

Flame Robin in a Clearfell

Pete Hay¹

The contractor speaks.
Makes you sick what's happening in the forests.
His words jar,
startle.

Mechanical forks pummel the pile apart.
Stripped and living torsos of *D. antarctica* clatter aloft, aboard.
They are bound for the gardens of Europe.
They will yield a handsome profit.

The contractor speaks.
His words jar,
startle.

A flame robin flits along windrows of dead, smashed matter,
demanding the eye,
its vested brilliance harbinger of the firestorm to come,
ferocious mimic of the last nest of fire
in the charred desert that is to be.

The robin's small and vivid torch
threads my sensibility
to an imagined wise and gentle world
beyond the shattered slopes.

So it may be.
And it may be that here –
when this was a boundless, streaming world;
an exuberance contained all unto itself –
that here was robin's home; nesting, as it may have been, with young.
Could I read the language of its jittery way
I would know this.
I cannot.
I have eyes that cannot see,
the mind fog-dull that drives them.

These eyes that cannot see
skitter the windrowed dead,
and the leaden mind registers this small truth:
you cannot know

– and there, in perspective's democratic want, is the problem.

The contractor loads his ferns for Europe.
Makes you sick what's happening in the forests, he says.

Notes

1. Pete Hay is a poet, essayist, and erstwhile academic who lives in Hobart, Tasmania. His island scopes the boundaries of his interests and understandings – he is fiercely Tasmanian, then, and has little understanding of the abstraction known as “Australia”. His most recent book is a volume of poetry, *Silently on the Tide* (2005).