

Stephen Bett, selections from a serial poem, in progress, *Novel Lines 101*

Vassily Aksyonov, *Say Cheese!* (epigraph & opening line; trans, Antonina W. Bouis)

After the movies, photography of all the arts is the most important for us! —V. Lenin or J. Stalin

When and by which of the two possible authors this quotation was spoken is not known with accuracy.

Ah Lenin'o, ah Sta' lēēn

Axe ion is off (& running a'gen then)

Well it's hardly the *new sentence* is it ...

Take my photo, Koba

tyranny of the signified

It's like trying to see

the *air* itself

Your agitprop chop

nixed

— say cheese ¹

¹ Re: "Tyranny [or fetish] of the signified..." Two source critical texts underlie many of these poems: Stephen Fredman, *Poet's Prose: The Crisis in American Verse* and Ron Silliman, *The New Sentence*

Martin Amis, *Lionel Asbo: State of England*

In his outward appearance Lionel was brutally generic—the slablike body, the full lump of the face, the tight-shaved crown with its tawny stubble.

A novel a'miss

sweet FU UK

Thuggish louts

(en route, NYC)

ASBO signified *yob*

bruter than signifier *boy*

Tyranny becomes fetish

one lump or two?

Say please ²

² ASBO: (Anti-Social Behaviour Order); UK's Blair gov't restraining order for thuggish louts— this novel being Amis' parting shot at Britain when he moved permanently to NYC. A different type of tyranny/fetish has been causal for avant poetry's "demolition of the conventional relationship between the active (dictatorial) writer and the passive (victimized) reader..." (George Hartley, *Textual Politics and the Language Poets*)

Ivo Andrić, *Bosnian Chronicle* (opening line; trans, Joseph Hitrec)

At the beginning of the year 1807 strange things began to happen at Travnik, things that had never happened before.

Strange b'place, Kin v. Art

one brow low one high

Stranger than wingnut

num(b)·er·ology

One ate one nought fewer

non bond·ouble "0" sevens

1807's a master "Sixteen"

Positive integer, karmic

numb'er

"Vibrational properties," they say

One lump v. two

Flight re·route Sarajevo Blue ³

³ *Tra'v'nik*, Bosnia: Andric's birthplace—*Obrnuto* (Bosnian for “in reverse”: kin v art). The Sarajevo ref is to another Bosnian poet & short story writer Semezdin Memedinović's biting/numbing war collection *Sarajevo Blues* (trans, incidentally, by Charles Olson scholar Ammiel Alcalay) with SM's debt to fellow Bosnian writers Ivo Andrić & Danilo Kiš

Donald Antrim, *Elect Mr. Robinson for a Better World*

“Duck!” ... From the skies it came, a gargantuan blue tome, one of those Compact Editions of the Oxford English Dictionary, end over end hurtling in projectile descent, pages fluttering and tearing in the wind, a screaming index of printed and bound lexical data, half a language heavy with gravity and gathering velocity. I dove for turf and covered my head as the OED cruised thumping to the earth.

Hurtling screaming index

d’ lexical data

Each ’tum point

a s p a c e ate

inside da’ words

Torque you round

shift yr ground

Ring tha’ blank space

Be you’m 27th letter ⁴

Google say two plus seven

⁴ “The new sentence is a decidedly contextual object. Its effects occur as much between, as within, sentences. Thus it reveals that the blank space, between words or sentences, is much more than the 27th letter of the alphabet. It is beginning to explore and articulate just what those hidden capacities might be.” (Silliman, *The New Sentence*, p. 92)

we's buzzing on

Cloud Nine

Say "Duck!" Sniper shots

cross street, Sara day-glo

heavy gravity for sure ⁵

⁵ See previous poem's footnote re: *Sarajevo Blues*—ducking sniper shots while crossing streets during the Bosnian war