

The Word

KINGDOM

in the Word

KINGDOM

Noah Eli Gordon

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Also by Noah Eli Gordon

Books

The Frequencies

(Tougher Disguises, 2003)

The Area of Sound Called the Subtone

(Ahsakta Press, 2004)

Inbox

(BlazeVox, 2006)

A Fiddle Pulled from the Throat of a Sparrow

(New Issues, 2007)

Novel Pictorial Noise

(Harper Perennial, 2007)

Figures for a Darkroom Voice

(Tarpaulin Sky Press, 2007; with Joshua Marie Wilkinson)

The Source

(Futurepoem Books, 2011)

The Year of The Rooster

(Ahsakta Press, 2013)

Chapbooks and Limited Edition Pamphlets

The Fire & The Blue, Ten Frequencies, A Falling in Autumn, The Neat Life of Nicely-Nicely Lincoln, The Laughing Alphabet, Untitled Essays, Notes Toward the Spectacle, Jaywalking the Is, What Ever Belongs in the Circle, How Human Nouns, That We Come to a Consensus, Twenty Ruptured Paragraphs from a Perfectly Functional Book, A New Hymn to the Old Night, Flag, Returning Diminishments, Acoustic Experience, Three Spider Stories, Fifteen Problems.

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acknowledgments

for Sommer & Georgia

AN EXAMPLE

A subway car
passes through the room
in which I'm discussing
examples of enjambment
with several poets. We talk
about these lines by Schuyler:

*A gray hush
in which the boxy trucks roll up Second Avenue
into the sky. They're just
going over the hill.*

No, it's not a subway
car. It's simply the windows

of a subway car, positioned
precisely where they'd be

were they
attached

to a subway car. I point
in the direction

the windows, for all
we know, are

still headed, say
there's
my example.

FOR EXPRESSION

*Sing a song of utterance. I mutter to you.
Sing a song of expression.*

—Gertrude Stein

For the feel
in my palm
of an apple
fresh from
the market
Against the
viscous
transparent skin
of marketing

For the condition
of air
Against air
conditioning

For the brightness
of the room made
brighter by an
illuminating act
of the imagination
Against ingredients
and blueprints

For the continued sweetness
of chilled plums
Against plumage

Against the rifles
the aggressors
of elegant discourse
display as flags
For riffing elegantly
through discourse
to display
aggression flagging

For the curve
of any Adonis's cock
Against a lecture
on how to cup
the sack while stroking

For the renewal
of sunsets and moons
seasons tiny saplings
soups of all kinds
Against novelty
stirring in the wrong direction

For patronage
Against patrons

For music
Against museums

For the body
in its folds
and dignities
Against collapsing
garment factories

For love
Against labels

For workers
Against force

For the mask's respect
of the contours
of the human face
Against hanging it
on a wall
backwards

For paintings
Against frames

For pleasure
Against its conscription
to a purely cerebral
paradise

For standing
however
you see fit
Against posturing

For buildings
Against scaffolding

For the suit
Against the numbers

For the public
Against the publicist

For the sudden sharp beauty
of seeing anew
again
the same
old world
Against the art
of money
the artifact

the art of facts
and administration

For water
that rises and falls
the earth
those on it
Against the pull
of the village
explainer

For weather
Against forecasts

For the cow
Against the brand

For Stein and Césaire
Vallejo
Sappho Rimbaud
Against Cage and Warhol
Google
Apple
Monsanto

For the capacity
to imagine
your nakedness

Against endless images
of it

For the thread
Against the mill

For the attendant enchantment
of a phrase
tuned
and trued
Against taking attendance

For enchantment
in general
Against the generals
of entrenched
imagination

For the clit
Against the clock

For poles and zones
Against polling and zoning

For plasticity
Against plastic

For the poets
grown old
before us
Against their mistaking
admiration
for eros

For a wooden door
painted green
impervious
to weather
Against whether
or not
one has
to open it

For options
Against operators

For photographs
of flowers
all over the place
Against poems
where people
aim telephoto lenses
at one another

For pushing
the last bits
of daylight
through
the door locks
Against polishing
your crown
behind the curtains

For a girl
floating
for a few seconds
across
the parking lot
Against what's only
an ordinary
skateboard
underneath her

For the desire
to walk around
and around the block
like a man who takes
pleasure
in circling something
he knows he won't

apply for because
he's certain he'd get it
Against applications

For another poem
textured
with the sky
night
stars
and the sun
Against its textual history

