

Unbox Your Words Course:

Session 4 Sept 27 2026

Materials

My aunt was always sweeping. She put her whole weight behind the broom like a man and that was my aunt. It was something and nothing to do with the dust. Then came the floods and she was the first to grab a yard broom, to sweep water from her living room, chase it hollering into the street. And when the time came, she would not get into the boat, she held them off with her stiff broom and they would have taken her into the boat but she wouldn't have it and that was my aunt. And always she believed her luck would turn. She saw how messes could be cleaned up, how a street, a province, a country could come good again. She would not get into the boat, she wouldn't have it and she stayed in her home as the water rose, as cardboard boxes, as mattresses and cats floated by. My aunt was always sweeping. That's how it was with my aunt. She was on the roof of her house with her pale straw broom. This was just before the house itself was swept away. She was waving the broom, my aunt was. She was waving the broom, she was sweeping the heavens clean.

These sentences will electrify the plain with black gathering; they will be blackened and will rise and cleave, magnetically, in an intake of housing

— —

These sentences will edge the void, will edge the plain and edge the towering structure; they will grain and blacken where they house and swoop where they fail

— —

These will flutter and spire and go dark with grain

These sentences will line the plain in modules for listening; they will hold and wait and lean in an absence of weather; they will be the calmative for the field

--

These sentences will make a tight, enclosing harmonics where the linking phrases turn and gasp in miniature and will lean in muted light

--

These will distill the question about the weather—"Is it fine?" "Are you fine today?" They will flute and silo

These sentences will awn the ethereal in formations of slow, climbing subjunctives; they will match the speed of that which has not occurred and that which is not yet known, and will show the stillness of that speed

— —

These curved enclosures will thin the plain; they will gasp where they void, will void where they cleave

— —

These places will gather in a succession of hollows, just edging above the grass, in effigy of the known, fraying; they will slant and hold and fray above the void, in around the plain

The sentence “Seeds turn into flowers, and flowers turn into soil” may be thought to describe a certain natural, biological process. In carefully watching seeds turn into flowers and flowers turn into soil, however, what is observed is a seamless phenomenon. At no moment does a seed turn into a flower. An observer, by some criteria, labels a phenomenon “seed” and at some later point labels a “different” (by some criteria) phenomenon “flower”. No one expects a flower to be permanent — we know that it is always changing. However, precisely by seeing the flower as always changing, we see it as one thing that is changing, not as a number of different things. No one expects a flower to be unitary — we know that some people will define the flower as the bloom atop a stem, and others will define it as the whole plant down to its finest roots. However, we may have deep expectations around what is certainly not a flower — a butterfly landing on a petal, for example.

Renee Gladman quote from Thresholds podcast

<https://www.thisisthresholds.com/archive/renee-gladman-on-the-spiral-of-prose>

Being in San Francisco I felt this kind of closeness or intimacy with the city, the physical surfaces of buildings, you could be somewhere and just touch a building. And also being out walking up the hills, walking the flats, and encountering other people doing the same thing, encountering different languages. It was a really formative experience for me in terms of thinking about environments and city structures. And I was also sort of thinking about the sentence and trying to figure out what I wanted to do with the sentence and it became pretty easy to equate the city and the sentence space to each other. Writing became a way of moving or moving through the city became a way of moving through language, so those two things kind of moved often into the future together, thinking of the sentence as a terrain for crossing, thinking of the city as something being written onto experience or memory etc...

I did figure out how to make my own sentences get long and twisty and spiraly and I figured that out through drawing, which blows my mind. To go back into writing and find that now I know how to go up and out and back in language, where I couldn't figure out how to do that before. That feels amazing.

https://thediagram.com/26_2/numberofpairs.html NUMBER OF PAIRS OF SHOES PURCHASED BY THE HOLY GHOST OF ST. NIKLAAS, 1317-1397

