

**MERRIWA\* , Karen Cessell, Perth**

I was born on Waargal's\* hill at Bethesda  
And lived my first years  
By the serpent's water at Peppermint Grove  
Then atop the sand hills at Nedlands

Waargal inspired me  
As I prepared to leave the Dervil Yirrigan\*  
Vowing to find another river  
In my own ancestral land

I found the Thames  
At Oxford and at London  
Now I am revisiting  
The land of the Noongar\*  
The country of the Wujak\*

I will walk where the Noongar people walked  
Generation after generation  
For 50,000 years  
Where they built weatherproof huts  
Dug wells and fished in the river  
At Goonininup\* and Katamboordup\*  
I will admire velvety red and green Nollamara\*  
At Kooyamulyp\*  
And take in the view of Waargal's river  
Where it is as wide as a lake.

Born by the same river  
I need to make my peace  
With the Noongar

My people walked in and made theirs ours  
The Noongar people were pushed out  
Convicts and opportunists took their homelands  
Settlers moved in fast

My ancestors were simple folk  
Neither convicts nor officials  
Impoverished in their own country  
They took advantage  
Of land seized and renamed  
Ignored the Noongar's plight  
While grabbing for themselves

Ancient history was disregarded  
The Noongah murdered  
At the battle of Pinjarra  
Survivors were treated with contempt  
Imprisoned on Rottnest Island  
Forced to live in Christian missions  
Children stolen to be brought up by whites

Disinherited and vulnerable  
Some mourned their loss with alcohol

Contempt was piled upon contempt

We have taken from the Noongah  
Their lives, their dignity  
Their homes, their sanity  
Their culture, their identity

I need to atone  
To plead for forgiveness  
I wish to make reparation  
To express remorse  
And shame  
To offer apology

What can I do?  
Were it to make a difference  
I would do almost anything  
Stand at Kooyamulyp  
With a banner  
Arrange for a flotilla of boats  
To sail on the wide Dervil Yirrigan  
With a thousand banners  
Shame wealthy Perth business people  
Into buying up riverside houses  
Demolish them  
And return the land to the Noongar

But it is too late to go back  
We must honour the descendents  
Of dispossessed Noongar people  
Acknowledge our crimes against them  
Confront them with honesty and humility  
Negotiate with them fair compensation  
Make amends  
Make amends  
Go forward in hope  
Create merriwa for all.

\* Merriwa: an Aboriginal word for 'a good place'

\*Waargal: A water-creative spiritual force with the appearance of a serpent that formed the bed and hills of the Swan River, Perth. Waargal represents the vital living force of running water. A Dreamtime ancestor of the Noongar/Nyungar people.

\* Noongar: The Aboriginals of the Perth area belong to the southwest region and are referred to by various names. The best known are Nyoongar, Nyungar, Noongar, Wajuk and Wudjari. The country along the Swan River was rich and allowed a high density of Aboriginal people.

\* Wujak: the place that they call Perth was known as the country of the Wujak

\* Dervil Yirrigan: the Swan River was, and still is, known as the Dervil Yirrigan.

\*Goonininup: sacred site beside the Swan River where the Swan brewery was built

\*Katamboordup: The eastern portion of the present suburb of Dalkeith was originally Swan Location 85 of 320 acres, assigned to Adam Armstrong in 1831. The Aboriginal name for the place where his cottage stood was "Katamboordup".

\*Nollamara is the Aboriginal word for the red and green kangaroo paw, Western Australia's floral emblem

Kooyamulyp: "Mt Eliza, King's Park (Kooyamulyp is the local Nyoongar Aboriginal name) has always been a significant gathering point for the Aboriginal culture and European culture