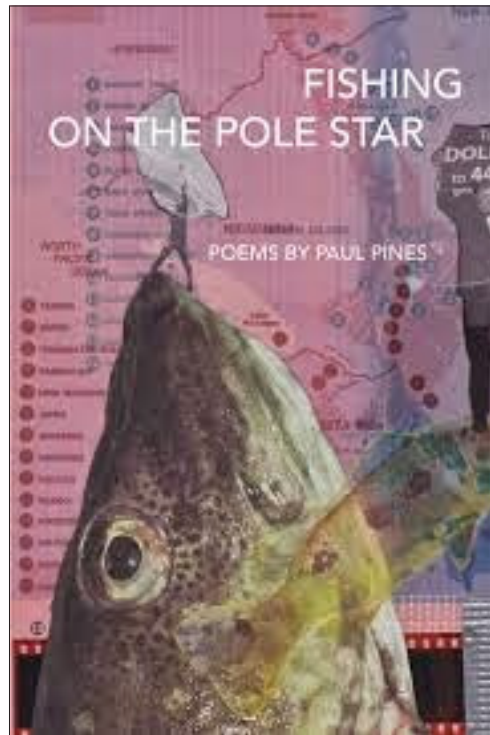


Fishing On the Pole Star
Poems by Paul Pines
Collages by Wayne Atherton
Dos Madres Press
Loveland, Ohio
www.dosmadres.com
ISBN 978-1-939929-11-2
94 Pages



Review by Dennis Daly

Have writer's block or artistic ennui? Find yourself bereft of inspiration and adrift in life's doldrums? My advice: go fishing! Even better, get Paul Pines' new book of poems, *Fishing on the Pole Star*.

Pines turns this wonderfully chronicled fishing voyage with a family of friends through the Bahamian isles inward, across lines of deeper self-knowledge and surprising allegory. Dream-like collages and a contrast of gorgeous maps, both antique and modern, add a soulful surrealism that seems magically appropriate.

Many trolling poets would be more than satisfied with the transfixing images, ethical considerations, and iridescent lines that these pieces serve up, but Pines is after bigger fish. He seems intent on examining his sense of self and beyond into the deeper ocean of poetry and archetypes.

Early on, in a poem entitled *A Family At Sea*, the poet confronts the ethics of killing fish. He recalls,

*stalking a yellow tail family
around a coral head in Belize
the moment when father
falling behind his wife
and kids turned
to face me
gills puffed out
his helpless fearlessness
against my spear*

The use of the provocative word "wife" gives me some pause. But this goes beyond anthropomorphic considerations. Here the poetry confronts the nature of existence and at this node of consciousness the poet-fisherman recognizes himself. Other examples later on in the same poem elaborate on this singular lesson. One of them strangely happens in dreamtime.

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*Judith dreamed she
was reeling in a dolphin then became the dolphin
being reeled*

*relives how it felt to be gaffed
hauled into the boat
flopped on her side
gasping in the air*

*as fishermen
comment
on her beauty*

And, yes, I see that there is obviously a lot more going on in these lines.

Uninhabited Concepcion Island offers sanctuary to birds on its tiny area of 2 miles by 2.7 miles. In his poem by the same name Pines meditates on the changing nature of conscious reality. His phrasing in the heart of the poem is quite lovely.

*all worlds are
small worlds*

*clustered
or standing alone*

*each with
its own evolutionary
history*

*atolls
of longing*

*the hardened shale
of volcanic anger*

In the third section of the poem Live Bait Buddha Pines details perfectly the frustrations of artistic creation. He's working with live bait and fishing for that moment of inspiration that all poets seek or should seek.

*suddenly
a hit*

*I put the reel in free spool
prepare for the impact
its furious weight*

*as I do when trolling
for a poem*

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*before the line goes slack
and I pull up
what the shark has left*

ragged remains

Mysticism of a sort rears its head in Pine's poem entitled Crooked Island Passage. Translucent lines troll the oceanic darkness for divinity's fire. Dolphins and their lovers respond, then are hooked and released. The piece opens with a religious connection,

*Caleb swims
with Eagle Rays
in formation off Cape Verde*

*long tails and wings
like Tibetan temple flags
unfold to include him
in their play*

*the leader
eye to eye
at his mask*

*coveys
silent acceptance
of an alien species*

Without any doubt the poem Marlin Strike tail walks the water as the climatic piece in Pines' collection. In its movement the reader senses the powerful force and musical depth of poetry drawn up from a collective unconscious. The fishermen of the Pole Star wire and bring to heel a marlin of mythical significance. The contest ends serenely and in a life affirming manner. A hook is removed and wounds seem to heal—perhaps wounds afflicting both species. Here the poetry of another realm awakens into consciousness and connects with the artist as creator. Pines describes this numinous moment,

*he bites down twice
gently on Caleb's hand
signals he's ready*

*we gaze into
the perfect roundness of his eye
watch the boundary
between us
dissolve*

glimpse

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in that great wink of eternity

the Divine Child

*watch him swim
away*

Creation demands the innocence and wonderment of a child. Even the momentary spark of conscious exchange will do. The poet at this moment becomes his art.

South of Concepcion (consider the allegorical implications in this now repeated name) Pines composes a most intriguing image—an alphabet of birds—in his title poem, *Fishing On the Pole Star*. The poet/explorer, here identified with Christopher Columbus, who died penniless, gets to have his moment of fame, albeit, in a preternatural way. Here's how Pines describes it,

*where Columbus
touched terra incognita
before dying
sin centavo*

*an alphabet
of birds spells out
his name*

*on an visible
world*

Using his penultimate piece as a denouement, Pines once again weaves dreamtime into his poetic adventure. The poet returns to his unmoving natural state—home,

*...Odysseus at sea
on his way*

*back to reclaim
his kingdom*

*a star among
stars blown off*

*course seldom
anchors*

*anywhere by
choice*

A worthy Odyssey of words from a true fisher king!