Kurnai Poems
(gunnai wark)

written and translated by

A. Angove

Kurnai Poems

(gunnai wark)

written and translated by

A. Angove

by the author:
Bungeleen and other bush songs
love songs; the tao and mt. nugong
Bun Jirrah Gingee Munjie
Mt. Nugong No.22

This edition is limited to 200 copies. This is copy .....

PUBLISHED BY NGARAK PRESS 1994
P.O. Box 18 Ensay 3895

Copyright text: The Author, photographs H. Reddish. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.
ISBN 1 875254 15 3
Printed by E Gee Printers, Mcleod St. Bairnsdale 3875
Cover: Photographs by H. Reddish

Introduction

The following poems have been written in English and then translated into Kurnai. The Kurnai language was unique to the Gippsland region where, formerly, it was spoken for over 15000 years. To me the use of the Kurnai gives an ultimate expression of locality. It is NOT an attempt to appropriate, abuse or exploit Aboriginal culture. As with previous booklets much of the content is on local Aboriginal history. Whilst the Kurnai is a dead/ moribund language, these brief poems may act as a catalyst to stimulate interest in it. In both content and translation the poems remains highly sympathetic to the Aboriginal cause.

Substantial effort has been made for the translations to be as accurate as possible from the fragments of grammar and vocabularies extant. They remain however only rough and approximate and no claim is made to any precision. The exact process of translation is also distorted by a considerable amount of poetic licence and should be recognised as a creative work rather than an exact academic treatise. Rather than being limited to conforming with the bare vocabulary, composite words have been created where the vocabulary alone did not suffice. Thus for 'drowning' of which no known word exists we substitute 'die - in - water'. For 'tears' we substitute 'eye-water'. This process of creating composite words appears to conform to the rules of Gunnai grammar as many of the existing words are obviously composites. For instance 'brajerak' is composed of 'bra' meaning 'man' and 'jerah' meaning 'to fear' thus creating 'men whom we fear', the name for the Gunnai tribal enemies.

The substance and subject matter of the poems vary. They are partly local myth and legend, partly history and partly contemporary. Tackawarren and Harry Derramunjie were real individuals and are taken straight from the history books. The selection otherwise has no order chronologically or geographically, but generally follows the various themes and sub themes. Part of this work has been previously published in The Gippsland Times. Thanks to Howard Reddish for the cover and M. Gardner, J. Morphett and R. Miller for reading the manuscript.

A.A.
Aug.1994

"... language is not neutral but reflects the hierarchical relations of society as a whole - it is a terrain for the struggle of meanings, dominated by the most powerful groups in society. New language can help us challenge these relations." D.Welch (Freedom 19.3.94)

Kurnai poems - Gunnai wark

1.
From Mallacoota to Wilsons Promontory,
from the mountains to the sea,
this is the land of the Kurnai.

mungan marlagooter moola yiruk
mungan bulga moola warri
dindan ma wukkan ba kani.

2.
Long ago the pelican and the musk duck
flew over the mountains; they came here
as the parents of the Kurnai people.

mulbitthunga boorun batha tuk
boolootha waty bulga; mandtha budgee budgee mul
buth moongan batha yuckan ba kani.

3.
Since the time of the pelican and the musk duck
Gippsland has belonged to the Kurnai people.
This is our land.

mulbitthunga ba boorun batha tuk
wooraylwukan nindi thana kani.
dindan ma wuk wukkan.

4.
yesterday the whiteman
raped our mothers and sisters
stole our land; today's talk
will not right those deeds

pigeongul wango lohan
dhunguggandin nindi thanal yukkan il carrajung
towundjat nindi thanal wuruk
tyilli braba thunganadthung

5.
Saw-the-sky was a little boy
who led the white hunters
to find the white woman
instead they killed many of our people.

