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At Wentworth Falls

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205 SUMMER 2011

AT WENTWORTH FALLS

For, and after, AR Ammons

Phillip Hall

I followed Darwin's Walk again this evening
to the falls,
from the ridgetop's open forest,
contouring
around the furrowed boughs of black ash
and the smooth pale stands
of peppermint and blue gum flaking
over banksia, mountain devil and waratah:
zigzagging

down to the over-
cliff track where
clumps of button grass
and a holly-like grevillea blooms
among the sedges of hanging swamps,
soils like peat collecting
along shales and sandstones,
the sponged seepage zones
of a fernery's rare collection:

along to the lookout at the falls:

a bush fire haze still burnt
over the escarpment's western rim whilst drizzle
swirled around the communication tower
like a halo:

the forecasted change
heralded
to an alert line of towns
threaded along the railway and Great Western Highway,
the length of the Mountains' navigable central ridge,

the shape

of a wilderness' threatened destruction:

from the brink
of the lookout's precipice, in Darwin's *grand
amphitheatrical depression*, the drama
unfolded
and from this podium, I counted in
the change,
a swirling mist pouring over
even as the volumes of smoke swept
across the track,
a catalyst
like the secret stowed away on the *Beagle*,
a pillar of cloud
leading Darwin to his promised land,
a sighting that laid bare our origins and opened eyes
to change.

Phillip Hall is a wilderness expedition leader working with Indigenous kids to encourage school attendance and retention. He is also completing a Doctor of Creative Arts (poetry) at the University of Wollongong where he is researching the poetry of place from the perspective of postcolonialism and ecocriticism.

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CONTENTS

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Editorial
[Jeff Sparrow](#)

REGULARS

Alison Croggon on reading in bed
[Alison Croggon](#)

FEATURES

Who was Bet B?: On Aboriginality and identity
[Robert Bollard](#)

Silence resembling stupidity: Peter Slezak on the New Atheists and Islam
[Peter Slezak](#)

Whale, Daughter: Sarah Drummond on a slow death at sea
[Sarah Drummond](#)

Morality Begone!: Brad Nguyen on violence in the age of riots and revolution
[Brad Nguyen](#)

Language and politics in Indigenous writing: A PEN forum
[John Bradley](#), [Kim Scott](#), and [Marie Munkara](#)

Terror in the Norwegian Woods: On the rise of a militant anti-Muslim far right in Europe
[Matias Gardell](#)

'You are sick! This is not art!': Torture porn films and politics
[Rjurik Davidson](#)

Will the market save us?: On the logic of a carbon tax
[Xavier Rizo](#)

DEBATE

Sexing up animal rights: is it wrong?: A discussion
[Stephanie Convery](#)

That Australian Poetry should attempt to bring poetry into the mainstream: Affirmative: Robert Lukins
[Robert Lukins](#)

That Australian Poetry should attempt to bring poetry into the mainstream: Negative: Ali Alizadeh
[Ali Alizadeh](#)

That Australian Poetry should attempt to bring poetry into the mainstream: Rebuttal: Robert Lukins
[Robert Lukins](#)

That Australian Poetry should attempt to bring poetry into the mainstream: Rebuttal: Ali Alizadeh
[Ali Alizadeh](#)

MEANLAND

Sympathy for the devil?: Caroline Hamilton on small presses and free markets
[Caroline Hamilton](#)

POETRY

Jennifer Maiden woke up in The Lodge
[Angela Smith](#)

Theatre
[Cameron Lowe](#)

Fresh Kill
[Cath Drake](#)

Bite the Wax Tadpole
[DJ Huppatz](#)

Heide
[DJ Huppatz](#)

One February or July
[DJ Huppatz](#)

Mary: A Fiction
[Eileen Chong](#)

I need the finger of God inside my mind
[Maketh Ajak](#)

Edith's dead mother
[Molly Guy](#)

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