Golden Whistler

John Kinsella

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.uiowa.edu/iowareview

Part of the Creative Writing Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.6193
Golden Whistler

I've heard it for years, its mezzo soprano overwhelming the jam trees, charging the dry roots of flooded gums in a place where water is increasingly scarce, the gullies leading down to the river choked and reconfigured; and in the air aromatic with wattle bloom and pesticides, it shakes the glass sky around the mountain. It stops short of a high note when a rifle cracks over the range, barely audible though unmistakable. The firebreaks dried and cracking now where I started towards the stand of gums, the hay cutting in full swing, so quails, insects, and reptiles only just awake make fractal escapes against the clean lines of the cut, and I hear the golden whistler and look up; on the twist of a dead branch it sits, letting rip with a song wound up with the season: I see it.

A first, in over thirty years of hearing and not clearly seeing: black face with white beneath, a yellow-gold belly like the collective spark of all birds remaining, its immense voice pivoting on the tip of its tiny triangular beak. The whistler darts over to a jam tree near the fence; it has perched a few feet away, looking me straight in the eye. In the eye of the storm it is not silent as we're told: it's where expectations grow and decisions are made. In a few hours, I will fly in a round-about way back to Cambridge.

The pain of Huntingdon Life Sciences, of university experiments on farm animals just behind the college there, merges with the kangaroo shoots, foxes impaled on posts, and sheep bulldozed into pits here... but with me goes the song of the Golden Whistler, and out of the eye of the storm, an affirmation: operatic, visual, overwhelming, an impulse to say that it doesn't have to be this way.