Tackawarren gan nungeng tarlo lity
ngandoanggo wannhai lohan worngan
yaak wango lohanakin
melkina womba nindi than kani

6.
Like the kangaroo, the bandicoot, the koala
we eat, piss, drink,
fuck, die.
Like our brother snake
we kiss the earth.

booth jirrah, bembung, kula
werna dhanadalak,wirrak, dhanadalakyarn,
dhunguggan, tirtygan
booth nindi than tunn tunn thurrung
dhurndhunban werna wruk

7.
The little boy Saw-the-sky
was brought up by the whiteman;
they changed his name from
Tackawarren to Jacky Warren.

wango tarlolity tackawarren
warapananungan thoolo lohan
mandha ngungal thara mungan
tackawarren batha jacky warren.

8.
yesterday the whiteman
stole our land
perhaps they are sorry now

pigeongul wango lohan
dhauan dyadugri nindi thana wuruk
gano lohan dindin munadhan tyilli

9.
The Kurnai lived with the land
for an eternity
When I see how the whiteman
has fucked our land
I hang my head and cry

Kani warranawert thoolo wuruk
tyillibal il pigeongul
Nara dhankanadha wulngin lohan
dhunguggandin nindi thana wukkan
Thanga ngi purkitha il myreeyarn

10.
we cry for that great
singer of our people
Harry Derramunjie
the tears of little girls
fall to the earth

nuwanwert wool ketchoon lairn
watwat ba nindi thal kani
derramunjie
buth myreeyarn ba tarlorukut
blakadyingin jellan wuk wuk

11.
whiteman
you fuckedthe kangaroo
you fucked our people
you fucked my body
you fucked our countryside
What an arsehole!

lohan
dhunguggandin jirrah
dhunguggandin nindi than kani
dhunguggandin ngetal mackta
dhunguggandin nindi than wukkan.
nanma yukkanbagwannung

12.
one day a tiger snake
will get the old man dog

goodabun wurin il thurra
mull kurtba wango bourdanban

13.
our spirit
the blood and bones
of our ancestors
is in every corner
of the land

nindi thana yambo
wango gruk il bring ba
nindithan bookangkani
bil ngurtana balmunjie
ba wango wurruk.

14.
When Harry Derramunjie
died on Sardine Creek
his starving dogs
ate up his bones

nara derramunjie
tirtygan ma kouarkyarnmunjie
mramunatyan baan
dhanadalakan bring nangen

15.
With the coming of the whiteman
the native companion
no longer visits Gippsland

thoolo butha gnowanjy ba lohan
butha balwin
natbun boolootha wooraylwukan

16.
once our land was covered
in grass and gum trees.
now the north wind blows
dust out to sea

kooteganman nindithal wurruk
bil bun il balook balook.
wango daar beeba beeba
mulloo nganathan jellan warri

17.
At Paynesville by the sea
where the son of Bungeleen
was drowned during the
hunt for the white woman,
I sit with a one-legged
seagull for company

ma toonalook ge wango warri
wunman lity ba bungeleen
tirtyganbilyarn pigeongul
worngan wango lohanakin,
bunnunganaty thoolo goodaban bourne
tarlo wyak yunki yunki werna

18.
as a rule
snake dogs
do not grow old

buth wert balnat yaninga
thurrabaana
yal berngan dan dan

19.
The little boy Saw-the-sky
called Jacky Warren
grew up to be a native trooper
he was the only one
to turn against his people.

wango tarlolity tackawarren
tharbla jacky warren
berngan jellan bra narran brajerak
nungga butha bragoodabun
jellan birru neerambo ngungal kani

20.
Likewise the scrub turkey
the native cat and paddymelon
once plentiful
are no longer found in the land

booth wango kooracan
wango binyallung il bowi
kooteganman ya il
natbun manana bil wurruk.

