

**Ron C. Moss.** *The Bone Carver*. Ormskirk, Great Britain: Snapshot Press, 2014, 112 pp., perfect softbound, 5 x 7.75 inches. ISBN 978-1-903543-32-0. £9.99, US\$23 (includes shipping) from [www.snapshotpress.co.uk](http://www.snapshotpress.co.uk).

by Michael McClintock, Clovis, CA

T.S. Eliot wrote in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* that the “auditory imagination” involves “returning to the origin and bringing something back.”<sup>1</sup> I think Moss’s haiku exhibit a magic for doing just that.

How the past manifests itself in the present appears to be one of Moss’s claims on a reader’s interest and attention. This theme is clearly experienced in what is, perhaps, his best known poem to date:

crescent moon  
a bone carver sings  
to his ancestor

This remarkably good, haunting poem won the second prize in the 2009 Harold G. Henderson Memorial Contest. In her foreword to *The Bone Carver*, Ferris Gilli, one of the veteran editors at *The Heron’s Nest*, quotes from the write-up of judges Peggy Willis Lyles and Marian Olson:

Carved from light, the evocative shape of the crescent moon sets an appropriate mood for another song, this one uniquely human. The second image is exotic and the bone carver’s cultivation of spiritual connection with his ancestor stirs intuitive contemplation of a debt to past generations and our place in the cosmos.

Many of Moss’s poems are imbued with a sense of the mythic and primitive that is similar to that found in Joseph Campbell’s best writing. Also present are Jungian elements of deep imagery from nature and the inner caves of human imagination and memory. These characteristics may be Moss’s central grounding as a poet and the chief markers of his distinction

in the milieu of contemporary English-language haiku. In poem after poem Moss creates a sense of continuity with the primitive, revealing a Jungian awareness that imparts aesthetic tension between a sense of the past and our experience of the present:

sudden downpour  
cotton-candy screams  
on the ghost train

Myth and tradition are present, as ghosts in the psyche, and as freshly apprehended and embodied things and human dramas of the present—often unexpectedly so, as in the above poem, or in this one, purely from nature:

almost heard  
the wind between  
the stones

Moss is a poet of human and environmental (natural, urban) convergence. Alienation and irony are not major premises in his work. One could say that Moss's importance to the current expansion and development of haiku literature is the almost complete absence in his work of those exhausted modern and postmodern issues. Again I quote from the book's foreword, where Ferris Gilli speaks of Moss's "joy in the most mundane of circumstances, hope in the midst of despair. In his hands, recorded events become precisely carved haiku, each one with its own powerful light."

This is not to say there is no angst, as for instance that induced by the tension and menace in this poem's innocent setting:

late call for dinner  
the click of a toy gun  
in the twilight

The violence we fear and deplore in today's world is indeed the ugly potential (and payback?) that is embedded in our entertainments and toys. Moss makes his point without clubbing

us with it, conveying an important idea and criticism. This toy gun registers a very loud “click” of recognition.

I find much compassion, humor, and tenderness in Moss’s vignettes. Here are two favorites:

end of shift  
returning my name badge  
to the pile

trout rising  
singing Baptists gather  
by the riverbank

In *Where the River Goes*, the 2014 winner of the Mildred Kanterman Award for Best Anthology, Allan Burns praises Moss for adding “a wealth of fresh images and references to our haiku” and for exemplifying “the poet-observer effaced by the act of seeing.”<sup>2</sup>

*The Bone Carver* is Ron C. Moss’s first collection, a carefully selected body of 97 poems from his first ten years of work in the genre. He sets a high standard for himself and for others, too, of course. This ambitious debut should, I think, unlock many rusted, broken gates.

### Notes

1. Thomas Stearns Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933).
2. Allan Burns, *Where the River Goes: The Nature Tradition in English-Language Haiku* (Ormskirk, Great Britain: Snapshot Press, 2014).



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