

Continental Drifts

by Cheryl Pallant

Continental Drifts is Pallant's most unwieldy, sprawling, cosmic, and best book yet. It is far more tightly woven than Uncommon Grammar Cloth, and stiller than Into Stillness. What really separates this book, though, is how engaged it is (though tacitly and subtly) with the current historical/ecological moment. Basically it continues Pallant's signature hermetic style but, just under a language that sparks with reference, resides a deeply cutting commentary on postmodern human existence in the world.

“[W]aywardness along the continuum of balance,” Cheryl Pallant's new collection feels its way between old orders and the information which renders them uneasy. Reality and representation are married here, but always on the brink of divorce, and if the I and the Thou are involved, both are suspect: so that the core performance of the subjectivity that emerges is a constantly readjusted search. But it's this consistently exploratory quality of the poems that is the great pleasure, this sense of desperate hunts and disparate strategies stabilized by a return to the material body or gesture. Written in “the vernacular of flesh,” Continental Drifts is full of deep questions leading to deeper questions, shot through by sudden answers that—blazing with the quick light of new illuminations—reveal the dancing shadows on every certainty. “I know what saying wants,” Pallant writes, but (the poet warns us) “Letters burn beyond recognition, beyond the naming of a star.”
—Laura Mullen

Cheryl Pallant is the author of several poetry books, chapbooks, a collaboratively written poetry book, and a nonfiction book on dance. Poetry, fiction, and nonfiction have been anthologized and published in numerous online and print journals in the United States and abroad. She has taught writing and dance at University of Tulsa, Keimyung University (in S. Korea), University of Richmond, and Virginia Commonwealth University. She lives in Richmond VA.

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A Directional

Pssst, this way.

Was a book. A fire of bon proportions, flames kicking the sky, every worse, verse for the verse. Lumen beyond the eye scat shattering of sparks. History hisses. Hers too. Lost ties to a cohesion of the vast.

Any ism of an ology, any sound searching its arch. Every letter raining fragments, a letter here, there, a patch of them, phrased and unragged, placed in a home, even rooms and odd. In the beginning, or middle, the word.

Came down. Came down diss. Bespoken, a mark upon my shirt.

Some insisted upon end, some upon begin fell to their knees, failed to believe no such shush as ash by face, star by staying put upon this orb, no greed, no choice, birth by birth, or a belabored point.

Most wanted signs. Some signs wanted sun. Battle begun, rift between pauses, commas spliced, words ripped apart, none sentenced to end without a questionable start. Whatever the signifier says. Whatever mouths lip purse. The heat insisted, persisted from warmed earth and tempers inflamed. No such yes such not much yes crush no gone yes go in their own way, wet eyed and dry, heart hardened and heard beyond deny. Shuffling shoes.

Verbs fight for their enactment
and let go from the deep.

I knows what saying wants. Saying so said so, you're it. Where fore art. Westward wind unwound ravel. This episodic undertaker blood lechery. Words interest more than more. Seems slim writhing down the pole. Seemingly porous. Simultaneously wrathful and in pace with humor. Sod and rain, period and begin again. Knowing knows not what saying wants said. Letters burn beyond recognition, beyond the naming of a star.

Point within a pattern. Exclaim amid a crowd. Scar tissue, all.

However we come to know.

Do not ask

Whether I started from a place of my choice or placed choice where I began.

Whether I said what I meant or silence delineated the way.

Whether nature brands the move of each cell or I behave naturally.

The decision affects me.

Sinking in mud and declining to shout is preferred to staining doors and puttying holes.

Whether it's your turn or I missed mine.

Whether any book existed or scattered suggestive sparks.

Who knew what was said and disagreed

to be disagreeable.

Let us go together toward the letter.

Where the tongue roams and the buffalo

It is you. You look away. I look directly.

Me arrives on the spot no longer me and turns directions, not wall, not window, but an expansive desert. No flights or trains, no blaring horn, no ticket unclaimed.

It is who. Who looks away in directly. A severing of ties, not silk or plastic. Unfabricated.

Whoever wants. Desire sets the word afire and thoughts adrift. Tenderness heats bodies supine upon the sheet.

You who calls from the back door and front. Time to come home.

No one answers. Silence defies vowels longing for consonance.

Earning My Keep

Keep out. Writer at work. Ozone level high. Veracious tweaking prohibited. Code orange. Soft shoulders, a head.

Place all valuables in the magnetic chamber. Pull yourself together. Stack limbs on the bedside table and donate extras to the thrift store.

If you step outside yourself, who lets you back in? Watch what you say and who slips on speech and twists an angle. Observations matter in a magma charter.

Let yourself down gently on the couch. Or bifurcate explosively at the beach among shells in the toss of crashing waves.

Don't pour oil into the rain gutter. Don't behave like somebody else unless you are somebody else. Lurking, like loitering, is a fineable offense. Always match the right shoe with the left.

I'm out of my mind but reserved a first-class express priority-seating ticket. The same for everyone. The first order of logic tumbles into second place. What is essential, the lacunae of minds, generates collateral damage, a synaptic link, a hormonal whomever.

Giving it over

Give it to yourself. Why train the wait? Why prevent the stream, dam, or stop it in vowel toward tomorrow rings. Various vectors. Burgundy striations and strains of accord. Into settlement, a sentiment from the deep. Let pressure go by, sail past and unsold.

Hear now! Step upright and wink at the game and its players. Lie under shade of tree or book, beam and look.

The statements matter of fact face it. Listen for your turn
and page.

X

ielding to the unknown y
letting slip
when they pulled out the nails and refused to refill the pale
near the cornerstone of speak return with a poke no nods hear
nor subsequent withdrawals of hands and toes
resounding dread and rising from

who can tell the flow from the trees
let them say now
for the sake of beauty
which saves us from this vacancy

just say anything

bound to leave dew
each drop
drops away