21.
At Calulu
the kookaburra and wood duck
call before sunrise.

ma calulu
wango kouark il wrang
karndan nulla uca mirrin

22.
the whiteman came
killed the kangaroo
killed our people;
but this will always
be our land

lohan gnowanja
melkina butha jirrah
melkina nindi thal kani
dindan girtganwoorin
nindithan wuk wukkan

23.
At the place of the blackfish
the leaves
of the whiteman's trees
fall to the ground
in winter

ma numblamunjie
wango gerrung
ba wango lohanin yail ngleppur
blakadyingin jellan wango wurruk
bil merbuck

24.
the large smooth boulders
on the hills
of Boonabirrah reflect
the early sun.

wango murkinwalliniga-baayu wamba
ba wango krungark wamba
ma boonabirrah wandyin
wango tabbarro woorin burreet

25.
At Nugong
north of Ensay
the cold wind
sweeps down
from the mountain

ma nugong
daar ba numblamunjie
wango karrong cowwar
mirkwan thanga
mungan wango bulga.

26.
From Nugong
to the west stands
the round boulders
of Boonabirrah

mungan nugong
jilan wango yak dyettyan
wango murkinwalliniga-baayu wamba
mungan boonabirrah

27.
Long ago
the station cook at Orbost
stole our young girls.

mulbitthunga
wango lohan boollagga careringal
towundjat nindi thanal tarlorukut

28.
Harry Derramunjie
would not leave
his country of east Gippsland.
So he lived and died
alone amongst the whitemen

derramunjie
yal balnungayaning
nungal wurruk ba krowajingalung.
nunga warrapannan il tirtygan
ngalquan karan wango lohan

29.
long ago the Kurnai had a
white woman with them
she was a piece of wood
from a boat on the ocean

mulbithunga wango kani
lohanakin thoolo kani
jillyakin tarlobalgejan bremba ba kallack
mungan kooroong ma butha binginwarri

30.
our kangaroo have been killed
the birds have gone
the whiteman is like an evil spirit
haunting the countryside

nindi thana melkina jirrah
wango jack ngalko tyilli
wango lohan buth il dindinmrart
dindinyamban mandha wurruk.

31.
Our land!
Our land!
Our land!

nindi than wurruk wuk
nindi than wurruk wuk
nindi than wurruk wuk

32.
At the blackfish place
the leaves
of the whiteman's trees
die in autumn

ma numblamunjie
wango gerrung
ba wango lohanin yail ngleppur
tirtygan bil nullamerbuck

33.
with one bite
from the tiger snake
the old dog will die.

thoolo goodabun bundando
mungan wango thurrong
buth bairndan baan tirtygana.

34.
In the mountains
north of Wilsons Promontory
and south of the land
of the swamp dwellers
is the place the Bunerong
called Mirboo.

bil wango bulga
daar ba yiruk
il tha ba wango wuk
ba wango morwelli
wango brajerak munjie
tharbla mirboo.

35.
At the place called Mirboo
a bunerong was killed
by a man who
cut out his kidney.

ma wango munjie tharbla mirboo
brajerak melkina
thoolo kani ngandoanggo
batgejan ngungal wullong.

36.
once a good snake dog
a snake dog till death

kooteganman il lane thurrabaan
il thurrabaan mana tirtygan

37.
The Bunerong called
Wilsons Promontory Wamoon.
They thought it was haunted

wango brajerak tharbla
yiruk wamoon.
jellan brajerak yiruk yambodindin

38.
Once the Bunerong called
the 'prom' Wamoon
but it has always
been our land.

kooteganman buth brajerak tharbla
wango yiruk wamoon
yiruk girtganwoorin
nindi than wurruk.

39.
to the west
of the promontory
we have always had
the fighting and stealing
of the Bunerong.

jellan wango yak
ba wango yiruk
werna girtganwoorin
wango pandean il towundjatan
ba buth brajerak

40.
to the west
beyond the promontory
lies the land
of the men whom we fear.

jellan wango yak
moonda wango yiruk
jatebolana wango wurrruk
ba buth brajerak

41.
Near Port Albert
a whiteman threw
hot coals over the feet
of some of our people.

jenana lurt bit
goodabun lohan brab
towrawallung boolootha wango jane
ba preporitha ba nindithan kani.

