

PASCALLE BURTON

“*Mining Spelter to Pewter*”

Javant Biarujia, *Spelter to Pewter*

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Words lie waiting, intentions of the dead, and what to the dead were intentions of the dead. Words are gathered, not made, for intentions new and old.

Harry Mathews

If we ask whether the electron is at rest, we must say ‘No’; if we ask whether it is in motion, we must say ‘No’.

J. Robert Oppenheimer

It’s often the case that I have no idea what a line means or why exactly it appeals to me.

Charles Bernstein

Fibres are woven before we even open Javant Biarujia’s *Spelter to Pewter*. It is bonded to nine other books in Cordite’s first poetry series (all with striking and matching cover designs by Zoe Sadokierski) and to Biarujia’s previous work *Resinations* (Otoliths), a companion to the title piece. This potential energy signposts the coming attractions to and from matter, form, language, sound, typography and meaning.

Biarujia is one of Australia’s longstanding experimental poets, dealing in avant-garde language/s since the 1970’s. He prefers the term ‘generalist’ (after David Bowie) to any shackled labels,<sup>1</sup> however his lineage and influences make appearances throughout his writing. For those who need boundaries, though, Corey Wakeling puts it well:

Biarujia’s work marks out its own historical forebears and familiars in a way that I believe – although absolutely in association with contemporary histories of poetry such as American Language poetry, Australian bricolage, and European surrealism – happens to hybridise baroque linguistic ingenuity with deconstructive collage and games of poetic reality that defy straightforward historical alignment.

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<sup>1</sup> See Murphy.

*Spelter to Pewter* is a sharp selection and arrangement of words, which Biarujia permits as ‘empty vessels for the reader to fill’. He emancipates the three sections — *Spelter to Pewter*, *Brancusi Études* and *OBJE(C)T FOU(ND): A Crevel–Breton cento* — by constructing them as ‘conceptual poems’ that should find ‘their own level, *above* and *below* consciousness’. The reader must locate, extract and process the work and allow for its many possible alchemical reactions.

As is often characteristic of experimental writing, the collection is thrilling on first entry. Whereas *Resinations* consists of 512 lines of pantoums, Biarujia turns to the constraints of mesostics (a form invented by John Cage) in the 512-lined title piece. It demands specifically physical reading; each poem’s central spine reveals an element from the Periodic table and encourages dynamic horizontal and vertical scans. Often, due to the choice of case and space, stresses will leap and the eye must recalibrate its phonemic awareness for example, ‘the Ory’, ‘tea Ring articulation & metre apart’ or ‘: arcane pro Liferations:’. Reading as performance continues through *Brancusi Études*’ vertical text and font size variations. The slippage is a corporeal tax on the reader — sometimes more like a visual stutter. As the poet says in *FLUORINE*, ‘Eyes see sound’.

The push and pull of case makes objects, letters and meaning appear and disappear. Languages other than English (including Biarujia’s own invented Taneraic) complement the ‘here-there’ fashion. If these poems are objects, they are prisms to turn to the light, such as these lines that shimmer in their lightplay: ‘collec Ted culture’, ‘[tab Oo subject]’ and ‘globally war M’.

Rhythmically, there are places where the poems seem ablaze. Biarujia has a feverish way with words, bringing musical and sonic sensations through internal rhymes and assonance. From *EUROPIUM*:

“*Bo Oz endormi*”  
    Presided over Hugos violent  
    def Inition of  
    so UI  
a brutal hole / of incorporeal for M

