

## Rooms: New and Selected Poems

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# Rooms

NEW AND SELECTED POEMS

DIANE GLANCY



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This book is dedicated to poetry, and to the idea of *boom town*, which seems to me a collection of poems. I came from Oklahoma where boom towns were the sudden settlements that grew up overnight after the land runs, and later, the oil rigs. This book also is dedicated to the land, to the central corridor of America where I've lived, south to north, where the image of *boom town* is now the ice-fishing houses, those *rooms* out there on a frozen Minnesota lake, and in the cold, those small boom-towns of *breath*, which is the Native American meaning of *poem*.



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## The Ordinary Shape of Rooms

The windows are normally independent of one another, although you may pass back and forth from one view to the other. This absurd interdependence is like a lark at break of day. The altitude is assumed by the upper window. The lark song. The other window is the lark.

*"Shifting Persona,"* BARBARA GUEST



## The Ordinary Shape of Rooms

... of any height, it is higher, it is simpler and if it were placed  
there would not be any doubt.

from "Rooms," GERTRUDE STEIN

An entire past comes to dwell in a new house.

*The Poetics of Space*, GASTON BACHELARD

There's a construction called, *the Ames Room*.<sup>1</sup> It looks like a duck house you've seen by a lake. It's a small room with windows and a roof, but it's uneven. Wapperjawed. A four-dimensional trapezoid. But if you look into the room through a peep-hole in the side wall, it looks like a regular, rectangular room.

*The Ames Room* stands on four legs because you have legs and can look into the peep-hole *eye-level*, where your mind produces the room proportioned as it should be with a level floor and straight walls. You see what you think you should be seeing, not what you see.

Somehow *the Ames Room* depends upon the array of light on geometrically ambiguous surfaces. *Somehow perception is influenced by prior experience. By what we have earlier learned about the ordinary shape of rooms.*

*The Ames Room* could be an off-sided tree house too small for a child. A child's table and chair would not fit. Maybe the Cherokee little people would fit. If anyone could see a Cherokee little people. You can't quite be sure of them. It's a matter of perception.

You look through the peep-hole and a construction of the mind appears. A map of memory. You don't see the slanted floor and uneven walls, but the idea of a room you're acquainted with. Where birds are singing. Or unsinging if that's your experience. When rooms warp with pressures from within or without, the idea of how rooms should be hold them in their shapes. A

<sup>1</sup> *The Ames Room*, one of many demonstrations created in the late 40s by Adelbert Ames, Jr. at Dartmouth College, was reconstructed by Psychology Professor Charles Torrey at Macalester College.

construction of memory is the map of prior experience, no matter how real the *offness*.

You imagine a lake in the backyard near the tree house. You are rowing there. It is autumn because you think it should be. Yellow leaves tumble to the shore. A duck waddles up and down the plank to the duck house.

The ambiguous array of light is its possibilities. Not only overshoot with what you have known—the baggage you have brought to the outing on the lake—the parts from other *wholes*—but the appropriation of the term itself: *rooms*. The lack of them in the past of native heritage. The interpretations therein. The relationship of your varied observations and experiences. A juxtaposition of refracted light.

*The Ames Room* is an inveiglement to make you see what you think. If you want to know how memory floats. The Cherokee little people rearranging what you know. Tricking you off balance, which is a way to keep you seeking memory. But what if the overlay of perception is unstraight? What if there is a duck blind nearby from which memory shoots? Would the array of light on the geometrical surface of a regular, rectangular room cause it to appear uneven?

The fragmented memory of a room is its blueprint. Outside, the tree house, duck house, duck blind. The shifting topography. Inside, the grounding, solace, the collection of furniture. The roaster. Duck w/ gravy. The walls, windows, floor, ceiling, voices shaping with their traces.

# Asylum in the Grasslands

