

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:

midnight hours
the sound of his electric
toothbrush

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.

Keepers, by Terri L. French Illustrations by Paresh Tiwari (2018, CreateSpace) 46 pages, 6" x 9", ISBN-10: 1979771049, ISBN-13: 978-1979771047, \$10.00, <https://www.amazon.com/Keepers-haibun-Terri-L-French/dp/1979771049>

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 daylight 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:

garage sale —
nobody touches
the Ouija board

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:

summer night
a tendril through
the bedroom screen

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 be seen 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.