



Chris Dombrowski is the author of two books of poems, most recently *Earth Again*, a runner-up for *ForeWord Magazine's* Book of the Year in Poetry (both from Wayne State University Press). Following the publication of his nonfiction debut, *Body of Water* (Milkweed Editions), he is at work on a second book of prose. With his family, he lives in Missoula where in winter 2017 he will serve as the Kittredge Distinguished Visiting Writer in the EVST Program at University of Montana.

Body of Water
Chris Dombrowski
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Review by Katie Higinbotham

In his prose debut, *Body of Water*, a beautifully rendered travelogue/memoir, Chris Dombrowski adeptly shifts focus between a microscopic fascination with the natural world and the vast frames of racial oppression, conservation, and ecotourism. Vivid images of the Bahamian landscapes and seascapes around Deep Water Cay are interwoven with sections of Dombrowski's personal story: his current life as a poet and fly fishing guide in Montana, his growing up years in Michigan. While in the Bahamas—the trip is a gift from a friend and a timely escape from challenges at home—Dombrowski forms a transformative bond with renowned fishing guide, David Pinder. Of Pinder, Dombrowski writes, “Few people alive today have attuned themselves for an entire lifetime to a single creature the way Senior has attuned himself to the bonefish; lacking fins and gills, he seems to have developed, or retained, some equivalent to the shark’s detection system, something which hasn’t stuck, evolutionarily, in most of us.”

Dombrowski not only becomes enthralled with his gifted bonefishing mentor’s stories, but also with the unfamiliar ecosystem before him. He leaves many lines in the water for readers as well as fish: David Pinder’s story of success and struggle within a racially divided industry, his own identity as both writer and guide, and the story of the bonefish in its ancient watery world. We follow each of these captivating hooks from depths to surface.

At the core of this web of life is the elusive bonefish. Intricate detail gives insight to the world of this fascinating creature: “its shadow nearly always more visible than its body...the density of the pigment cells beneath its fingernail-shaped scales varying from moment to moment to match

its environment...Among anglers, gray ghost is the preferred and perhaps most telling moniker." Its existence requires balance that must be maintained in a fragile environment. And the life cycle of the bonefish is brilliantly interwoven with the cycles of human life. The book is as much an observation of different kinds of human beings as it is of different marine species. Anglers who spend the minimum "\$700-per-day price of a guided fishing trip" that Dombrowski quotes are both humorous and aggravating. Further, a steady awareness of tourism's impact on the Bahamian ecosystem culminates in the chilling chapter "Horizonward," which draws together the warnings and knowledge of several conservationists. They address issues ranging from the decreasing mangrove population to the troubling "role for blacks to play" on Grand Bahama. Dombrowski implicates himself as well, noting "Clearly murk abounds in the proverbial water, but one thing is clear: our creation of lodges and the infrastructure necessary to sustain such lodges has marred the same ecosystem our beloved Albulavulpes requires for survival."

Water, "the roof of their world," eventually surges into the book's spotlight. "Nothing in the world is weaker than water, but it has no better in overcoming the hard," Dombrowski says. It is a consistent backdrop throughout the book, but comes to its sharpest point of significance near the end. It is in the final chapters that the reader experiences water's infinite connections to all life. In "Chance Baptisms," water becomes "a hint of the absolute, perhaps, or the hint of a hint we carry within our earthly bodies." Ultimately, Dombrowski speaks to an element so vital, so present and powerful, that we cannot ignore it.

Water is survival, a vast hunting ground and sacred space, as well as a vehicle of miracles. Our bodies contain it and are surrounded by it. And though "like language, the artificial fly is a brutal approximation," *Body of Water* flawlessly realizes this world of allure and destruction.



