Driving South

Sally Clarke
driving south by Sally Clarke

I

first rain after summer dry
pigeon shakes feathers

close isobars, strong cold front,
last night’s weather forecast fulfilled,
we drive into a bleak landscape.

blue-green gums reach for grey sky,
outlines reflected in cloud shapes,
black on the road, a discarded tyre tread.

in drought-denuded fields, square-rumped cows
wait for feed, congregate around farm gates,
huddle near homesteads.

cars speed towards us, headlights on,
windscreen-wipers struggling against sudden squalls
a passing log truck’s oily thrown spume.

opposite the church with a red steeple,
country bakery warmth, friendly faces,
hot tea, a sweet apple slice to cheer us on.

beneath suddenly-clearing skies,
a new-born calf, splayed legs uncertain,
flicks ears in unfamiliar space.

first green already flushing paddocks,
party balloons tied to a verandah
pluck colours from the faint rainbow.

II

fledgling pigeon tries new wings
mother walks away

an altogether other day!
sunlight sheening gum trees,
angel clouds streaming clear skies.
we ignore the brand-new by-pass,  
go the old way, make for  
our favourite lunch spot

blond grasses wave from the roadside,  
callistemons bleed shadows,  
paper barks are snow-capped,  

Perth pinks smear a lipstick touch.  
the dams are full, vines beginning to sprawl,  
roses budding at the ends of terraces.  

well-fed cows tug at tender grass,  
hold head-to-head meetings under shady trees,  
sit content in rustic rumination.  

plastic-wrapped hay rolls spool paddocks,  
a technological leap from my country childhood's  
rows of new-mown grass pitch-forked to dryness.  

I lose count of glossy black crows  
daring sorrow and joy on the road ahead,  
slip into holiday languor.

Sally Clarke is the biographer of Western Australian author Donald Stuart, *In The Space Behind His Eyes* (2006); editor of *Kaleidoscope Twentieth Century* (1999) produced for the International Year of the Older Person; and one of five WA poets published in *Amber Contains the Sun* (2008). Her articles, poems and award winning short stories are widely published.