

*Chelate*, by Jay Besemer (Brooklyn Arts Press, 2016)

reviewed by Kendra Craighead

Jay Besemer lives and works in Chicago, IL as a teacher of art and poetry workshops and has published several books of poetry such as *A New Territory Sought* and *Object with Man's Face*. He has also been working as a contributor to the anthology, *Troubling the Line: Trans and Genderqueer Poetry and Poetics*, and contributes poems and critical essays regularly to ongoing publications such as *Axon of Performance Literature* and *Petra*.

Besemer's book of poetry, *Chelate*, is telling a personal narrative through sound driven poetry in a unique form that gradually shifts in tone as the book progresses. Structurally, it is separated into five "chapters": Xenophilia, Making & Unmaking, Adjustment Disorder, My Inheritance, and Ordinary Wear & Tear.

The book's poems all follow a consistent form, which omits punctuation except for colons to indicate a pause between lines, the use of the ampersand symbol and a theme of all lowercase letters including "i". For example on page twenty-four, "i have a head that flies up & down depending on necessity but never side to side : i wait for it to launch or land."

The poems are sound-driven and use assonance more than actual rhyme. For example, on page sixty-five in Adjustment Disorder, a line from the poem on that page reads, "the border between flesh & prosthesis pretty porous these days : the walks propelling my energy packet through the fields & particles of this place." The aesthetic this combination of sound driven diction and form creates is one of simplicity and surreal imagery.

Each poem is on its own page, but they can all be read as if they continue into each another like one long poem. For example, on pages 92 and 93 in *My Inheritance*, the transition between the pages feels almost like it could be one poem when it says, “...i will go there : rest my hand flat on a rust-furred refrigerator & laugh in prayer :: the forest will find you.” Where that double colon occurs is where the first poem ends and the next line is on the next page. Both poems describe a forest, but in two different ways; as comfort being sought and comfort being given. It is an interesting and unique form of poetry that gives the reader more to contemplate than just languid and surreal imagery, but a story that Besemer seems to be weaving throughout.

Besemer’s book of poetry, *Chelate*, in these aspects it is a successful collection, one that functions like one long poem that has been broken down page by page for a more invested experience of connecting the dots of the author’s story. If you enjoy poetry that is rich in sound and tone, without too much focus on tangible details, then Jay Besemer’s *Chelate* is well worth the read.