

***Feathering Deep***  
**Poems by David M. Parsons**  
**Texas Review Press, Cloth 18.95/Paper 12.95**

The poetry of David M. Parsons, Austin native and 2011 Texas Poet Laureate, seems paradoxical on the surface. Generally we do not think of ex-Marines and former athletic coaches writing poems, especially of such high caliber. *Feathering Deep*, Parsons' third collection after *Color of Mourning* and *Editing Sky* (both from Texas Review Press), continues to reveal his depths. Now a creative writing professor at Lone Star College and an arts advocate in Montgomery county, we encounter this new book within the landscape of sophisticated poetry published by literary presses in Texas.

While we may expect traditional verses on hunting and fishing, Parsons' poems ("Blinds" among them) turn suddenly inward to illuminate the unexpected. "I could discern/in my blind of artificial/trees, and yet, I/am, also, a witness//and citizen of the ancient/tribe, that coalition/that exists in the universal/chain of fear/and food—the aiming/eyes behind our many/individual stands—/those many faceted irises,/eyes we see through—/not with." The unexpected is not merely his wordplay on "blind" but the primal insight of connecting our "chain of fear/and food" to the chain-rattling anxiety of mortality.

In the opening title poem, the narrator's canoe—reflecting an inward, spiritual quality—becomes a metaphor for the poem, but without saying so. "I believe it to be/unlike any other/conveyance//the manner in which/it carries us in/ upon its own silence//the way an idea drifts/into the great divide/where we find ourselves//in that sacred state—easing/quietly into the dark *duende*/to unconscious understanding//a lone canoe at midnight—blades/paddling deep—smoothly/and deftly feathering//that largest of bodies." This unpunctuated poem, afloat on the immense waters of unknowing, drifts where meditative poetry always has—from the "inscape" of Hopkins to Wordsworth's "spots of time" to Emerson's "moments" to Joyce's "epiphanies" to Denise Levertov's extensions of her exploratory "organic form" beyond the sensorium, to include the experience of intellect and emotion, which she calls "the inscape of an experience."

“Portents of Inscape”—a statement of poetics—sees “inscape” as “the distinctive and essential/inner quality of something, especially/a natural object or scene in nature/like the manner in which a poem resides,” perceiving “enigmatic possibilities//for something new, fruitful,/an entity/lit from within.” The intrinsic light of poetry clarifies in language the experiences most readers share but cannot express.

Rarely lacking words, “Stepdaughter” stumbles adroitly across the time of his loving relationship, paralleling the social awkwardness of *that* word. “The term has always felt clumsy in my mouth,” he begins, working through it, while metaphorically brushing her hair: “stunning locks in complicated snares and rats,/demanding gentle/concentration, occasionally evoking a snagging yelp/and pain.” This sweet confession ends with “two smooth syllables combed together as two pig tails/woven carefully around/each other—naturally: *I would like you to meet my/lovely daughter, Laura—*”

Parsons also reveals a social consciousness in texts that expose racism against people of color. Not overtly political, these poems resonate with ethical honesty and self-criticism. In “Midnight Montana: Little Big Horn” he hears “the true sound of the coming/of the Valkyries—” and experiences an epiphany that ends “Integration 1964”: “in after hours’ deep in East Austin,/when it was the ‘bad part of town’/and we were like giddy young tourists. . ./through the sixties and we didn’t have a clue/that we were like Ugly Americans.” But this poetry is anything but ugly and this book is worthy of what a Texas Poet Laureate should be.

**—Roberto Bonazzi writes reviews for the San Antonio Express & Texas Observer, his new book of poems, *The Scribbling Cure*, will be published by Pecan Grove Press in April 2012**