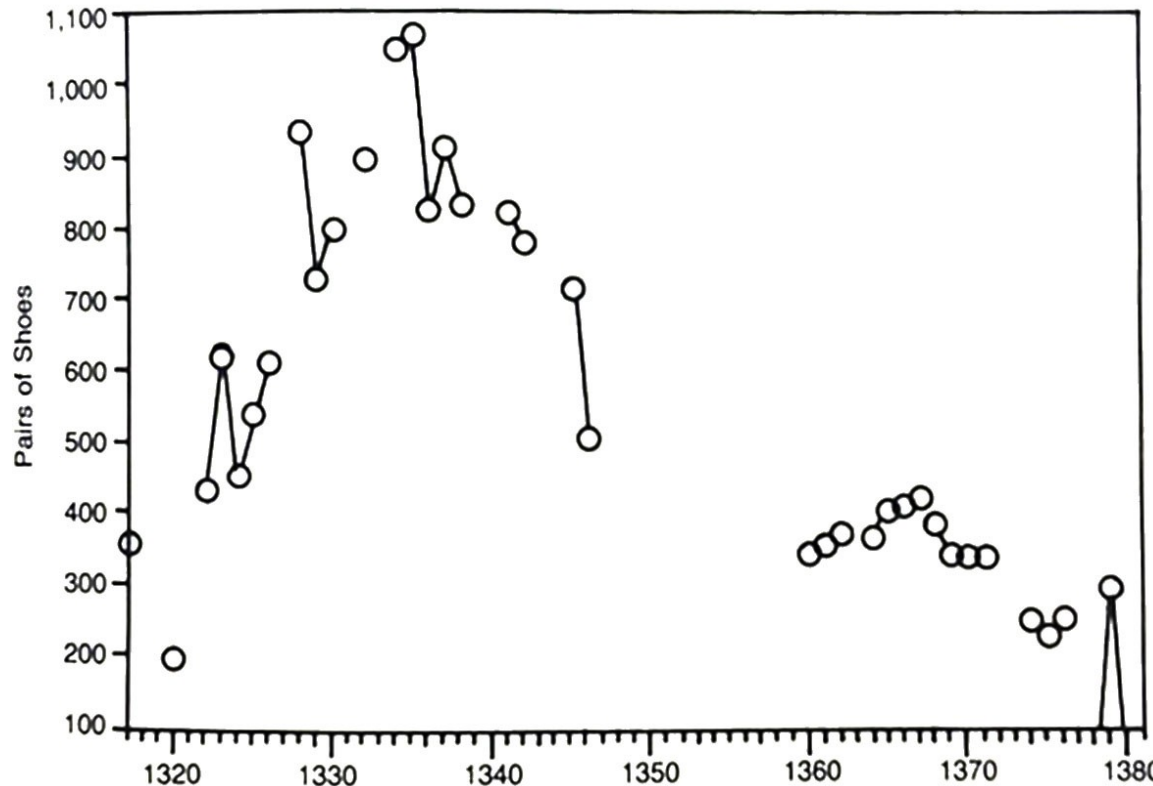
David Nicholas, *The Metamorphosis of a Medieval City: Ghent in the Age of the Arteveldes, 1302-1390*, University of Nebraska Press, 1986

NUMBER OF PAIRS OF SHOES PURCHASED BY THE HOLY GHOST OF ST. NIKLAAS, 1317-1397

David Nicholas, *The Metamorphosis of a Medieval City: Ghent in the Age of the Arteveldes, 1302-1390*, University of Nebraska Press, 1986

Graphs 3.2 and 3.3 [right] show that between 1360 and 1367 the number of pigs purchased had declined 27.8 percent from the pre-plague average, while grain had risen a bare 2.23 percent. Shoe purchases, however, declined sharply to an average of 379 annually, a drop of 42.92 percent.

In the four-year period initiated by the plague in 1368, the number of pigs purchased increase by 29.55 percent, while grain dropped 5.76 percent and shoes declined 8.44 percent. In view of the heavy mortality associated with the plague, the comparative stability of these figures shows clearly that the epidemic



struck the poorest groups
with special ferocity.
Between 1374 and 1377,
the number of pigs rose,
while grain declined an
infinitesimal 0.53 percent
and shoes declined by a
substantial 30.556
percent. If we assume
that the Holy Ghost only
gave one pair of shoes
per year to the indigent,
these figures suggest a
high poverty rate; but
this assumption is
unwarranted. Whether
records were kept of the
names of recipients of
shoes is uncertain.

