Continental Drift
Also by Nancy Gaffield

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Continental Drift

Shearsman Books
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For Maurice
“Past is past. I salute that various field.”
—James Schuyler, ‘Salute’

“The notion of a landscape element escapes precise definition. On the one hand, a site may be a physical entity that reveals certain characteristics of the place... On the other, a site may refer to something imperceptible but nonetheless significant (a past event, a local story, or chronology).”
—Christophe Girot
Proem

If only it were possible to arrive at a condition of knowing through language. What the rain knows. That the same number of planets circle the sun today as yesterday. That it signals something. Not exactly Gene Kelly dancing and singing, but a portent borrowed from the sea endlessly rocking and powered by a rage to meet in time, word to word, running rings. The surface may appear fragmented but underneath a deep and seamless structure. Abides. This is not about you anymore but you are in it.
1 Crossing the water
Music of the Phenomenal World

“I have discovered that it is enough when a single note is beautifully played.”
—Arvo Pärt

ARBOS

The years wind back
to an old refrain

—There isn’t a train I wouldn’t take
No matter where it’s going

A memory of you
fossilised in amber,
out of time.

Looking
for moss under stones
stumbling
upon you.

Disillusions disappear
trailing sound.

I carry you encased
in resin, an amulet
round my neck.
Time trails.

Sound of keys
jangling means a corn bunting
camouflages in the hedgerows.

Feathered choristers utter
the creed
    aural symphony of plain
    song, few notes, much repetition.

Swell
of a single bell.
    Here before
hear after a tone train streaming
meaning
    unlimited returns.

Swift flight
    of a winter sparrow.
zu Babel


Released from dendrochronology pentatonic monody for four voices. Drones. Rare lady orchid fringes the escarpment outside time.

*

Loosening the bands of syntax morpheme by morpheme mother plaiting pain the name she gave you all that remains.

A beam of light wedges a foot in the door elongating fa fah far

hum and haw, random acts of kindness.

You go deep to reassemble thought.
Words aged in the dark
before us
stammer past future
present.
Time layers.

Find the word for it
and let it
go into the forest,
locate others.
Tuning.

Among them you walk
in moonlight
carrying your shadow.

* 

In the boreal forest
memory frays.

Blur of lore,
dream-work and grasping,
finding your name there. Linked
from the start, your life
and mine.
De Profundis

What matters is not the frame but the space inside. Broken glass. The wind bellows, curtain billows.

Crows there.

A woman stands in front of the hearth, drying her hair. All around her the old world is crumbling. Swathes of red dead trees. Must not see, say, so lost without you. Falling masonry. Fire glances round the room, licking. Aspen-glow, tinder-box, wild.

West, we were here.
VOR LANGEN JAHREN

The rings of the tree know something. Radical introspection. In here is a world the tree wishes to speak of, the shadow of a former

Listen.

Overcome by beauty of wind in the leaves you are apt to miss the point. A year is made of light and dark rings, principle of Limiting Factors. Spring wood filled with inner light endarkens and hardens by summer. They died of heart sickness.

And so a woman rich in cognates contemplates the heavens:

str, étoile, aster, stella, star

Above me sways the fir tree. You are here not forever forever not here. Are you.

*

Berthed in straw below deck, hemmed in
and the sea roiling. Farewell
to small land and heather village.
Fading. Ruptures,
transatlantic abrasions.
Crossings and starting over.

Scattering
to cheap and fertile
undesired land. Unfamiliar tongue weeds
wed wedes.

*Give me your*

Pour through numbered,
encumbered

*No stopping here.*

Stumble into pale light,
Lake of the Woods,
someone else’s,
dwellers amongst the leaves.
Taking it.
The fields too,
the cistern. Dipping.
Thick as trees and just as good
at keeping secrets.

*Worm in the wood.*

Up here on the rim
transubstantiating and wearing
masks, writing the world.

*Fleeting fall turns to winter sleet.
When they got to the new world
they called each place by the old names.*
Never mastered the broad vowels, 
learned instead to keep quiet, 
tame their speech.

Watching northern geese 
baste cloud to earth, 
wing dips 
pulse in every point, 
long and low  
herronk of no return.

The heart  
repines.

Suppose I were to find 
words in my pocket, 
loose change. Unlettered.

Blow them over the sea.

*What is this spindrift?*
*asks the cormorant.*

*Dance of the Spirits*
*answer the Cree.*

The bark knows.
Putting on a brave face, it scrutinises 
the sky. Day after day, cloud 
hangs there. Leaves come and go, 
then snow. So much time 
spent waiting.
Wave after wave
of lapwings fly
over late-winter fields. Lilacs
in the dooryard
bloom and everything shooting
upwards. A blue orb fractures,
unfamiliar tongue
cleaving, wanting
to sing a song
in a strange land.

Oaks turn
inward.

Click-clack
Click-clack

Shiny refrain of train on the tracks.
Dashing of little ones against stones.
Heart, my heart,
bury my heart.