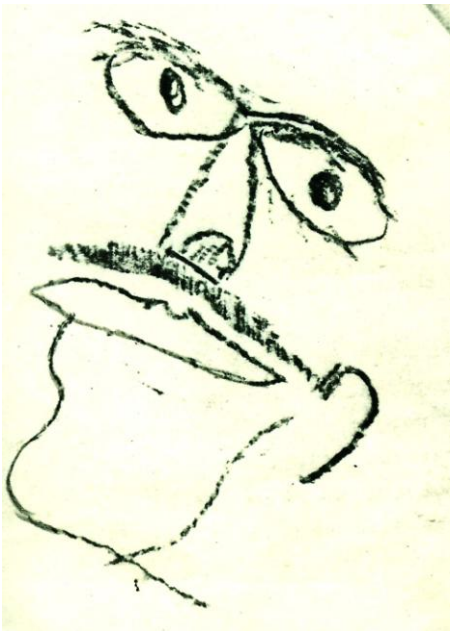
The Discovery of Self in the book, *Bunji*

- An analysis of the text.

by
W. B. Day,
This essay written in 1994. Revised 2007.



Above: Portrait of Bill Day by Wayne Austral, 1983

The Discovery of Self
in *Bunji.*
An analysis written by W. B. Day in 1994. Revised in 2007.

The book, *Bunji*, can be read in many ways. On one level it is the story of a prolonged campaign for Aboriginal land rights against great odds. On another level the book tells the story of a man from a middle-class suburb of Perth who gains self-awareness through his increasing involvement in the struggle of the Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory in the 1970s.

Unaware he is using an archetypal symbol of the fully-realised Self, Bill Day writes in a 1970s note to Stewart Harris (Foreword, page x): '[Our role] is to be the grit in the pearl shell. The finished pearl is the main thing.' Similarly, the story revolves around a symbol of a 'vital psychic centre' (Jung 1964) represented by the looming presence of the ancient creation site named Old Man Rock off a Darwin beach that challenges Day to begin the task of self knowledge.

Bill Day identified with Aborigines who he views as 'outsiders' like himself (p.10). Typically, the 'white man' is the oppressor while Aborigines become what Lattas (1992:57) has called the 'unconscious realm of meaning' which is repressed and must be integrated to re-establish the wholeness of the self, and on another scale, the nation. As Lattas (1992:57) explains in his analysis:

> The historical violence inflicted upon Aborigines by the white colonisers is thus rendered as a violence inflicted by the white man against the spiritual-sacred part of his psyche.

Day's acceptance of the need to change begins as he travels north 'attracted to the alternative lifestyle' (9), despite the forewarning of the dangers of this venture, indicated by the reference to the Manson cult (9) that cast a shadow over the 1960s alternative lifestyle. However, camping on Darwin's Lameroo Beach, close to nature, Day and the hippies challenge the stratified Darwin society by sitting with the Blacks in the front stalls of the Star Cinema. On the beach Day and the hippies 'rubbed wet clay on [their] bare bodies,' emphasising the connection the book makes between the body and the land.

From the rather aimless beginning of his journey, Day receives his calling while drinking on a suburban beach when an unseen Black man calls from the darkness from the direction of Old Man Rock, across a flooded tidal creek. In response, Day tries to communicate with this mysterious voice calling for his 'Bunji,' or friend, until he is rejected by the mysterious caller who recognises the voice as being that of a 'whitefella,' not an Aborigine.

Following this episode, Day is step-by-step immersed in a process of initiation into what it means to be a 'blackfella,' and thus towards a truly representative selfhood. In so doing, Day begins a 16-year journey that brings to consciousness unresolved subconscious issues from his past, so that in the final chapter, 'blackness descends' on Day as he is cast into the police lock-up (133). The years of sharing the Aboriginal experience, which symbolises an essential part of Day's psyche, prepares the author to respond to 'One greater than I… waiting to be called' (134). Healing can and does then begin.

The activity, the swirling tides, and the storms of the first months in Darwin all indicate a time of psychic upheaval. This is followed by 'orientation tours' by an Aboriginal 'guide' that Day meets in a pub. The elder leads him beyond the comfortable bourgeois suburban subdivisions into a less familiar, more threatening and neglected region where the original people survive in a forgotten state on the edges of the subconscious.

Day and his guide do not travel to remote regions to find their Aboriginal sources but instead search out hidden bushland camps amongst shopping centres, water mains and railway yards. In these fringe camps Day compares the plight of the Larrakia people he meets to that of 'the last of the Sydney clan' who died one hundred years earlier (11). The reference indicates the meetings in the Darwin camps have triggered subconscious aspects that must be integrated. As a result, sixteen years later the author will relive his inner pain as a similarly destitute 'tribesman' on the streets of Sydney.

