Diane Glancy. *The Keyboard Letters QWERTYUIOPASDFGHJKLZXCVBNM*. Poetry Society of Texas, 2018. 74 pp. ISBN 978154322804

Diane Glancy gives her book, the winner of the 2016 Catherine Case Lubbe Manuscript Prize of the Poetry Society of Texas, the exceptional title *The Keyboard Letters QWERTYUIOPASDFGHJKLZXCVBNM*. This innovative collection includes poems, notes, short prose (preface and backmatter are essential to the whole), allusions to paintings, and texts. The sum is a cartographer's manual to the 21st century. Pieces calibrate backroads of Texas, their trajectory, with stopover points at the New Bedford Whaling Museum to see exhibits of the Pequod (or did Melville mean Pequot?) and the Middle Eastern country of Jordan. Christopher Columbus's ship is a moving point/target. In the acknowledgements, Glancy writes about some of her influences: "A visit to the Dali Museum in St. Petersburg, Florida. A list of the most important discoveries of the world. A PBS television program on mathematics. A stormy day in North Texas. . ." (66). These are very personal to her experience, so the book has a journal-like quality; this is a log of her physical and imaginative explorations.

Sequences are not exact. Mashups of locations, fictional characters, real people, Bible verses, inventions—all these contribute temporal axes to the project. Repetition of some of these, like rural Texas and the invention of moveable type, wend through the sequence. These motifs create subtextual timelines. Chronologies collapse in the organic process of this "clump" of writing. Glancy describes her process of writing, "Sometimes a lot of things come together and congeal in clumps, which become a group of poems" (66). The resulting book is a word-bundle, with layers of denotive directions that lead outward.

A guiding theme throughout is the process of metaphor. Glancy writes about "A walk on a rural road when I saw a deer head looking from the edge of the woods. For an instant it seemed like a puppet—a cartoon on a child's program. Something unreal. The question came—how can what I see be trusted?" (66). Images like that deer suspended in the poems, frozen in place by imagination, and in words. An example is the cover photograph of the book, which is a rusty tine found in the fields of rural Texas, transformed by metaphor into a fox's head: "In the field I find a metal piece / triangular as the head of a fox / but smaller" ("The Normal God," 23). The poet explains it is a "point blade" from a discarded hay-cutter implement. The poem juxtaposes metaphors from this hayfield, where once Indigenous people "crossed the prairie and stand there," still present to the dog who senses them. She concludes with uncertainty,

> A lost glove.
> A stray cat killed by a predator—
> as if they were connected
> in a plain and unforgiving world. (24)

The indeterminacy is the final thought, the inability of the narrator to find facts beyond language whose syntax creates inaccurate connections in a "plain" reality.

The poet interrogates, along the way, her writer's tool, Roman alphabet of the English language—what Joy Harjo calls "the enemy's language" to emphasize it as an agent of colonization. (Harjo's timbre of protests underlies the book.) The title of the book is a genius move. At each touch the quotidian keyboard under the narrator's fingers, under all our fingers, generates code strings. The keyboard alphabet is wired directly into language reflexes.

Left in random order, letters spell chaos. Strung together, letters can at best create slippage, a continuous and impermanent etymology. Unmoored fragments of writing are the residue of fractured lives for all post-contact inhabitants of North America. Moveable type, a metaphor for displacement and an agent of displacement, unhinges sign systems. The second half of the title is unpronounceable, despite its visual familiarity, which forces readers to confront the scrambled chaos of the abstracted alphabet. Yet it is, like the dislodged metal point of the haying implement, the tool available to writers. Glancy writes about her intention that the book "acknowledges the infinite variety of the combinations of the alphabet that enable our different searches for meaning" (iii). Among the seekers of meaning in this book are Captain Ahab in the novel *Moby Dick* and Salvador Dali, the painter. None of the seekers can avoid the splintered nature of language.

Synesthesia is a signature technique in *The Keyboard Letters*, as one sense suggests another. In the preface, the author writes, "Poetry after all is a vehicle after a whale" (iii). "Vehicle" deconstructs into a vague mode of mental transport. Yet in common usage it is a motorized conveyance for land use. The metaphor "vehicle" suggests the movement of the imagination across oceans and geographies.

