

after/image by Jim Kacian (2017, Red Moon Press, Winchester VA). 118 pages, 5×8", perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-947271-03-6. \$20 from redmoonpress.com.

Reviewed by Cherie Hunter Day

After/image is Jim Kacian's first full-length haiku collection in nearly a decade. The title of the book comes from an optical illusion. Afterimage is defined as "an image that continues to appear in one's vision after exposure to the original image has ceased." An afterimage results from prolonged viewing of a pattern or enough brightness, as in a bolt of lightning, to overstimulate the eye. It's not the initial image that lingers, but the residue of the image—the afterimage—that allows a longer look.

Haiku in the first section of *after/image* are reminiscent of a booklet by Kacian, *A Primer of Organic Form* (2013), which was presented at Haiku North America that year. In it he illustrates various adjustments to word order, unit, and field to shape the visual space and enhance meaning. We have become accustomed to the differences between one-line and three-line haiku to control the pace of processing words, but Kacian uses the full toolbox of graphic techniques such as alignment, fade or gradient, insertion of brackets and symbols, and a variety of typefaces and fonts to great effect.

one
 step
 farther
 than
 I
 wanted
 to
 go
 march
 wind

This haiku places as much emphasis on the typographical effect in conveying meaning as the words themselves. Words can be both evocative and demonstrative.

| a | nail | pops | in | the | dark | loneliness |

In this example the words are printed in a 70% grey screen, and the vertical bars (v-bars) are 100% black. This gives the v-bar punctuation a visual sharpness that may be felt as hardness—the stiletto of a nail. The v-bar glyph is used in mathematical notations: whatever is contained between the v-bars can be read as “the absolute value of.” The absolute value of a number is the same whether it is positive or negative. Similarly, both positive and negative experiences have a real value in our lives. A v-bar can also indicate division, restriction, or that a particular segment of a line is perpendicular. Those nails inserted into the surface with such precision are working their way out. Often the route out of our personal darkness is the same path as that which put us there in the first place. All this can be inferred from the choice and placement of a keyboard symbol, plus an adjustment to font opacity.

In the introduction to *after/image* Jim Kacian writes about looking “for ways to make these disparate moments cohere into something more than a ‘string of firecrackers.’” While the material in the first section of the book features Kacian’s dexterous use of form, type, and layout, he addresses text layering and haiku sequencing in the second and third sections of *after/image*.

“The social project” is the title of the second section, which presents one variety of palimpsest—writing over a ghost text. In this case the ‘ghost’ is four categories of white text on a pale gray-screened page. Each right-hand page has: “the political,” “the one,” “the other,” and “the future.” Over each of these phrases are a variety of one-line haiku printed in a dark grey ink. The background text is limited to these four phrases, which anchor and propel the haiku forward like voices in a Greek chorus. This section was performed by four readers at Haiku North America 2017. (A YouTube video of the reading is available online.) There is a bit of theater in presenting the work on the page as well.

To further the dynamism of the section, an abstract painting develops frame-by-frame on the right-hand page. Kacian is known for his video haiga, and this flipbook animation allows the reader to simulate a similar visual liveliness. This treatment reiterates that experience can be both intermittent and uninteruptable—light as particle and wave.

The third section is titled “after image,” and it introduces the drama of ellipsis—a text-inspired afterimage. One haiku per page in dark grey ink in the center of the page is written over a ghosted portion of an adjacent haiku. Again the undertext is barely perceptible, rendered as large white letters printed diagonally on the page in a different typeface than the haiku. Juxtaposition happens not only within the haiku, as expected, but the collocation extends to the haiku in the immediate vicinity. Consider the following example.

no
me
mo
ry
no
me

Written behind this vertical haiku is “into dreams” from the preceding one-line haiku: “new year’s eve the last dram weaves into dreams.” Starting with the verticality of the foreground presentation, the text falls down the page like one is falling asleep. The senses and the sense of self shut down through an ever-narrowing slit of consciousness. Aided by whisky, sleep comes easily. The “me” in the haven of dreams remains mysterious, shrouded beyond/within memory. It’s the perfect nexus: one haiku provisioning a second haiku.

after/image marries haiku with a high degree of creative expression and extends our notion of what haiku can be.