The necessity for the past to be connected to the present before healing can take place is shown by the Aboriginal flag that Day designs in 1972. The flag is red at one end for 'the blood of the old people' and red at the other end for the blood of the present generation which may be shed (25). Between the representations of the past and the future on the flag is a green-tipped tree growing from 'the decaying heaps' of the old jungle fowl's nest in the heart of the Larrakia camp. Unseen, but representing subconscious memories, the jungle fowl's eggs are incubated in the warmth of the festering mounds while the sprouting tree on the flag is another symbol of the rebirth to come. Like intrusive memories from the past, the cries of the jungle fowl can be heard from the impenetrable forest nearby (17).

The explanation of the flag design in *Bunji* again suggests that the land is the equivalent of the body, making the fight for land rights equivalent to the reclamation of the body. The land has been 'gang raped' by the white man (2), whose 'brainwashing' has internalised the mentality of the coloniser. Similarly *Bunji* relates how slaves are indoctrinated 'to feel they are no good' (20). In a cry from within, Day indicates that, for Aborigines and Self alike, an ingrained false-consciousness can be resisted by positive slogans such as, 'This is our land' and, 'We should say in a loud voice, "Not guilty!"'

The book suggests that within the author's body, or psyche, there is 'an ancestor' that needs to be remembered. In the first of several simple rhyming poems (14) 'brave old people died for their land,' while 'their bones are buried in the sand' - leaving the possibility of later discovery. Elsewhere *Bunji* makes similar appeals to remember the 'brave ancestors' who were the victims of violence. Another of Day's poems asks: 'Are they told how our people died?' The verse refers to Australia's 'true history' that is 'never read, but the black man keeps it in his head' (12).[i]

As Day's world collapses around him in the last chapter, he indicates that withholding memories is a guarantee of the unassailable integrity of the Self, as expressed in the short poetic

tribute to his deceased friend, Fred Fogarty: 'Iron may bend and wood may break, but memories they cannot take' (132).

Years of activism for Aboriginal rights provides a structure for Day to reconstruct the unity of his fractured Self. However, denial and conflict towards the urge for unity is expressed in the admission that 'In days gone by we had no fear … now we drink and fight each other' (14). It is not only the Aborigines but also the author who drinks to excess to avoid confronting his demons.

Meanwhile, the often expressed opposition to mining in *Bunji* indicates a threat to the individualisation of consciousness if memories are too soon brought to the surface. Uncontrolled delving into the subconscious could be destructive and, like uranium, become a danger to the awakening inner child signified by *Bunji*'s concern for the next generation.

A further internal problem to be solved is the conflict of the male animus and female anima, symbolically at war in Day's first visit to the camp when Bobby and Bessie fight each other with Day trapped in between them (13). In the last chapter the centring of the Madonna and child represents the integration of an archetypal anima figure nurturing the child within.

In *Bunji*, that part of the psyche that is faithful to the true Self and promises to 'stay in our country' is contrasted to the exploitative and transient white man. To love the land is to show self-respect as 'one who looks after the place' (xxx). Meanwhile authorities seek to recognise a 'traditional owner' who is defined using a mythical past not susceptible to change. *Bunji* opposes the imposition of the concept of traditional ownership, in recognition that things have changed and Day must move on by integrating the past, rather than become fixated upon it.

In 1979, as land rights becomes a reality, Day's journey continues into regions beyond the urban confines as he parks his caravan on the land he has helped to win. His chosen site is scarred from past sand mining, representing a wound to the psyche that he begins to

heal by the planting of trees. In his created space, Day also begins what appears to be a second childhood. Surviving memory traces are suggested by creatures of the forest and sea that at first leave only tracks as they gradually emerge more openly into consciousness. The fish trap is a structure that ensnares creatures of the deep that are no longer a threat as they lie 'flapping helplessly on the grey sand' when the tide recedes (105).

Early in his new venture a bushfire sweeps across the land, with the result that the 'rubbish and wreckage of years of abuse lay exposed and ugly' (100). Seemingly acknowledging the opening up of the psyche by an intense experience, Day notes that 'the deepest forest was not burnt' and the burnt area would regrow, with some help (100). In addition, trees that he plants will later 'enfold the scarred earth' (133). Pretence can metaphorically now be abandoned as the old order, represented by a banyan tree that has been 'a landmark for generations,' collapses. Only the white ash remains as 'a ghostly outline' (99).

As the inner child develops at the beachside camp Day can begin to grow to maturity. The story of Sammy (122) metaphorically portrays the plight of the neglected child within as Sammy emerges from his mental prison through a psychic upheaval, surfing 'in crashing waves' (xxx). At this time of growth the story is told of a mythical frog, Kwork Kwork, whose children are sent to break the drought and bring nurturing rain to the parched land (127).

