."

She sat in her wheelchair
on West 32nd Street
where she begged every day
starting at about 4 p.m.

“You know,
“SSI’s
not enough
to get by!”

She could hear the blind man
coming towards her:
the tap, tap, tapping of his Cane.
She always said “hello!”
to him
just before he reached her
chair,
so he’d know to swerve
around her
and make his way
across 7th Avenue
into Penn Station.

They both knew
that she was not
really
saying “hello,”
that it was
just her way
of letting him know
it was time
to swerve
a couple of steps
to the left.

George Snedeker is an Associate Professor of Sociology at the
SUNY College at Old Westbury, where he has taught since 1984. He
has published scholarly articles in the areas of Social theory and
Literary Criticism as well as short stories and poems. His book, *The
Politics of Critical Theory*, was published by Rowman and Littlefield in
2004. His most recent articles is “Culture, Alienation and Class
Struggle”, in the *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, 2012. His poems have
appeared in *Critical Sociology*, *Cultural Logic*, and *And Then*. He also
serves on the editorial board of the journal, *Socialism and Democracy*,
and is their Book Review Editor.