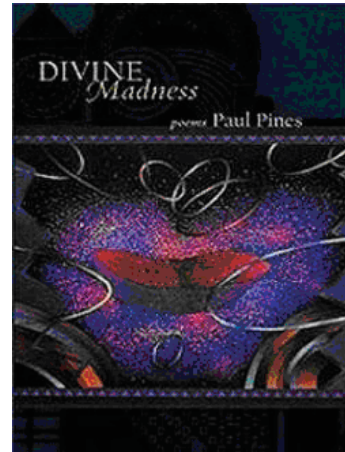


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DIVINE Madness by Paul Pines
New York: Marsh Hawk Press, 2012
Pages: 64, Price: 15.00

Reviewed by Pam Rosenblatt

With a beautiful, colorful, abstract cover painting by Douglas Leichter, Paul Pines' DIVINE Madness deals with a lot of things: religion, mythological figures, death, life, communication and of course mental illness, etc. His book is divided into three sections: Book 1: The Serpent In the Bird, Book 2: The Absent One, and Book 3: Who Knows The Knower.



In Book One: The Serpent In the Bird, Pines reveals his intentions for the 64 page trilogy in his first poem, "1 • It's not about us". He suggests what we as readers should expect to discover throughout in DIVINE Madness:

*It's not about us
but what
connects us*

*a world
forged of links*

*the parrot's beak
in the lion's jaw*

*divine madness
encrypting our sleep*

*like Puritans sniffing out
God's fingerprints*

*messages born again
and again from the rubble
of our assumptions*

what we listen for

*as if decoding
the depth
of diamond*

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*or entering a winter landscape
suddenly don't know
what we thought*

*until a child
who
for a moment lost
reappears full grown
to tell us
we need not
fear death*

*if touched by
the consciousness
of the gods
in men*

Pines has introduced gently introduced us to DIVINE Madness. He begins with "It's not about us/but what/connects us" and ends his poem "1 ● It's not about us" with his advice that "we need not/fear death//if touched by/the conscious/of the gods/in men".

Pines suggests that like the mythological serpent who lives inside of the bird (as the first section's title reads), there are "gods [whose 'consciousness' lives] in men". Some psychiatrists would call this mental illness. And since this book is titled DIVINE Madness, the readers may think so also.

As George Economou blurbs on Pines' book's back cover, "With extraordinary daring and inspiration, Paul Pines has dedicated the art he has exquisitely crafted for a lifetime to the service of the divine madness that has always distinguished poetry from mere writing." He also comments on how Pines "captures the universal analogy anew by 'connecting us to the consciousness of the gods in men'"

The way Pines writes about this 'divine madness' is intriguing, after all perhaps this contact with "the gods" is a gift, or - better yet - maybe it's mental telepathy. Whichever Pines is implying, the analogies/metaphors are there.

Throughout civilization, there have been myths and legends about serpents being powerful, evil, and frightening to humans. Now, in 2012, Pines suggests that, like *The Serpent in the Bird*, there are "gods" inside the minds of men. How creative and brilliant, yet how disconcerting at the same time.

DIVINE Madness is filled with metaphors, vivid imagery, and has a pretty consistent experimental structure. While an abstract poet, he uses similar themes with different twists throughout his book. One topic often

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written about is birds, especially in Book Two: THE ABSENT ONE. His love for these feathered friends can be seen in "20 • Did Audubon":

*Did Audubon
In the woods around Natchez
think of birds
as aspects of
his inner landscape*

*a mockingbird
in the marsh
the secretive
part of himself*

*the pileated woodpecker
his relentlessness*

*and what of
the thrush*

*whose song
bends the spectrum*

*filling the pine grove
of his heart?*

*Did December's long beams
touch something*

*that moved in him
unseen*

*which he could neither identify
nor tame*

*but knew
only as a shadow*

*at day's end when brandy
staves off dampness*

*that accompanies
the dark*

*a shadow
that moves still in his drawings*

*of flightless wings
stiff legs and talons*

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*in stuffed owls looking down
from mantels*

*decoys on shelves
or paneled walls*

*did he imagine these too
had their place*

*fragments of unrealized
desire*

*known to him only
as shadows at day's end?*

While this poem is about mental illness or how "December's long beams/touch something/that moved in him/unseen/which he could neither identify/nor tame/but knew/only as a shadow/at day's end when brandy/staves off dampness", Pines describes various birds so beautifully that we can almost visualize them: "a mockingbird/in the marsh"; "the pileated woodpecker/his relentlessness"; "the thrush/whose song/bends the spectrum". Even "the stuffed owls looking down/from mantels/decoys on shelves/or paneled walls" have a place in his world where everything is "touched by the consciousness of the gods in men".

DIVINE Madness's back cover has a blurb by Robert Kelly that reads, "[Pines] is the quiet sage who makes everything in his room a tender plaything." He refers to Pines' poem "20 • Did Audubon".

Pines appreciates birds, living or deceased. He even writes about "birds in an ice storm/as if nothing were/more important than/the direction of our intention" in Book Two: The Absent One's poem "28: Grief strips us bare" and about "... reef birds/feeding on life beneath/the surface" in poem "35: Starting out from a Spain" found in Book Three: Who Knows The Knower. Pines' birds seem to have a purpose, or a direction, and have a functional existence.

Pines writes how it's important to know one's role in life, and to accept it, as seen in Book Three: Who Knows The Knower's poem "33: The sea beyond bare trees":

*The sea beyond bare trees
under a winter sky
extends to the horizon*

*highlighting branches
mossed by wind
skinned by salt air*

*golden finches at the feeder
blue and white nut-hatches
pecking at rind*

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*He understands the role of salt
the geometry of shells
the bios of ocean*

*how marine life
melts into stone shelves
hollows out
submerged cathedrals
for worship crabs
where the eel of solitude
electrifies its prey*

*as armies clash wave
upon wave
in the agitation of forces
seen and unseen*

*he can watch
the gods make love
in the privacy of
his heart*

*and continue to chop the carrots
dice the garlic.*

In this poem, Pines has these non-living or living things do their normal routines. The poem's voice "understands the role of salt/the geometry of shells/the bios of ocean". Why "he can [even] watch/the gods make love/in the privacy of/his heart" and remain so detached that he can "continue to chop the carrots/dice the garlic".

As he writes in the final poem "46: but shall we leave it here" in Book Three: Who Know The Knower, "but shall we leave it here/with a drop of dew/on a leaf//stars snaking through/the heaven//the underworld/in the Milky Way//to navigate/the world as it forms around us/the universe".

Here questions are raised that are probably thousands of years old like: Is a god, or are there gods? How did the world begin? Is there a heaven and hell? And will we ever find the answers to such inquiries?

In "46: but shall we leave it here", the poet also asks:

*the voice
that asks us*

*is it hard
to look upon the fear
in your father's face?*

who calls the ancient one

HaShem?

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Paul Pines presents and deals with difficult topics throughout this read. And if as readers we keep an open mind, we can appreciate and understand Paul Pines' DIVINE Madness