Amar in ‘The Handle’ who must cope with living in a war-torn world, yet still clings to dreams of a brighter future. Occasionally Pierides’ turn of phrase is startlingly original such as in ‘Shoes’ which so concisely explores the tragedy of the sinking of migrant boats from Africa and the Middle East. She tellingly writes, ‘We poets, who put our hearts in the shoes of the hummingbird and the beggar poet, the little frog and the mighty spring thunder, the cat and the star-studded sky, are confronted with a reality hard to fathom.’ There is a great deal of humanity in her work.

However, not all the haibun are serious. Pierides writes about googling herself in ‘Phishing’, the irony of adult relationships in ‘In the Shade’ and gains our attention using rhetorical questions, for example in ‘Shut-Eye’ where we are asked, ‘Have you ever tried to fall asleep in Athens?’ The author has and tells us rather humorously that it is ‘no mean feat’ due to the fact that ‘Athenians never stop’ making noise in this colourful city.

So, Pierides not only writes well about diverse and interesting subjects and gives her haibun short and catchy titles, she also skillfully uses the art of juxtaposition in her haibun. So many poets when writing haibun carry on the thought or main theme in the haiku, but not so Pierides. She adds new dimensions to her writing through the additional element of the haiku, for example in ‘Biting’ where she ponders on the meaning of life in just a few lines, she ends with the haiku:

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midnight hours
the sound of his electric
toothbrush
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leaving a welcome space for the reader to make their own connections.

Pierides extends her work far beyond purely personal experience to incorporate the universal and she does it seamlessly. ‘Of This World’ is a collection of fine haibun which is most definitely worth reading and rereading.

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**Review by Dave Read**

*Keepers*, a book of haibun by Terri L. French, contains the adventures of JT Blankenship, a young southern boy growing up in the 1960s. As we
learn in the Preface, the fictional JT “came” to French with his desire to
tell her a story. Fortunately, for French’s readers, one story became many
and resulted in this collection. Brilliantly illustrated by Paresh Tiwari,
Keepers is powered by JT’s voice and French’s thoughtful storytelling.
With JT as her narrator, French has created a strong and authentic voice
that is consistent and provides unity across her haibun. She captures the
nuances of the young boy’s speech in two ways. First, French imbues JT
with credible childhood perspectives and imagination. Take, for example,
the haibun about Old Man Harold, “Spooked”. JT speaks of Harold’s
house as haunted, overgrown with weeds, and home to a plethora of cats.
Reminiscent of Jem and Scout’s fascination with Boo Radley, JT admits
that “Even though he scared the living daylights out of us we couldn’t
seem to stay away from his house.” The compelling nature of strange and
scary things tugs at a child. A boy will pursue what an adult lets be. The
richness of his perspective continues when JT discovers that Harold has
died. He becomes sentimental, and hopes that Harold has “plenty of old
cat ghosts to keep him company.” However, as shown in the concluding
haiku, JT does not abandon his fear of the old man completely:

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garage sale —
nobody touches
the Ouija board
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Likewise, French adds believability to JT through her presentation of his
imagination. In “Kudzu”, he confesses to having tasted the leaves of a kudzu
vine. Spitting them out immediately, he “got to thinkin’ that monstrous
vine has a life of its own and might take root in my belly and wrap itself
around my innards and in no time trail out my nose and ears”. Again, the
manner in which JT imagines his subject augments his childhood voice.
Without knowing anything about the narrator, the readers would easily
discern that they are being spoken to by a young boy. His imagination
follows him right to bedtime:

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summer night
a tendril through
the bedroom screen
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The second manner in which French gives strength to JT’s voice is in
her use of Southern phrases, slang, and dialect. In the reader’s ear, JT
sounds much like the children in the movies To Kill A Mockingbird and
Where the Red Fern Grows. Sentences like “The creek was brimming with
bream and crappie just hankering to get caught” and “But, I reckon, what
I thought was purty and what Mama thought was purty was not one and
the same” are richly embedded with that unmistakable southern drawl.
Other characters also add to the sense of place through voice. In “Rite of
Passage”, JT’s Daddy says “that boy’s been climbin’ trees since he was knee-
high to a grasshopper and he ain’t fell yet, so quit yer frettin’”. French even
manages to work a drawl into some of her haiku:

skimming stones ...
a Skoal ring
on his Wrangler’s

in the fruit cellar
unsealed peaches
growing fuzz

Keepers is also strengthened through French’s thoughtful storytelling. Her
skill as a writer can been both within the space of a haibun and across
the scope of her book. French is patient. In “Proverbs 16:18”, she takes care
to detail JT’s vanity about his hair and the time he spends “Brylcreeming
it to perfection.” She also, through JT’s Mama, makes reference to his
Daddy’s jealousy from being “half bald”. Without these details, the end of
the haibun would not be as effective. After JT is discovered to have head
lice, all of his beautiful hair needs to be shorn. It turns out his Daddy is
the one with the clippers. Having JT’s “jealous” Daddy cutting off his hair
provides a strong irony at the end of the poem while turning the narrative
back to its beginning.

French’s excellent storytelling is also at play across her haibun as she
weaves various characters into the narrative of her book. The best example
comes through her use of JT’s dog Mudd. While Mudd has two haibun
directly about him (the second and the last of the book) he also makes
appearances in many other places. The frequent use of a sub-character
like Mudd unifies the book and creates verisimilitude across its pages.
As readers, our growing familiarity with JT’s family, friends, and pets
makes Keepers increasingly more believable and real. The reappearances
of characters help us feel our way deeper into JT’s world and know him
better in the process.

Keepers is a strong and endearing book of haibun which invites rereading.
French’s creation of an authentic, southern child’s voice along with her
superb storytelling provides resonance and truth in these entertaining
tales. Beyond the typical reader of haibun, Keepers is a book to be
recommended to all lovers of literature.