

Inside the Hall of Silence
(a biostratigraphically correct poem)

By Joanna Beyers

1. South of Sidney, BC

Time is the sculpted element.
In this moment, opposite the rock
that is James Island
a hawthorn flings its crop of shadow-spines
lightly atop the sand, piercing
in their fall the bits of grass
that flourish despite the salt.
The afternoon is drained of every sound
except for those residing in the silence.
Sandpipers skim the water. Loudest
are the waves the slur against the beach,
the unceasing crickets.

In the early dark the geese fly down
to a shallow spot where
in the morning when the tide is out
herons come to fish.
Nudged by guards into a sleepy column
they will drift sideways across the bay
till dawn.
And inland the high canopy,
the sweet-smelling broom.

2. Once, long after the palm trees

Once, long after the palm trees
abandoned the higher latitudes
there was open woodland
and savanna with horses on them,
deer and camels. Even Rhinos.

Imagine too the crocodiles, loud
flightless birds, bears, cats
The insistent crickets.

3. Go further back

Go further back, take away the birds,
the flowering bushes, sea-lions and bats.
Long embayments tear into the coast
origami fingers that ascend the continent
and reptiles fly over in search of fish
to snatch recklessly on the wing.
Who eats the snails? Starfish
prowl amongst the algae.
Conifers crowd the low hills, wind
pecks at the canopy.

Go further back. All the world is forest
sweltering in the floodplain swamps.
Take away the insects, the steaming
woods, fish and trilobites
turning the muddy ocean floors,
medusas floating.
Microbial mats line the tropical shores,
get drenched sometimes and then
torn down, die & decay, are built
again, settle and decay

and further -
only the hot winds are left
hot over the water
summer storms and fire
in the mountains
cyanide rain
sunlight on the ponds