The 'wobbled movement' that capsizes the boat of Day's left-leaning friends (116) can be seen as a warning of a lack of balance in Day's life that causes him to finally describe himself as a 'crazed eccentric' (164). The wild pigs immerging from the jungle represent repressed memories and unpleasant aspects of the Unconscious Self reaching the surface. Day is now like a 'battle scarred pig dog' (167) and able to deal with the past, unlike the 'domestic dogs that bounded yapping into the bush' where they are no match for the feral pigs (167). It is the years of

campaigning described in *Bunji* that have prepared Day to slay his dragons.

Meanwhile at night a glowing 'white cross' (166) indicates a neglected spiritual power that beckons to the author. Eventually, in 1988 the violent death of the 'black-bristled beast' feral boar (136) occurs as Day is learning to live in the outside world 'one day at a time' (135) – a coded suggestion that he has become a member of Alcoholics Anonymous.

After all the structures that Day has built around himself have been demolished, the land that had been his home for six years is left 'spotless' (134), the debris of his past is buried or burnt and 'without looking back.' Day is then 'on the road again,' echoing the existentialism of the 1950s beat generation. He is now ready to travel to Sydney where he must experience an original pain for a lasting psychic resolution to occur.

On the streets of Sydney, in the depths of his despair, the messages from the land rights newsletter, *Bunji*, are understood at a deeper level. Day can now accept his 'blackfella' within, as well as the 'whitefella' without. The quest ends with a symbolic coming together of the previously divided Self, as Day and the Aboriginal man hug in the traditional greeting for 'long separated friends' (135). On a national level, the boy from middle class Perth has become a man who is enriched by experiencing life as it is lived by the nation's indigenous people.

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[i] John Pilger begins his 1988 televised documentary *A Secret Country* (now available on DVD) with a dramatic personal recitation to the camera of this poem from *Bunji*. Pilger's book by the same name also reprints the poem (page 19). Earlier editions acknowledge 'an anonymous Aboriginal poet.' After I had written to Pilger pointing out his mistake, later reprints of *A Secret Country* have acknowledged the author as Bill Day in the Aboriginal newsletter, *Bunji*.

he was noosed and shot.

Kulaluk Killer shot in pool

By PAUL JACKSON

The Kulaluk Killer is dead.

The huge 126 kg black feral boar which had terrorised the Coconut Grove and Nightcliff areas for the past three years, was shot by wildlife rangers early yesterday morning.

And of all places, the well-known snorting and squealing dog-mauler met his grisly end in a swimming pool.

Rangers had tried since 1985 to the catch the pig which was responsible for flattening many gardens, ripping apart dogs and killing dozens of other smaller animals.

Rangers were called to a house in Osterman St, Coconut Grove about 7am yesterday after the owner reported the boar in his garden.

"The pig was running around the yard trying to get out," ranger Ross Belcher said today.

"Apparently he chased the owner of the house and slipped into the pool."

Mr Belcher said officers tied a noose around the boar's head, lifted it out of the water and shot it with a .22 rifle.

Believed to be about seven years old, the Kulaluk Killer haunted the 20 km² Kulaluk Aboriginal reserve roaming through swamps, mangroves, dense areas of thick undergrowth and coastal plains.

Mr Belcher said the porker had been trapped and noosed before, but always managed to get away.

"He was so big, nothing could hold or stop him," he said.

He said about 100 other feral pigs roam the reserve.

Below: Young Evan Belcher, 4, alongside the Kulaluk Killer.

ON THE WAY TO DARWIN 1969

Fitzroy Crossing
6th June 8am.
1969

Dear Folks,

The begining of my second day at the crossing. I left Hedland 10 days ago, to h.h. to Broome. Had a tasty breakfast of turtle steak. supplied by the fisherman - very nice grilled. Out on the road a landrover passed, turned & came back - it was cousin Jeff enjoying himself up here & was able to get me 12 miles out of town.

There met up with 2 other hikers & together we managed no better than 30 miles that day. Spent an afternoon by the Delgrey fishing & got a meal of perch & eventually picked up a lift right through to Broome (over 350 mls) with the "Mad Mechanic of the North", which is the only name I knew this bloke by in taxi days.

Meanwhile an abo girl 'Eliza', had joined us. She was very intelligent & h.h. north too.

Broome kept us 3 days, I liked it so much.

Except for the night we were all camped under a beach shelter & a howling gale & driving rain suddenly started. We hung on & huddled behind some drums but before sunrise we had to abandon ship - everything soaking wet & splashed thro' puddles to a dry place. This page is still damp today. Unfortunately there was no job at the meat-works.

