

In a final haiku by Robinson:

a farmer sets
the curve of his cap
prairie skyline

we see the farmer adjusting his view to match the curve of the horizon. He is looking out into the distance of the prairie, aware of its grand reach. He sees the skyline, its darkness, its promise, its history, and he is ready to be part of it. He is in tune with the heavens and earth of the great plains.

Don't just drive through the great plains of Kansas and South Dakota, get your copy of these two excellent collections to enter into the inner landscape of life on the prairie.

The Bone Carver, by Ron C. Moss (United Kingdom: Snapshot Press, 2014). 112 pages; 5"x7¾". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-903543-32-0. Price: \$23.00 from www.snapshotpress.co.uk

Reviewed by Dan Schwerin

The first line of the first poem is 'meditation' which is the frame for all that follows. About that *The Bone Carver* is intentional. This first collection by Ron Moss is for the reader who wants more. The black currawongs and banjo frogs of Tasmania sing a clear sense of place—and more. In short, the 'more' is the here worthy of meditation. These poems render an immediacy that arrives brick by brick:

meditation ...
deep in a white forest
the sound of frost

The color white appears in over half a dozen poems and is foreground for the moonlight in several more. Moss conveys an artist's love of contrast. These poems feature at least a dozen languages of black, from black swans to black water. The poems call us not to miss all that is vivified in the dark.

black rose ...
 even before
 the dusk

The Bone Carver juxtaposes poems and color nicely, but with 112 pages and over 70 poems, Moss has room to add the layer of time. Consider:

after your death ...
 framed in every window
 winter geese

It's exciting to reckon the layers here: 'after your death' is one slice of time, as well as all the physical and emotional locations that are 'framed in every window.' Notice these are not the usual geese of autumn—here the geese have lost what was left of a season—with the harsh onset of winter. We feel the sudden emotional winter after a significant death. This haiku conveys the internal view of the poet facing the frame and the external world of winter geese. Every window is a frame for this moving desolation. While haiku poets experiment with different ways to convey emotion and import, *The Bone Carver* anchors aesthetic depth in the juxtaposition of color, images, and time.

These are not happy accidents. The image of 'bone,' 'skeleton,' and 'bone-colored' also pepper the collection. These poems figure contrast the same way bone carvers use white, grey, and black scrawled into the ancient now of bone carving.

If you get under the hood and look at these poems, a black currawong echoes Basho's withered branch and settled crow autumn poem of 1680. First Moss, then Bashō:

autumn wind
 the black currawong
 settles on my lunch

on a withered branch
 a crow has settled —
 autumn evening

David Barnhill, in his book, *Basho's Haiku*, notes that Bashō's poem is influenced by both early Chinese verse, and also the spiritual aesthetics of Zen. That old poem comes on the wind with a black currawong to render a layer of literary reference worthy of meditation.

Moss's use of the images that convey Zen sensibility makes me think of families at the time of a funeral. The human impulse to eulogize says to all who listen, 'here is the best of life—and here is the truth we must carry forward.' I hear Moss calling us to poems of intelligent reflection trusting all that is here is endlessly worthy of meditation.

Even the verbs are directional. We poets who are eternal novices would do well to remember haiku has been called a poetry of nouns. Lee Gurga, in his classic, *A Poet's Guide*, counsels the haiku poet to 'suspect every verb.' Moss's collection has more than twenty poems that juxtapose and tell time without calling a single verb off the bench and into the game. However, when Moss wants to employ a verb, many move the poem in some direction—up or down. He uses the verbs, 'sleep' and 'rise,' 'dive' and 'sing,' 'sink' and 'float,' among others that settle and lift.

Before we leave the Zen sensibilities behind, I appreciate how moonlight arrives between late night exhaustion and a flash of insight:

tired of this world ...
 suddenly moonlight
 through my window

This poem made me think of a tanka by Izumi Shikibu (974?-1034?) translated in *The Ink Dark Moon* by Jane Hirshfield and Mariko Aratani:

Although the wind
 blows terribly here,
 the moonlight also leaks
 between the roof planks
 of this ruined house.

Hirshfield's notes on this poem are in part: "This poem's power and resonance emerge when one reads it as a Buddhist statement: it is in the midst of poverty and suffering that the moonlight of enlightenment is able to enter the human heart." The poem by Moss takes us, I think, to a similar dynamic of mortal limits being the window where moonlight enters in. Moss's light touch allows us to see moonlight as an image of both the yearning and insight conveyed by the best moon poems. In summary, while the aesthetic of *sabi* often sings of the existential impermanence and solitariness of things, this collection suggests less of that mournfulness, and more of the liveness and serenity that endows existence as it is conveyed here in black and white.

This collection doesn't forget to have fun. Moss sings of babies and teenagers and my favorite poem is the honest, multi-sensory and verbless but tumbling delight of:

children's laughter
a weekend father
with sticks in his hair

The clean and beautiful production values of Snapshot Press allow the poems space for appreciation. An intelligent introduction by Ferris Gilli helps orient the reader as well. By the end, *The Bone Carver* helps us intuit the insight Ron Moss has reached:

starry night ...
what's left of my life
is enough

To that I would whisper, 'amen.'