

reviewed

Imago by Peter Yovu (2016, Ornithopter Press, Princeton NJ). 32 pages, 4 $\frac{5}{8}$ ×7 $\frac{1}{8}$ ”, block printed cover wrappings, saddle stitched. ISBN 978-1-942723-02-8. \$11 from ornithopterpress.com

Reviewed by John Stevenson

“The poem must resist the intelligence
Almost successfully.” -Wallace Stevens

Considered as a unit, I don’t know when I have read a more satisfying single-poet chapbook. Whether others will see it in the same way will depend, in large part, on whether they agree with Wallace Stevens that a poem must “resist the intelligence almost successfully.” It is certainly the case that resistance is an element of each of these poems. Sometimes this resistance is mild:

the darkening
desert sky

vertebrae breaking through

And sometimes it is intense:

the cradle	crickets
the cradle	rockets
the	of civilization

This quality of resisting expectation, plus a prominent articulation of empty page space, forces the reader to slow down and focus intensely. And even when the reader does so, there are moments like those when we are driving and realize that we don't remember exactly how we got this far along the highway.

What is most impressive about *Imago* is its consistency. Like the vast majority of haiku books, this one contains poems written on widely spaced and disparate occasions and previously published separately. But the work has been selected and organized in a way that makes it register strongly as a single entity. There are several strategies employed to achieve this affect. First of all, the author has resisted the temptation to make this a "greatest hits" compilation. *Imago* is a relatively brief set of poems, about sixty-one of them. I say "about" because the spacing sometimes makes it arguable where the line between poems occurs and, also, because eleven of the poems are presented in italics and function as section headings, foreword, and postscript.

The poems are individually memorable but, in much the way that the constituent elements of a haibun or haiga may be strong in their own rights but should be more so in their interactions, the interplay of the poems in *Imago* contributes to the sense of the book as a single organism, a new creature. And how would I characterize that creature? I think of a mountain goat negotiating the sheer side of a cliff—surefooted, occasionally breathtakingly so, and withal, nonchalant.

In gathering cost and other data on the book, I contacted Mark Harris, who is credited with creating the cover image and book design. About those tasks he commented, "The challenge is to make a package worthy of the poems inside, no easy task." His success adds to the seamless quality of *Imago*. Your copy is available through the website noted above. It is a limited edition. Act now.