

The Goose

Volume 18
Number 2 *Miscellany (An Extra-Open Issue) /*
méli-mélo (numéro très ouvert)

Article 10

10-15-2020

The Age of Endarkenment

Stephen S. Collis
Simon Fraser University

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Recommended Citation / Citation recommandée

Collis, Stephen S.. "The Age of Endarkenment." *The Goose*, vol. 18 , no. 2 , article 10, 2020,
<https://scholars.wlu.ca/thegoose/vol18/iss2/10>.

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The Age of Endarkenment

1

Then all go

to form and to lift

some words falling together / silences budding

from out what's left

have to have fallen from out what's left

no matter how meagre

no matter how lift

in the age of endarkenment / not much left

and we were a scourge and we were beloved

and we sang as we killed our way across

killing time and with our hands in the heavens

remember the winter? Remember the beach?

I stood up to go with the mountains / their birds

who knew the mountains would leave here too?

the opening notes of a new symphony wending

then the seas joined in / liquid troubadours too

pulses and sea birds

all birds were once sea birds

but we don't know if dinosaurs sang songs too

2

Then hoping our signal *will have been* found in the rocks
razor-thin stratum up the side of eroding canyon wall
our wild chemistry transfixed
then escape through anti-capitalist sorcery
and emancipation from multiple time signatures
history not free of butterfly effects either
subsoil through stratosphere
thin as all that / and thinking itself whole
then quickening and compressing time scales folding
it's the pace not the volume / whether Volvos or volcanos
then how to separate natural from human history
said the vine crawling tendril by tendril over bookshelves sagging
the wall being removed so the weather gets in to read
the event that we are / trickling this far out of Africa

3

Only such dim light as never
will have come to have been singing
from entropic shores
saying if tipping points / borders
what kind of a border?
wind in a vacuum
seemingly unguarded
unless no passports / no tomorrows
watching all in flight and still flowing
I think swifts don't need to land on tiny feet
how liquid we are limbs over ground gripping
just moving so living / all moving to be living
goalposts and targets
then precipitous
then absence
no one asked for tipping points / borders
then some did
then money-hate
then our hubris a golden spike in radiocarbon record

4

Think of the last trans-Saharan epicontinental transgressions of the Early Paleocene
and the decrease in the volume of the carapace over time
as the transgression advanced carrying the evolving association
this incursion of the sea seems to have been of short duration
floating algal islands and island hopping
insects migrating / from a few meters to many hundreds of kilometers
employing entomological radars
then changes causing phenological shifts to host plants
destruction of habitat and landscape fragmentation
marine incursions and faunal reshuffling
then the fact that we cannot exclude embarkation by vehicle
butterflies crossing large bodies of water on ships
moss balls called *glacier mice* migrate in herds one inch per day
each soft squishy ball comprised of several mosses combined
and carrying worms and water bears within
when habitat is removed / by fire or changing climate
then increases in emigration mortality
then follow the route of the plants towards higher altitudes / latitudes
plant and insect assemblages / communities / people out of deserts
what makes people / people?
it is time to re-examine molluscan migrations

and bathymetric difference

when the Bering Strait opened astartids and other bivalves

invaded the Pacific

then a variety of cues are used for orientation: celestial / geomagnetic /

olfactory / auditory / thermal / wave and current pattern signals

unlikely map-compass system of navigation

my friends used the stars / the desert their sea crossing towards detention

in the Cenozoic asylum

STEPHEN COLLIS is the author of a dozen books of poetry and prose, including *The Commons* (Talonbooks 2008); the BC Book Prize winning *On the Material* (Talonbooks 2010); *Once in Blockadia* (Talonbooks 2016), and *Almost Islands: Phyllis Webb and the Pursuit of the Unwritten* (Talonbooks 2018). In 2019, he was awarded the Latner Writers' Trust of Canada Poetry Prize in recognition of his body of work. He lives near Vancouver, on unceded Coast Salish Territory, and teaches poetry and poetics at Simon Fraser University.