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 taking over banksia, mountain devil and waratah: zigzagging down the over-cleft track where clumps of button grass and a holly-like grevillea blooms among the sadges 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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ABOUT PHILLIP HALL
More by Phillip Hall

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

Editorial
Jeff Sparrow

REGULARS

Alison Croggon on reading in bed
Alison Croggon

FEATURES

Who was Bet B?: On Aboriginality and identity
Robert Boland

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 BrIssues, Kim Scott, and Marie Munkara

Terror in the Norwegian Woods: On the rise of a militant anti-Muslim far right in Europe
Mattias Gardell

You are sick! This is not art!: Torture porn films and politics
Brock Davison

Will the market save us?: On the logic of a carbon tax
Xavier Rizos

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
Malath Ake

Edith's dead mother
Molly Guy

At Wentworth Falls: For, and after, AR Ammons

Phillip Hall

the supplement

Ruby Todd

sad

Stuart Barnes

Elites

Stuart Cooke

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