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Inside a Jarrah Tree, A Black Tunnel Reaching Skyward

By John Ryan

neatly burned-out innards;
this tree lives on as skin,
still supple and twisting in pleats, but
where did the heart go, and the breast bone
and the heavy, unctuous insides?

the spine endures,
knobby column ripped bare
by a magnificent thrust of liquid fire;
but what about the soul,
where is its perch now?

outside, the grass trees
don verdant headdresses
over the charred land,
and kino sap stamps red
insignias along marri trunks.

have you ever breathed inside a tree,
and felt the cool glance of air
where once a molten river ran
seeing the without from within,
as witchetty grubs or kookaburras might,
clawing skyward towards a portal of light?

I would not stand here forever.

John C. Ryan is a second-year Ph.D. candidate at Edith Cowan University. His dissertation invokes the writer-as-botanist tradition of John Clare, Henry David Thoreau, and Pablo Neruda to create poetic interpretations of the unusual and stunning flora of Southwest Australia. He is a graduate of the University of Lancaster's M.A. in Environmental Philosophy, and his research interests include ecophilosophy, landscape writing, and the human-plant relationship.