<i>Hi.</i>	[]	/\\V/\\V/\\
<i>How was work?</i>	[]	=====
<i>Bye.</i>	[]	#####

—sometimes—my head still hits the pillow—
and as my frame falls flat—something—that was
once someone—stretches—a pulling jolt—whether
skin—organ—air—or the absence of—that thing
—pelvis to chest—across my belly—your first
home—barren marrow—now—i still don't know
—what it is—or when it might return—if it's
phantom memory—earthquakes of your uterine
kicks—some deeply unhealed scar—or a vital
structure malfunctioning—an abscess hanging
loose—untethered—looking for—its anchor—

(We no longer share mornings - - - - -)

Goodnight. [] in the
 process of poem making,
 the only time i can be in
 my body, but there is
 no time, i massage the
 embryo of an aneurism pulsing
 into being at the knot of my
 forehead, not today, no, let me not
 yet—abandon

the well stitched pattern that once held myself together, in tatters, i'm wrung out and webbed in, a silver film of unfamiliar

~~~~~

two male superiors / laughing over their insecure ineptitude /  
mimicry of me / as I do their jobs / below them / better than  
them / earn their bonuses / birth the ideas / they appropriate /  
see how my left hand / works works works / they say / ha ha  
ha / while my right / cradles a baby / mouth attached to my  
breast / is this / \ splice and dice  
—my head rolling \ to their left \ the tendons of my  
transitions \ torn at their right \ the blueprint of my bones \  
human form \ splayed at their feet \ my breast sputtering \  
milkblood all over my body \ all my compartmentalized  
capillary \ identities \ split—meant to be \ a compliment?

my mothers, a rooted map of dried guts, germinating

between my baby and i,      umbilical, of one body,  
blanched of blood but plump, warm velvet, leashed——

all family ties except my mothers, long lost  
strings in fragments, desiccated by the elements

~~~~~

he says: *just tell me how much detergent to use for the
diapers, what machine settings, how many ounces of
milk a day, each growing month, how thick to cut, how
soft to cook, each type of food, each stage, what
thermal level of clothing to wear to sleep, each season,
what toys are safe at what age, what books to read and
when, I can help, no problem, I like spending time with
him, I do not have to pretend to be happy.*

::: ///\\\\ ::: ///\\\\ ::: ///\\\\ :::

He says: *Today I need to wash my car.* (but two weeks ago i wanted to wash my hair)

between him and i, this thread is fraying

BLADDERS

We're inside the bladder room, trying to find the bladder that controls the flow of the client's blood. We take meticulous inventory: the bladder for blinking, the bladder for making love, the bladders for mourning, fear and uncertainty... Confusingly to the nonprofessionals, there are bladders that suppress, bladders that repress, bladders that conflate... But we are the professionals. You can tell by our hands. We soften them with exfoliating scrubs, strengthen them to just the right grip. There's order to our operations. Upon entering a bladder room, we isolate the bladder for dying and the bladder for not waking up. The nonprofessionals don't understand these aren't the same thing and isolate one or the other and call it good. In this state, you don't need to be one of the professionals to enter a bladder room. Most of our work is correcting the work performed by the nonprofessionals and DIY Daves. The client thinks he's been swindled by a nonprofessional. Ever since a routine servicing of the bladders, his blood flows different and uncomfortable. We're not surprised. We've seen bladders misplaced or outright stolen and brazenly replaced with non-bladder devices such as produce bags, balloons, latex gloves... We warn the client's daughter to expect the unexpected inside the bladder room. She insists on coming with us to ensure we do right by her father. She is at a loss when we discover the children manipulating the bladder for the flow of blood. This isn't the same bladder as for the heart or for bleeding. The nonprofessionals don't understand this, can't understand this, won't understand this... The children don't acknowledge us. They don't appear to be blood relations or to belong to the neighbors or on any footage from the doorbell camera at the entrance of the bladder room. The client's daughter tries pushing past us to do the work she thinks we should be doing. We can't let her remove the children. The children may be naturally occurring. We mustn't disrupt the ecosystem. Our work is neither to disrupt the ecosystem nor for us to explain. We isolate the client and the client's daughter into another room far from the bladder room. We tell the client he must explain. We manipulate the bladder for explaining.