For the messianic
and
Against the messianic
and
For the freedom to be so
and
Against the fastidiousness not to

ON DISMANTLING CLASSICAL VOCABULARY

Two tragedies occur simultaneously
A hummingbird coming apart in thin sun
is neither first nor the second one
Hear morning recast in sound
the body's trace symmetry
When is the age of analysis not upon us
its orange curtains filtering
twice the sun & twice
the sentence from which sun falls
The difficulty of replicating darkness
too much blue around the black earth
too many binaries making uncomfortable beds
Goodnight air full of astronauts
There is no tree. There is no modernism

WHAT DO I KNOW

for Michael Burkard

I was going to read your new book tonight going to start
on the balcony where I go to smoke standing next
to a square of light let out by the little window there
which gives enough to see if all the apartment lights are on
since I still haven't changed the bulb above the porch a waste
I know I was going to read but the snow was too strong
it blew right into the first few pages so I closed the book
and smoked with my back to the wind which felt
deliberate and defiant at the same time I mean the act
not the weather although I know either way works really
ten years ago I wrote "gushing self-pity" next to a poem
in one of your books I'm sorry ten years ago I thought I knew
everything about what poems should do now I know I know
very little and that it's better this way standing here in the dark

BEST AMERICAN EXPERIMENTAL POETRY

In last season's
dust

burning off

you can't smell
the oily fingerprints

of whomever
positioned
the spotlight

but you can
amazingly
see the power cord

plugged only into itself

EIGHT MEDITATIONS ON ENORMITY, PETRIFICATION, AND WORK

1

Whatever deities have taken up residence in prayer aimed at labor's aftermath won't explain the establishment of a sedentary society, especially one already weighed down with Gospel accounts of bread turned to stone, splinters tumbling from the sky, and pieces of the heavenly throne scattered across our own backyards. I'm pretty sure mystery is simply a privileging of what's not directly in front of one's face. That that which between method and doctrine manifests itself in the decision to finally clean out the sink, restock the cupboard, and make those few remaining phone calls is proof of the tightened apogee of the possible proves there is no difference between one for whom work is freed from acrimonious entanglements and one for whom entanglement works to free acrimony from its surfacing in such daily banality. I'm pretty sure there's nothing mysterious in that.

But wasn't there much left to learn from the old ways? Hadn't we heard a literal train of thought approaching from the past? Its pervasive melancholic rumble, partly audible, registering as a vibratory feeling, a taking in of distant movement as one might take in a stray cat, living with it for years, until it too moves on. Isn't ownership questionable? I suppose the certainty of a train's arrival would allow us a little departure, failing that, at least the story would, as they say, grow legs. Awkwardness is part of its appeal, part of what strikes one, for no apparent reason, or for a reason whose appearance is still unjustified, suddenly and completely to accept the first excuse given as the answer one was after all along.

It's not resignation, rather a way to effectively seat one's self in the lone remaining chair, nodding toward the left or right, so that for an instant the other passengers regret not having taken a clearly desirable spot. Perhaps I'm not much inclined to venture further than my own comfort can stretch, as though giving up the unknown for larger, headier complications were akin to cataloging the minor advances each day allows, until even these are as easily forgotten as a list of chores accomplished months ago, yet discovered this afternoon, underneath whatever the surface of the desk deemed more important, or at least more pressing. A reclining detail relaxes in redundancy.

That a train arrives at all is a small miracle of dependence, a smaller one of reliability. There's weather to anchor us to one another. I mention this hoping you'll agree, and so we're indentured to the startling anecdotes that chisel the face we think we've put on from the lumpy air of individuality surrounding our sense of how the world looks from someone else's perspective. By chance a drop of water lands precisely between coat collar and a bit of exposed neck, almost as a means to further punctuate this point, which, of course, is not random, but another of the mysterious jokes the universe seems to be silently playing, refusing to give itself away with even the slightest of chuckles. It's held in, neither expanding nor dissipating, like a painting of a man pattering around his rooms, another of him picking up or putting down a few treasured objects—scissors, an onyx paperweight, the skull of a monkey with three teeth attached. Is he really turning them over in a way that shows him to be alone with the act? One might claim a kinship with the palette, burn the canvas, and hang the brush on a museum wall.

