The Age of Endarkenment

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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
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
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
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.