

The Word

KINGDOM

in the Word

KINGDOM

Noah Eli Gordon

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Also by Noah Eli Gordon

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*Inbox*

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*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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