THE WAX CHILD

'Olga Ravn is a master and an alchemist' SAMANTHA HARVEY



FROM THE INTERNATIONAL
BOOKER-SHORTLISTED AUTHOR

TRANSLATED BY
MARTIN AITKEN

OLGA

RAVN

present in the room fully comprehends what they are allowing out of its lair. And I, I am a wax child, secreted from the scaly glands of the honeybee's abdomen, of rose hip, propolis, pollen, dread, quince, longing, yeast dough, age, and ever young, with infinity's secret in my folds. They consult their ledger; they read aloud from it: Ale for the executioner, two nights: 2 marks. Reasonable, by any account, they say. Wait, there is more, they say: For five barrels of tar: 5 marks. A ladder for the girl: 20 shillings. For the executioner for putting her to her death: 9 daler. Payment to a man for assisting in her night-time capture: 4 daler, they say. No paltry sum, they say. Indeed, a handsome payment, they say, and continue. For the witnesses called to the hundred court: 5 marks. A pair of shoes for her, since she was barefoot when taken into custody: 3 marks, they say. Indeed, they say. Indeed, and again they continue: For the summons: 4 shillings. For the judgement of the provincial court: 6 marks. And then there was the boy clerk, a half-mark, the judgement of the hundred court, half a daler, bed and board for the provincial court, two nights, likewise half a daler, they say. And then too the cost of her detention, including payment for the ones who attended her those two nights, they say. That came to 3 marks, they say. And further: Has an amount been included for those who conducted the examination? To which they say, Not as far as can be seen. A mussel is alive as long as it is closed; this is the thought in Apelone's head. I don't think we should view it as a series

Someone in the casemates said, Your hand in the darkness is very soft. Someone in the casemates said, We are alive. As yet we are alive. Someone in the casemates said, Will you make yourself invisible? We are alive, someone said. I cannot see, someone said. We are alive. Something smells burnt, someone said. I cannot see. Is something burning? someone said. We are alive. I cannot see, someone said. Here, take my hand. The main thing is that we are alive. As yet we are alive. Who is it who speaks? someone said. It is only me, someone said. Who is that? It is us. Apelone. Is this your hand? someone said. No, it is mine. Is it you? I cannot see. I cannot either. Something is burning, someone said. Are we all here? Yes. Come over to the keyhole, so the light can fall upon your face. Yes, I will, someone said. Why is your skin so waxy and pale? Why do your eyes stare so? All the better to see you. Something is among us. What something? Something that is not us, someone said. What do you mean? I cannot see, someone said. The main thing is that we are alive. As yet we are alive. Yes. Hello? someone said. Is anybody there? someone said. Maren, are you there? Maren? Where is Maren? someone said. Something smells burnt, someone said. I cannot see, someone said. Quiet. I hear something, someone said. Keys that rattle, someone said. Now they are coming.

Someone in the darkness of the casemates said, We're alive. As yet we're alive. We is us. It's Maren. It's Apelone. It's Dorte, and Christenze. You had a strange little wax child. We were meant to perform magic with it. You had such beautiful eyes. You always became wet so quickly. We are in the casemates, in the dungeon of Aalborg-hus. We talk to each other all day long. From our four corners. We have nothing else to do. You had with you a loaf of rye bread you would not share. You silly woman, Apelone. Is that loaf hard and dry now? Someone in the darkness of the casemates said, The worst one is Otto Skeel. He always grabs a squeeze whenever they come in to see to us. And he talks boastfully of how he knows the king. And he says they soon will question us one by one. People are so obsessed with our death. Someone kneeled and through the peephole in the door observed tired glossy images of the world.