Glancy is, indeed, an inveterate traveler, usually by car. The front windshield is a lens for many of these poems, and her optics shifts the view to a visual panorama. The poem "I-35 from North Texas through the Flint Hills of Kansas" exemplifies her skewed perceptions from the driver's seat. It begins with a comparison of the late winter view as flattened into one sepia hue: "In March the land is tan as hide." On the journey, she barely avoids an accident, recovers, and continues, distanced by her car's armor. She concludes the poem:

> Ahead of me now, a thin haze of smoke from range burning.
> A round sun leans on a hill to the west.
> To the north, the moon faint as a spot of snow.
>
> Maybe the outcropping of rock along the embankment
> is safe.
>
> Nothing but plainness, and the moving toward survival. (46)

"Ahead of me now" shows the writer's directional movement in a timeline, without judgement, stated with an eerie calm after the near-miss collision. The near-likenesses of the metaphors parallel the near-miss of the car wreck. Scale in the imagery distorts, as the sun "leans" like a person on a piece of furniture. The roadcuts alongside the car are foregrounded with the sun, despite the vast difference in distances between these physical objects. The moon is far away, a normal perception, but its descriptor "snow" changes a visual image to tactile iciness. Throughout the poem, which is a first-person testimony, the truth has slippage, not outright falsehood. Truth is "plainness" (who has not said the plains are plain?), and again, as in "The Normal God," Glancy uses the term "plain" for reality beyond metaphor-ed words. Also "plain" are jumbled combinations like *QWERTYUIOPASDFGHJKLZXCVBNM*.

Along with repeated motifs and mixed senses, Glancy uses transpositions to create connections. Her poem about Christopher Columbus's lies about his voyage—"He wrote the versions of his voyage / until he wondered at the truth of multiple possibilities"—is expressed in terms of Salvador Dali's painting *The Discovery of America* (48). History is at a distance; the

Italian's version of that history is at another distance. Columbus lies until it is a "habit" and the next lie is "the way a painter far down the road / would paint his landing / with all the clutter he could manage" (50). Dali's third-distant account is even less based on what truly happened.

Another poem that uses stunning transposition is "He Was Crucified, Placed in a Tomb, Backed-out," based on Dali's painting *The Sacrament of the Last Supper.* This painting alludes to Leonardo Da Vinci's *Last Supper*, but with the crew of *Moby Dick*'s Pequod seated at the table. Glancy's version is removed from the biblical event by even more multiple degrees of separation. Her poem notes, "War coming from different translations" (45).

One of my favorite poems, among many, is "A Harness for the Visible World," which riffs on a bowl of pistachios on a table:

> The nuts look like something from the sea,
> *Mollusca*—a large group of invertebrates—oyster, clam,
> mussel, snail, slug, squid, octopus, whelk,
> most of them in shells, having gills, a foot, a mantle. (38)

Most of the poem appears to be about what the poet sees beyond the table, outside her window, an autumn scene of fall leaves, "minnows in a stream of branches" (38). A bird's nest is like a northern Plains bull boat made with buffalo hide. Then the poet's reflection meanders to a central image—"Pistachio shells upside-down on the table / are small, overturned rowboats" (39). The narrator navigates this "interchange," "while the world drifts again from what it was. Resolute / and disappearing" (39). All the images in the poem, and the poet, are undefined and impermanent. The repetition of forms, like the hard shell of a pistachio, occurs in natural forms across environments. Yet all physical structures dissolve in time.

This is a book to read, and reread, as an *ars poetica*. Underlying the European, Middle Eastern, and North American cultural references is an understanding of the unadorned facts of what survives in this apocalyptic, for Native peoples, existence. In these days of instantaneous satellite maps, nothing remains remote, not even Glancy's setting of the North American grasslands. The maps, however current, cannot keep up with the incomprehensible reality of the land in time. In this Etch-A-Sketch mapping, nothing remains for long. Glancy writes of this in "The Beginnings of Disintegrated, a short poem of four lines:

> Send help I am here
> in these googled doors
>
> One story starts
> another disappears. (21)

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