
Diane Glancy. *Fort Marion Prisoners and the Trauma of Native Education*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014. 136 pp.

<http://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/product/Fort-Marion-Prisoners-and-the-Trauma-of-Native-Edu,675967.aspx>

Diane Glancy. *Report to the Department of the Interior: Poems*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2015. 97 pp.

<http://unmpress.com/books.php?ID=2000000005780&Page=book>

Although Diane Glancy, an author of German and Cherokee descent, began writing “late” in life by contemporary standards, in the thirty or so years since the appearance of her first chapbook she has written more than twenty-five books, many of which defy generic classification. Her body of work draws upon her life experiences, involves in-depth research, and features reoccurring themes: the gaps in recorded history, the reclamation of Native voices, the role of place, issues surrounding the written word versus oral storytelling, and tensions between Christianity and traditional religious practices, among others. Two of her most recent publications—*Fort Marion Prisoners and the Trauma of Native Education* and *Report to the Department of the Interior: Poems*—return to these subjects in thoughtful and challenging ways, pushing readers to think about the on-going repercussions of 19th century US Government actions on Native education, culture, identity, and fundamental well-being.

Glancy has retold or reimagined relatively well known historical events from Native points of view more than once, focusing on the Trail of Tears in *Pushing The Bear* (1996) and the Lewis and Clark Expedition in *Stone Heart: A Novel of Sacajawea* (2003), just to give two examples. However, in *Fort Marion Prisoners and the Trauma of Native Education*, she turns to what is perhaps a lesser known event, but one that has had far-reaching and long-term effects: the end of the Southern Plains Indian Wars in 1875. Specifically, Glancy concentrates on seventy-two of the “worst prisoners,” who were ripped from everyone and everything that they knew, shackled, and shipped via rail from Fort Sill, Indian Territory (now near Lawson, Oklahoma) to Fort Marion in St. Augustine, Florida, where they were delivered into the custody of (then) Captain Richard Henry Pratt, who went on to found the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in 1879. Simply put, these prisoners were Pratt’s initial experiment in cultural assimilation through education that would serve as the model for Native boarding schools for decades. It is, essentially, where he put his infamous philosophy of “[k]ill the Indian [...] and save the man” into practice for the first time.

In 2005, after viewing their “afraid or defiant or passive” facial expressions preserved in “plaster casts or life masks” and locked away in storage at Harvard’s Peabody Museum, Glancy became inspired to write about these prisoners (*Fort Marion* 43). It is there that she “felt their stories wanting to be told” (*Fort Marion* 43). In the nearly ten years between that moment and the publication of *Fort Marion*, as she reveals in the three sections entitled “The Process of Writing” (and as is her general practice), Glancy

traveled the land—mostly by car and preferably alone—visiting the places where the prisoners had been held—Fort Sill, Fort Marion—absorbing the physical realities of those locations. She consulted printed histories on the subject (many published by the US Government), as well as conducted research at numerous museums and archives (as her acknowledgments and bibliography attest).

Glancy weaves this “factual” information into *Fort Marion*, including photographs of the prisoners, multiple replications of their drawings from their “ledger books,” and transcriptions of various historical government documents, which perhaps explains why this book is ostensibly thought of, or at least marketed, as (creative) non-fiction. However, the emphasis should be on *creative*, particularly as, throughout this work (and presumably throughout the entire process of writing it), Glancy was in search of the “history that was not in history books” (*Fort Marion* 60). *Fort Marion* is her attempt to give voice to those whose stories not only weren’t recorded, but who have nearly been erased from memory.

In order to accomplish this, Glancy begins *Fort Marion* with an historical overview of the events, a partial list of prisoners, a stereograph of them in “native costume,” and a collective “they,” as the reader travels with the prisoners by train from Fort Sill to Fort Marion, stopping periodically to be paraded in front of the assembled crowds (*Fort Marion* 5). As the work progresses, Glancy moves from person to person (one may as well say from character to character) imagining their individual reactions to their imprisonment, surroundings, and experiences; she allows Pratt to speak from time to time, and occasionally interjects her own voice, drawing comparisons to her own life, particularly in relation to schooling. “Their voices” and the text also “carry the elements of all genres” (*Fort Marion* 88). Glancy consciously uses this style, because “[s]ometimes it takes an accretion of incongruous layers to reach the undercurrents of meanings in the structure of Native concepts and oralities” (*Fort Marion* 109).

For those unfamiliar with Glancy’s work, this form may feel fragmented and circular (some might uncharitably think repetitive). However, Glancy believes it is necessary to reconstruct these events, as she explains:

I’m interested in different versions of the same story—the telling and retelling of the story in different ways—moving from third person to first and back. It’s how multiple retellings seem to work [...] the rewrite of a broken history broken into different narratives (*Fort Marion* 14).

Part of reconstructing this broken Native history involves addressing the issues that surround who is telling the stories and how those stories are told (orally or in writing). Consequently, this attention to form is not accidental. It is central to understanding what happened at Fort Marion: the place where the Native prisoners were stripped of their tribal identity, including language, given “ledger books in which to draw,” and “taught to read and write” in English (1). It is also necessary to grasping what Glancy wants to do in this text, which is to “giv[e] voice to those marked with the long and sometimes cruel

history of Indian education” and “to *set right* a small part of America’s history by recognizing the stains on America’s self-appointed clean self-image” (*Fort Marion* 47). And in this work, it isn’t just giving voice to the seventy-two prisoners of Fort Marion, whose drawings were overwritten with English “explanations” by Pratt, but also the opportunity for Glancy to testify to her own Native education, where she “was relegated to invisibility,” “could not speak,” and “learned [she] was nothing [and] would be nothing” (*Fort Marion* 71).

