

*winter pruning*, by Wanda D. Cook (Colrain, Mass.: Stark Mountain Press, 2014). 48 pages; 4¼"x6¾". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-0-9832298-8-9. Price: \$9.00 from the author at P.O. Box 314, Hadley, MA 01035

*Reviewed by Terri L. French*

Landscapers will tell you that cutting back trees and shrubs during the dormant season invigorates the plant and reserves more root energy. In Wanda D. Cook's trim little book of haiku, *winter pruning*, she has successfully selected and arranged sixty haiku full of evocative imagery and emotion.

Many of the poems are nostalgic. Childhood memories are relived through the subtle smell of drying mittens, gentle tickle of dandelions, and in the patterns made by grandmother's spoon in fresh butter.

Family and relationships are reoccurring themes, whether it be the birth of a child, death of a father, or a private moment with a lover. The reader is summoned into the shadows of a beautifully erotic moment in the following poem:

lantern light  
the place on his back  
where hollow meets curve

There are moments in which the reader is brought figuratively into the shadows—an undisclosed journal entry, whispered secret, a letter to a distant friend. One is left to speculate as to just what was written or said.

Other poems are written with lightness and a touch of whimsy reminiscent of Issa, particularly those dealing with animals.

chipmunk —  
just because i saved the beetle  
don't assume i want you here

One of my favorite haiku was perhaps the simplest, yet most touching.

prompting the fledgling  
 robin  
 &  
 i

The layout of this poem added to its overall effectiveness of relating humanity to nature. The baby bird is perched precariously in the higher branches, his mother below him, urging him to fly, and the woman on the ground looking on anxiously and expectantly. Perhaps she is facing her own empty nest as children grow and leave the home.

The settings of Cook's haiku vary as much as the subject matter. There are haiku set in laundromats and roadhouses, rural gardens and ghetto streets, on the front stoop and in the bedroom.

Along with choosing just the right landscape for her haiku, Cook manages to select the perfect combination of words. Her use of alliteration and sound render the poems favorable for reading aloud.

rustling autumn  
 the snip of scissors  
 on winter wool

Many of the poems pose questions, whether to herself, an animal, the reader, or to the universe itself. Others leave themselves open with ambiguity and invite the reader to ponder. Again, I come back to the book's title and the poem that inspired it:

a full moon  
 where branches once were  
 winter pruning

What moments do we choose to celebrate and remember as we approach the winter of our lives? What moments do we prune away? And in the pruning are we then able to see more fully and clearly the truths and the beauty that might have otherwise been obscured?

These are questions you may ask yourself as you read and reread Wanda D. Cook's book, *winter pruning*, a celebration of both the natural seasons and the seasons of a persons' life.

## BRIEFLY NOTED

*Earthlings*, by Allan Burns (No place: 2015) 40 pages; 41MB. E-book. No ISBN. Price: free download from [www.mutteringthunder.weebly.com](http://www.mutteringthunder.weebly.com)

We tend to think that the titular word only applies to human beings, but of course that isn't the case. *Earthlings* continues in the nature tradition of Burns' ejournal *Muttering Thunder* where he has developed a well-deserved reputation for nature haiku and its stewardship. The poems in this slight collection show a deep empathy and love for nature and humankind's place in it, but also our responsibilities toward it. Like the ejournal, the artwork of Ron Moss accompanies the haiku. I could have easily picked any one of its forty poems as an example. A strong offering and well-recommended! *colors of dawn... / beyond the brush pile / the fox's black ears*

*Journeys: An Anthology of International Haibun*, edited by Angelee Deodhar (India: Nivasini Publishers, 2014). 238 pages; 5½"x8¼". Glossy two-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-81-929002-1-6. Price: Inquire of the editor at [angeleedeodhar@gmail.com](mailto:angeleedeodhar@gmail.com)

A collection of 122 haibun by twenty-five international practitioners of the genre. Picking the representative authors was undoubtedly a challenge and for the most part we agree with the editor's choices. All well-known names and some favorite pieces.