

*Of This World*: 48 Haibun, by Stella Pierides (2016 Red Moon Press) 122 pages, 6" x 9", ISBN-10: 1936848805, ISBN-13: 978-1936848805, \$15.00, <https://www.amazon.com/This-World-48-Haibun/dp/1936848805>

*Reviewed by Vanessa Proctor*

What is immediately noticeable about Stella Pierides' collection of haibun 'Of This World' is the strength of the authorial voice. The poet is not afraid to address the reader and this direct approach lends an authoritative tone to her work. That is not to say that there is condescension here, but rather a sense of playful confidence. Pierides is not only a poet but also an accomplished writer. She engages and continues to engage the reader from her first haibun 'Cave World' until the 48th haibun 'Before Words'. In 'Cave World' we become part of 'the half-lit world between the realm of the real and the story we are going to be told.'

In this well-structured collection Pierides explores her interest in psychology while exploring the poet's place in the world. The haibun clearly are 'Of This World' taking us through the gamut of human experience. There are haibun about science, literature, philosophical matters and pressing political issues and embedded within these pieces we find myth, metaphor and memories. Some of the pieces are personal, but never cloyingly sentimental. Some haibun are about others, such as

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.