Observation is change. Change is violence. Violence is inevitable. There's no other way to see it. Even a pet is unaware of her owner's eventual return. Music drifts from a window and you're back to the first time you'd heard it. Don't expect this to work for the intervening moments; they're better left to the rubbish heap of accustomed and unobtrusive activity. Here, I think the station's swell of newly quickening passengers means we're primed for another exodus. One would do well to propose an analogy between these momentary surges and those of live electrical currents, not that it would reveal anything novel about the situation, which, in its drab, mundane state, is the operative candidate for a shock or two. It would, however, work as a kind of counter-example, laying siege to the universality of our more entrenched ideas. To paint the word *lighthouse* on a lighthouse is deserving of shipwreck.

Don't you want the weight of the thought to have a literal heft, an equivalency you might wear as though it were a shawl, casually, yet calculatingly so. It's not enough to cover the shoulders. This is easy, and ease has its way of undermining the best of plans. Better to scale the walls before thinking of anything approaching an embodiment of the underworld, let alone the nobility that gives it like a blind guard dog its distance. What mythology doesn't have evidence of a gate somewhere at its center? I, for one, am open to reconsidering the usefulness of so flimsy a proposition. As is the case with past action charged with the memory of now unalterable, alternative choice, any nostalgic longing for a tree over the table it's become must take into account every last meal eaten upon it.

History has a way of waking us up, not to some bright future, where the telephone rings at the precise moment you were beginning to feel the first pings of loneliness. No, one is woken in a haze, feeling the disorientation of a child mistaking a stranger's dangling arm for that of his mother's. This is the sort of moment out of which entire gardens are planned. Were it not for the invention of clocks and the boarding of factory windows, we would have left work at dusk, dawdled in idle conversation, and been back home in no time. It's true, you can refute the historic role of a stone by simply kicking it.

As Prometheus would have it, a human redolence
 retained in raw stone descends from heaven
 only to rise again above the earth.
 Don't delude yourself lifting a tool upon lofty thinking akin to pollution.
 Four noble truths. Four feet in a single state. Poor prize-less fourth place
 and the upright mammal's interest in purity pulverized
 as a white painting of a white lake awash in late office light.
 To undertake an economic pilgrimage. To tie feathers to your hair.
 Swimming in moral instruction, Chinese peace and Hindu tranquility,
 the first original American's redemptive breath: oratorio on top of old smoky.
 All outward signs disappear. All disappearances
 sign sing scorching O spaciousness!
 O death knell conscript chalking walls!
 How do I know sexual laxity from the perfect image of self-control?
 How do I know an ember from an embryonic dark horse?
 Unlikely candidate unlike a future model for town square
 smashing a textile machine to deify archeological evidence.
 And thusly the Luddite begins anew, as Prometheus would
 have it, to retain a human redolence in raw stone
 descending from heaven and rising again above the earth.

About the Author

Noah Eli Gordon was born in Cleveland, OH, in 1975, and grew up there and in South Florida, then moved to Boston where he sold jewelry from a cart for several years while attending Bunker Hill Community College, followed by UMass-Amherst, eventually graduating from their Program for Poets & Writers, before moving west and settling in Denver, CO.

His recent books include *The Year of the Rooster* (Ahsahta Press, 2013), *The Source* (Futurepoem Books, 2011), and *Novel Pictorial Noise* (Harper Perennial, 2007), which was selected by John Ashbery for the National Poetry Series and subsequently chosen for the San Francisco State Poetry Center Book Award. His work has appeared in numerous anthologies, including *The Volta Book of Poets* (Sidebrow, 2014), *The Force of What's Possible: Writers on Accessibility & the Avant-Garde* (Nightboat Books, 2014), *Villanelles* (Everyman's Library, 2012), *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology 2nd Edition* (W.W. Norton, 2012), *A Broken Thing: Poets on the Line* (University of Iowa Press, 2011), *Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing* (Northwestern University Press, 2011), and *Poets on Teaching* (University of Iowa Press, 2010), and was short-listed in *The 2010 Best American Nonrequired Reading*.

An advocate of small press culture, he co-founded (with Joshua Marie Wilkinson) Letter Machine Editions, penned a column for five years on chapbooks for *Rain Taxi: Review of Books*, ran Braincase Press, was Head Reviews editor for *The Volta*, co-founded the little magazine *Baffling Combustions*, and has published numerous reviews, interviews, and critical and journalistic writing. Currently, he teaches courses on poetry, poetics, publishing, and nonfiction for the MFA program in creative writing at the University of Colorado at Boulder, where he directs Subito Press.

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