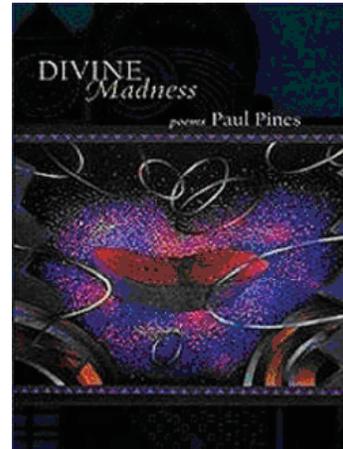


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**DIVINE Madness by Paul Pines**  
New York: Marsh Hawk Press, 2012  
Pages: 64, Price: 15.00

*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