

Feathering Deep by David M. Parsons.

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In the poetry collection, *Feathering Deep*, David M. Parsons maintains a conversational tone, as if he and the reader were old friends discussing thoughts and sharing memories on his front porch in the humid Texas weather. Parsons describes his life growing up and living in Texas, and he frequently refers to the Blanton Museum, Mount Bonnell, Barton Springs, and other Austin landmarks. Many of his reflective poems blend historical references and personal experiences, suggesting that as life continues, memory is one of the significant forces people possess.

Parsons opens his collection with the title poem, “Feathering Deep,” which calmly and quietly welcomes the reader into a space depicted as a journey beyond ourselves, something only perceived through the slightest of touches:

the way an idea drifts
into the grey 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

These lines provide the reader with a sense of mysticism and prepare us for the ensuing journey through Parsons’ poems.

The first three sections have the strongest connections of the past to the present. The retrospective point of view acts as a solid foundation for the meditative approach Parsons embraces. The poem, “Falling,” written for the Blanton Museum Poetry Project at the University of Texas, was inspired by the art piece *Dionysus or Heracles*. Parsons delves into the captivating content of the work, but he also drifts outward and expresses the correlations between this art piece and the wars of today:

warriors of every century through the many stair
stepping years of history—
we always think of time as progress, moving up
toward the lofty air of gods,
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yet, here, this moment, I find myself witness again
to a player such as you—
cast as a casualty of civilization's latest stumble—
after all these centuries,
we are still falling—

The soldier immortalized in the art piece faces a conflict similar to the one today's soldiers face. Through his observations on war, Parsons also subtly introduces politics. In "The People," he writes:

reading—vivid stories
of bloody raids against
the emerging white menace—
clouds of covered wagons—
each crimson episode
another of history's
many tragic tales
of failed preemptions—
the image of that wild gaggle,
so fluent of air and time, returning
again and again and again
the way the scarlet rimmed
eyes of the past always
infiltrate our present—

The poem looks at Texas Native American history and uses the symbol of geese as a metaphor for how the past continues to make its presence known through memory. We feel a sense of connection to these poems because they are part of our past as well.

In these sections, Parsons also focuses on his own memories growing up in Texas. In his poem, "Integration 1964," he writes:

...sweaty Phil, tie loose, is swimming *The Gator*
on the gritty dance floor at Charlie's
Playhouse in after hours' deep East Austin,
when it was the "bad part of town"
and we were like giddy young tourists
and I can taste wee-hour fried chicken

This engaging, innocent account of his wild adolescent years ends on a subtle, political note: "[W]e were flying our lives/through the sixties and we didn't have a clue/ that we were like the Ugly Americans."

In his playful poem, "Sixties Music," he writes:

following another late night Lifeguard cleaning session at Barton Springs, our boom box at the max as we wrestled a fire hose, blasting the basic beginnings of algae from that ancient limestone creek bottom—she, stretching her bountiful Scandinavian body smooth against the length of mine, bringing me alive, slowly, with the smell of her shampoo, nuzzling damp morning-hair...and later, that one wild all night driving of her from Austin to Baytown, dangerously winding around each other, hands

Parsons' memories evoke a strong sense of place as he equates the vibrant Austin scenery with youth and wild innocence.

In his final section, Parsons provides poems dedicated to people who have profoundly affected his life. In the very last poem, "Trail Markers," he pays homage to his childhood role model and brings his memories full circle:

simply, Thanks, Mr. Wilkes, I do not know who
I would have become without having known you
and after all these years, I am still discovering myself
in memories of your many edifying ways, trail markers.

In these last lines, Parsons reveals reasons for his constant reflection and how the past is continuously present in his thoughts. For the most part, the collection is full of meditative poems that concern the Texas landscape, history, and Parsons' own personal memories. He connects the past with the present as a way of making sense of the world around him. Parsons' collection communicates the idea that value can be found by acknowledging and embracing all the imperfections of the past and that we can use those imperfections to move on freely into the future.

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