



THE SYMPATHETIC COW MURDERER

PHOTOGRAPHY AND WRITTEN WORD

BY RICHARD DAVY

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Shelly took in a wandering young boy of nineteen all those years ago and planted the writing seed.

And Sara, who said it would happen one day.

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Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today,
to say farewell to the recently departed, and the broken hearted.
They have gone from this place, to be replaced,
again, and again and again.

To those from whom I have mined a living,
the newborns, who've lived only seconds, minutes and days,
I truly loved you,
was honoured to meet you, and am only sorry
I took part in your so brief an incarnation.

I fell in to being your life's conductor,
you gave of yourself for me to receive,
now I truly believe
You are worthy of your holy status.
Yet,
I cannot attend the ceremony,
for my hands are still stained with your lineages' blood,
as they are of yours.
I am,
your sympathetic murderer.



FOREWORD

After attending a Beginner's class of Tai Chi in Albany Western Australia, I stayed to watch experienced practitioners go through the whole 108 moves with a fluidity and intensity I could barely imagine. The control, grace, sublime segues from one complex move to another was breathtaking. I thought it impossible that I would ever achieve such unselfconscious immersion in such a demanding dance. At the end of a row was a tall, skinny, rather unkempt young bloke I estimated to be in his late thirties or early forties. He dissolved into the movements as if in meditation. I wanted to meet him, to somehow catch what he had so I could also enter that space. It took many weeks to cross that gap because he was very shy, and after the sessions, he rarely stayed for the tea and socialising. I noted that he drove a ute, often with a dog waiting patiently on the tray back.

A farmer? A farmer who travels in to Albany to do Tai Chi? The image was somewhat incongruous, given that my experience of farmers was to cast them as older, craggier, and like the land, parched and dry. I would never have expected to meet a real farmer with soft hands, a gentle voice, fluid body, artistic temperament and a poet and photographer to boot. Never.

But meet we did. I was writing *Storymen* at the time; a narrative that explores the philosophical confluence in the creative works of Tim Winton and Ngarinyin Lawman Bungal (David) Mowaljarlai. In correspondence with Tim I was excavating the possibility that Whitefellas might hear Nature and Land in a similar way to Blackfellas. Richard was interested, and wanted to share some of his poetry with me as my focus and journey seemed to ring some bells for him.

What I discovered in his works was an undeniable resonance with my own thesis; that Whitefellas can also hear the song of the land, the pleas and fears of plants and animals, the agonies of environmental abuse. Richard enters conversations with his surroundings, whether on the farm, in the Kimberley or Africa or India – he hears and feels the whispers and screams of lands, peoples and the elements as they experience human activity and its impacts. His animals are really 'persons': not personifications, but non-human persons whom he reads, and with whom he empathizes as they fulfil man's intentions for them. The loyalty of a dog, the sacrifice of a milking cow, the death throws of a tree or bushland or the earth, all pulse and live through this autobiographical anthology.

Richard does not apologise for animal husbandry, land clearing, water catchment, road building or other stereotypical 'green' indulgences. Rather, he fronts up to their necessity to modern living, but shirtfronts disrespectful and abusive practices. For Richard, the Earth is to be cherished as Mother, respected as provider, loved as a close family relation. In other words, he expounds the obligation to live mindfully in the world, respectfully and relationally in Nature and Land, and with humble gratitude to those beasts who live purely to serve us.

Hannah Rachel Bell
October 2010

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IN THE BEGINNING

In the beginning there is darkness
from which flows life's embryonic light.

IN THE BEGINNING

/

He was born an animal, and still is,
as we all are.

As a small child he lay down with dogs,
then stood and walked away,
apparently without fleas.

The mother and her pups had
an intoxicating scent of belonging,
Romulus and Remus is
his favourite mythology.

He evolved in a small child's universe
of southern coast dairy farm,
a forest maze with Paperbark River
where daily two hundred
black and white cows
massed together for milking,
waited as he followed them in,
wading through their warm ankle deep shit.

There are fragments of memory.

The school bus which would stay overnight
in the homestead's laneway
waiting for its driver's early morning return,
first on, last off.
Delivered.

Horse-mad mother disappearing
into surrounding forest,
returning with her saddle's pommel
full of Boronia,
filling the garage with buckets of intoxication;
a scent which still lures him to this day.

Some French girl,
who led him to bush near the homestead,
then laid down behind a fallen Jarrah tree
to show him her bodily parts
long before he needed to know.

Youngest weaned of four,
he had sense of self the moment
he had sense,
self which continues to drift, with a thirsty,
searching quest for harmony,
which he hears comes from connection
to the outer, and an inner self love,
it's just he has this lingering defensive wall,
breaking the give-into-it-all fall,
give in to being, human being.

HAY:RIVER





FURTHER EAST

He left the Jarrah forest with its black
and white cows
for the dry coastal plain further east.
An abundant heath of species,
wilderness, which he finished off after
a father and brother's first onslaught.

Tractor days with dog on board,
over and over burnt country, ploughing,
chaining, raking,
then chaining and raking again,
preparation for first dose of
European seed and super.

Now, when he returns to the old country,
the dairy farm has shrunk,
as children's memories often do.
The little known universe,
which welcomed him in
for so brief an existence
to play the part of reluctant cow farmer
come to make a difference,
a splash of resistance in this paradise
run by fools.





THE NISSEN HUT

To this shelter he owes a life.
As a boy, he shaped his future island-ship,
Watching the box, black cat curled upon lap sharing
beanbag and fire,
helping keep the darkness away
from the thin asbestos walls,
surrounded by country angered with its treatment.

Then he had another life here,
a coming-of-age wild life,
escaped from the parent's homestead's structure
to a learning of living with self.

And now for a third time
he's moving back in,
for there's a manager
occupying the homestead with his young family,
something the big house has missed
since the parents moved away.

It's been a long-time dream,
blasting out the Nissen hut's walls and making
it livable again.
He enjoys bush carpentry, which is needed
when things are not level.
Renovation is like exploration of another's dream;
travelling time by removing walls,
revealing pencil marks fresh as the day drawn.

Friends help.
Jesus and Lofty, both tall,
Paint the concave inner walls.
It's still unfinished,
but where there's corrugated iron, there's life,
this first night of a new life crosses back
upon an old one,
he is home.

HE IS

A quiet observer,
shit stirrer.

Documenter,
consumer,
cow herder.

He accesses livestock, judging characteristics and trait.

Structural soundness, longevity, femininity,
it's hard not to carry career into social activity.

Self vilified collector of souls,
how can a broken heart not break another?

Wandering chameleon is what he is,

a "next" junkie,

Gemini boy,

growing under the sign with a thousand possibilities,

he tries his best for original thought,

and though impossible it seems,

a quest for one fills a life.

HE WONDERS

He wonders sometimes,
did we venture too far from our chosen path?
We, crimson rose turned vicious sloth.
Is this a self sentence or did we really commit the crime?
And how in hell have we come so far,
just to create such an epic coup d'état.

He knows he came to being through a mother and father's joining,
he sees it in his parent's mix.
He was not witness to his birth,
has no knowledge of death,
just knows to expect it.
He believes in experience and learns only to learn
that he'll never stop.

As space stretches our minds grasp for its edges.
Since before man started his long trek to neighbouring spheres,
comic books told us of our futures,
he thinks apologetically of the visionaries,
heretics and dreamers all accused of insanity.

Now our robotic machinery roams foreign surfaces light years away,
while at home our ability to repair and replace human form
works directly in opposition to a smaller, sustainable civilisation,
so we feel we must search for another
way out from an unborn revolution.