Although *Fort Marion Prisoners and the Trauma of Native Education* and *Report to the Department of the Interior: Poems* are separate works, they can be seen as complementary, as both address the impact of US Government involvement on Native education. Glancy signals this thematic focus with her poetry collection’s title: since 1849, the Department of the Interior has overseen the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which, in turn, controls education on Native American reservations. Each year, the DOI releases its *Annual Report* to Congress, describing expenditures, progress, and other administrative details; however, they do not tell all. As Glancy explains in “To Say from Their Way:”

Whatever they said
was said in government reports
and filed in drawers that might be read again.

But schools cannot be contained on pages.
Dear Sir, if only you were here
you would know the conditions. (*Report* 28)

In *Report to the Department of the Interior*, Glancy is once again in search of history not found in the official US Government record. And while she kept *Fort Marion Prisoners and the Trauma of Native Education* focused on those initial victims of Pratt, with the occasional reference to her own experiences, through her poetry, Glancy stories others who were subjected to the “systematic effort to educate the Indians” inspired by Pratt into existence (*Fort Marion* 2).

Report to the Department of the Interior includes found poems taken from historical documents, but the poems are more than just a relating of “facts.” They dive into the inner lives of those who have learned that “Indian education” means “[l]iving without part of oneself. Living outside oneself. Living with a smaller self,” and not being “able to return to tribal life, or [be] able to make a living in the new world” (*Report* 39). They capture the experiences of those educated in a system that “demolished a sense of self and sent the fragments broken/into the world” (*Report* 82). To emphasize these points, Glancy does mention those who ended up at Pratt’s Carlisle Indian Industrial School, but she spends more time exploring the interior landscape of even more marginalized, complicated, and sometimes controversial figures from Bull Head’s Wife to Jeff Weise (although not explicitly named) to an anonymous, collective “we,” representing contemporary American Indian women who have survived sexual assault.

These poems challenge readers on multiple fronts. They expect that the reader know (or be willing to find out) that Bull Head was the tribal police officer responsible for killing Sitting Bull while serving a warrant for his arrest (and who was himself mortally wounded in the process). They force the reader to see life from the point of view of the school shooter responsible for the “Red Lake Massacre.” They drive the reader to drink deeply, “then [blot] out all that happened—taking it back as a report to our own department of the interior” (*Report* 79). But the tests aren’t restricted to information recall or emotionally charged content.

Glancy’s poetry—like all of her work—often breaks formal boundaries, but more often than not it can best be categorized as free verse, prose poetry, or even examples of concrete poetry, and this characterization is true of the work in *Report*. The poem “Bull Head’s Wife Reads Cliff Notes of Indian History,” for instance, is printed along the left-hand margin and is no more than an inch-wide at any point. The rest of the page is blank, reinforcing the image of “[t]he spider” making “herself/thin/as a/needle,” and the point that Native American history has been pushed to the side in textbooks, education, and US culture, generally (*Report* 18). All of which is to say, Glancy has never been afraid to experiment to find the right form for her purpose, but a few of the poems in *Report to the Department of the Interior* seem to break new ground even for Glancy.

A case in point is “Bull Head’s Wife Opens Ristorante Hortense Fiquet, Fort Yates, North Dakota,” which reads like a menu featuring, among other things:

Pan-roasted prairie rainbow trout wrapped in ham 22
Oven-roasted pheasant with creamy horseradish-ramp risotto 24
Grilled leg of elk with yellow-potato puree, grilled baby artichoke, and
dried cherries 26 (14)

Facing a found poem entitled “Bull Head’s Wife Studies Frances Glessner Lee’s Visible Proofs, A Series of Crime Scenes Reconstructed in Miniature in the 1940s and ‘50s for Use in Forensics,” one might be tempted to think that this is a found poem as well (and maybe it is). Found or not, it makes readers sort through an “accretion of incongruous layers.” The title alone offers at least four: Fort Yates, located on the North Dakota side of the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, was the initial burial place of Sitting Bull in 1890. Sioux County, in which Fort Yates is located (according to recent census data), states that over 37% of the population lives in poverty.¹ Hortense Fiquet was Paul Cézanne’s artistic model (and wife); one of his biographers notes that, as a result, “she was [...] silenced: sitters are seen but not heard” (Danchev 152).² And while Fiquet was French, “Ristorante” is Italian. And then there’s the menu itself. Needless to say, no such restaurant actually exists in Fort Yates (I googled it just to make certain). What should readers make of all of this? I’m not sure, although I have a few ideas.

All of which is to say, the poems in Glancy’s *Report to the Department of the Interior* tackle difficult subjects; they are cerebral; they can be disorienting, disturbing; and, sometimes, they are dream-like, which is fitting in that they are an attempt to imagine a

person's interior world. They illustrate—in content, feeling, and form—what it might be like to be caught between “two world views that could not coexist” (*Report 52*). This collection, along with *Fort Marion Prisoners and the Trauma of Native Education*, give readers pause and make them think, which is good, because we might learn something.

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¹ See US Census Bureau “QuickFacts Beta” for Sioux County, ND available at <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045214/38085,00> accessed 17 August 2015.

² Although published after *Report to the Department of the Interior*, for information on Hortense Fiquet, see Alex Danchev's *Cézanne: A Life* (New York: Pantheon, 2012), pp. 152-179.