

READING THE SIGNS

when I close my eyes I see the rusty red railway-crossing sign
a red X with "RAILWAY CROSSING" in white lettering
though no train runs here now
and the line is overgrown

beyond the sign a red dirt road climbs to a hill
and a young boy walks towards me
gracefully balancing a yellow plastic container
on his head -
something I could never do -
brown cow watches him from behind a bush
goats graze nearby

somewhere else in Africa
Moshe in Tanzania I think
there is another sign
on the edge of the town
at a busy roundabout
"WATER IS LIFE"

and in this moment
life for this boy is bringing the water
down the hill
to home

near to me now
a woman rises from the field of cotton
a baby half-hidden on her back
she calls to the boy with the water –
words I do not understand -
and they smile and wave to each other across the ditch

in the sky there are birds flying
and though they are not
I think of them as magpies
scattering black and white
against the blue

there are two of them
two magpies
"TWO FOR JOY"

(c) Gary Jermyn 4 April 2011