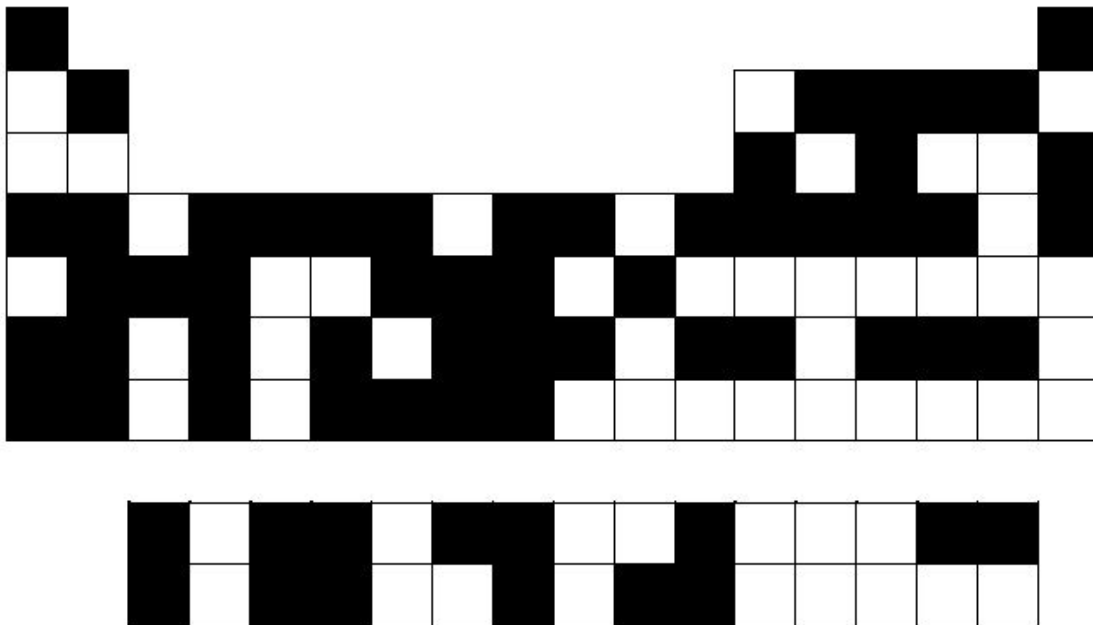
The text is populated with notions and notables — now and gone, near and far — presumably a who’s who/what’s what of the poet’s experience. Names dropped like Zukofsky, Malevich and Voltaire are predominantly from the ‘men’ category, a form that comes and goes throughout the work: see ‘of no Menclature’, ‘reciting ger Man’ and ‘a Mended!’.

In the erotic and stirring *OBJE(C)T FOU(ND)*, men lie at the poems' feet; while the cento nods towards René Crevel and André Breton, there are helping hands from others, such as Nigel Cawthorne and Roland Barthes, in the footnotes.

The patterns, processes, form and theory keep many secrets. If only there was an open door (other than Google) to spark some particles of light. Readers without Biarujia's deep intellect, exclusive perspective (or even a surface knowledge of the Periodic table) may need to bask in the glory of the cryptic and sculptural text, the sound and vision of the words, the rhythm of the lines and the electricity of possibilities.

The inclusion of so many other players in Biarujia's poetry makes for a full party. Perhaps, though, there is no requirement to know them — or their works. The poems still have charge and the author has given them over for the reader to transform and be transformed. Lytle Shaw, writing about Frank O'Hara's insertion of Mayakovsky in his poems, notices that 'the knots often create slippage between life and text and among versions of the self'. The effect, as with Rauschenberg erasing de Kooning, is somewhere between creation and preservation.<sup>2</sup>

There are many ways to come to knowing without knowing. This review is not about how my mind filled the words or how my perspective shaped the messages. I did wonder though, whether there was a key in the selection of elements:



I also found two lines of Cyrillic text in *BISMUTH* to be elusive at least. An online Cyrillic keyboard translated them loosely to mean 'stump like the action / applicant tiny love chest'. Unconvinced, I asked my fifteen-year-old nephew, Max, a student of Russian, to help an aunt out:

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<sup>2</sup> Shaw, 126.

The poem is written strangely but I am sure it is actually ‘laziness is the real truth of mankind’. But definitely use the ‘stump’ translation haha.

... Malevich again, ok, right.

There is a distinct atmosphere of potency and spirit in this book. Even when the subject matter is political, sometimes darkly so, there is an air of optimism and energy amidst the violence. *OBJE(C)T FOU(ND)* clashes fluids, body parts and fetishes with bigotry and misrepresentation. More subtly, *étude II* teams a phrase from Pasolini’s poem *The Tears of the Excavator* with a statement reminiscent of Brancusi’s *Sleeping Muse*:

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Off

Words are gathered for intentions new. I keep coming back to the final lines in the last poem *Dream/Action*:

“Beauty

will be

convulsive”

The text is taken from the end of Breton's 1928 book *Nadja* and the entire phrase is 'beauty will be convulsive or will not be at all'. The edited version is evocative of Pasolini, the unbeliever with a 'nostalgia for belief'.<sup>3</sup> By avoiding the final ultimatum, the spirit of optimism materialises.

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<sup>3</sup> Merjian, 450.

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