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Balga, Jarrahdale, Western Australia *by John Ryan*

beyond the slender jarrah stalks
parsing the lazuline into snaggy bits
is the roar, like an indomitable river
hammering rocks on a violent descent
out of some snowy silence:

the boom of terrestrial pilots
on burning bitumen.

before me, a song flies by, pure song,
only song, of a bodiless fluttering katydid;
between the metronomic clicking,
the bush breathes out an off-beat whistle
and for all I know, below:

Alph, the sacred river runs
through a chasm in Xanadu.

somewhere a siren sings sweetly
for a grasstree, but here, neither tree,
nor grass, nor lily—not a black boy
but a balga—this two-trunked
oldster splits into heaven, offering:
covenant in its roots
dark shelter in its limn.

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.