Eliza came with us into the hotel bar, for a squash but was asked "Have you got your rights?" Coming from Hedland, we didn't no what they were talking about. In the Kimberleys tho' Abos must have rights to drink. Seems to have a good effect up here, instead of scrounging, they are

always helping us out. A lot with caravans etc too. We met an old Malay who showed us some pearls he'd kept for years & ate regularly in the Chinese cafe. Unfortunately this Pommie h.k. only has to open his mouth to aggravate people, like when he asked the chink "How to you make chop suey?" & just about got thrown out.

We left Elyza in Broome & split up ourselves to get 180? to Derby. I went with a caravaning well sinker & his offsider, Percy. We spent 5 hours repairing it at one point. Friends (abos) of his from Broome stopped for a couple of hours til we got the truck going - so very patient, no hurry.

Well being a Monday holiday, Derby was quiet & I didn't like it at all, particularly after Broome. We moved out next day after going to the pictures in the 35c wooden seats, comfortable but freezing cold. Asked for a 35c & the women said "You know what they are?" I said "Yes the benches" But all the natives sit there." (Weren't many) First time my companions had seen or been to an outdoor picture show.

Got to Fitzroy on the back of a load, singing all the way, rugged up with everything possible. The country is grassy & fat beef wandering everywhere.

We had spent all afternoon at the Derby turnoff, so I got two sticks & began to "sing" a car to stop, imitating corroboree sounds. Car came screaming up & braked & wondered why the mates were laughing their heads off. However only going a mile. So tried harder & next thing this truck stopped. Now regarded as something of a witch doctor.

One of these blokes, Danny, 20 yrs, carries everywhere a brand new pair of ice skates, which causes a bit of comment. He says his father gave them to him before he died (6 mths ago) - a timber feller, killed by a falling tree in Tasmania. He has little else, particularly now - we found a plastic container with a liquid in it & tipped it out. Next day great holes appeared in his pants & shirt where he ~~was~~ wiped his hands - it was some kind of acid. I have small holes in my jeans, too.

Water was the problem up to now, porter on the Broome road. We always keep by water, but one windmill was broken & we spent a while trying to fix it, eventually lowered a tin on end of a wire down the well.

The Pommie is the most repulsive little weed I ever met, so now have let them go ahead.

Fitzroy Crossing is right on the bank of the river - a mighty thing, still running, full of fish & a crock, or two, but great for a dip. There is an open air pub there & store but the main road bypasses it now. However I choose to wait here, rather than on the road. Yesterday & last night yarning to a truck driver from Hedland, Jim Murphy, with whom I have mutual acquaintances. Learnt a lot about the town which is not obvious from the outside. e.g. The natives in Hedland, degenerate as they may seem & westernized, sober up for a couple of times a year for corroborees & ceremonies still. The blokes who are in charge of them, I know but

least suspected to know anything of tribal law etc - they certainly never mention it.
I might add that feelings amongst natives regarding land questions is strong. Such business as Weebo, they follow carefully.
That brings things up to date
Looking up I see hundreds of hawks, great flocks of them massing around here. They must be migrating or something.
I haven't got any mail, I suppose its all over the place.
Lets try P.O. Whyndam I should work there. Certainly travel up here is not as easy as I thought.
They tell me the crossing is great at raw time (September)
Hope you will send on one of Bruces letters.
Trust everyone is well etc.

Yours,
Bill.

P.S. Best thing about Derby is the strange Boab trees, so wide at the ~~st~~ trunk, one you could call the h.h. tree, it is covered with names from all over the world.

PS/ After 3 nights at Fitzroy, I at last arranged a lift. It was alright there, meeting the locals and tourists. In the open air (i.e. no walls) bar, birds, butterflies & grasshoppers are always passing thru - some pretty butterflies up here.

The station natives came in for supplies & met a couple of the local teachers.

Played darts with Bert the truckie who was waiting a week for parts - his truck was broken down 80 miles out. Beautiful fish in the Fitzroy, too and a type of mussel they call a cherubin.

Anyway we got out to Bert's truck & camped the night with sermons by the campfire from a driver who is a lay preacher (4 square church) & said some strange things, being a prophet of doom. With us were 2 young, one a h.t. & one a station man, or cowboy, & a very nice bloke.

In the morning we transfered Bert's load onto the other truck, with much ingenuity & continued on to Halls Creek, myself perched in the load of crates & cable drums. Good looking country of trees & grass.

H. Creek was bigger than I thought & a town where the pub serves bottles instead of glasses. There I met one of the blokes from the surveying job.

North of Halls, to Wyndham, the country is really rich, with flowing creeks every few miles & rugged hills & cattle everywhere.