42.
After that
kurnai warriors
killed a whiteman
and cut out his kidneys.

kendoona ketchoon
brabirakani
melkina lohan il
batgejan ngungal wullongwullong

43.
In return
the whitemen
killed all the Bratualung tribe
at Warrigal Creek.

bil yugwan ngurruk
wango lohan
melkina bal wango bratualung
ma yau-ungyarn.

44.
at the Warrigal Creek
waterhole the stream
ran red with the blood
of the murdered Kurnai.

ma yau-ungyarn
thungunndhaa wango wun wun
rindhan gingirruk thoolo gruk
ba buth tirtygandin kani.

45.
the cold winter wind
blows down from
the mountain above.

buth karrong merbuck cowwar
beeba beeba thanga mungan
wango bulga booloot.

46.
The winter wind
blows off Mount Nugong.

The wind blows
from the north
The wind blows cold
The wind blows
for an eternity.

wango merbuck cowwar
beeba beeba plakoma bulganugong.

buth cowwar beeba beeba
mungan wango daar
cowwar beeba beeba karrong
buth cowwar beeba beeba
pigeongul tyillibal.

47.
We played football
before the whiteman came.
the ball was made
from the scrotum
of an old man kangaroo

werna worngana jaan turta jiraua
nulla wango lohan gnowanjan.
werta dyirrumban
mungan wango turtbuddunng
ba il bourdan jirrah

48.
Like you, one day
the old dog will die.

buth nindoo goodabun woorin
wango bourdanban tirtygan.

49.
You can love
an old dog
as you would a child

nindoo ukatho wurinyan
wert bourdanban
buth nindoo ukatha tarlolity

50.
north of Boonabirah
lies the little stream
known as Swifts Creek.

daar ba boonabirah
jatebolana wango tarlo yarn
tharbla bunjirrah gingee munjie.

51.
Swifts Creek is
in the land of the manly tribe
for all time

bunjirrah gingee munjie
bil wangowurruk ba brabiralung
buthwert tyillibal

52.
at Tambo Crossing
the white-faced heron feeds
by the river.

ma noyangmunjie
karlo dhanadalakan
ge wango wunwun

53.
at Warrigal Creek
the whiteman shot
those hiding in the waterhole
as they put their heads
above the water

ma yau-ungyarn
wango lohan boo boo mandha
bagwan bil buth thungunndhaa
buth wanhai thanal brukbruk
booloot wango yarn.

54.
The upper Latrobe river
was once the home
of the people of the swamp.

wango jenana bulga durt yowan
kooteganman wango yamorwelli
ba wango morwelli

55.
The swamp dwellers
like all the Gippsland people
were sometimes called
warrigals or wild blacks

wango morwelli
booth bal wango kani
kengalapan tharbla
warrigals kinna guani counguller

56.
They came through the hills
and scrub and took
the swamp dwellers by surprise

mandha gnowanjan moolianga krungarkan
il karicka il kurtban
morwelli buth jate bolana.

57.
The men of the swamp dwellers
were shot with
the whiteman's guns

wango bra ba morwelli
boo boo thoolo
lohana booroobooryan

58.
Their men were killed
and women stolen
by the Bunerong

wango braua melkina
il woorcata dhauandyagria
ge brajerakyak

59.
The red Bluff
near Lake Bunga
was once the entrance
to the ocean.

wango ninnie
jenana lune beeuke
kooteganman wango yarngaty
jellan wango binginwari.

NOW AVAILABLE FROM NGARAK PRESS

PO BOX 18 ENSAY 3895

Ph. 051-573228

In A. Angove's Poetry Series

Bungeleen and other bush songs . 41p., Illust. 1989
love songs, the tao and mt. nugong . 48p., Illust. 1990
Bun Jirrah Gingee Munjie. 44p., Illust. 1991
Mt. Nugong No. 22. 28p. Illust.1993

By P.D. Gardner

Our Founding Murdering Father 2nd. rev. ed. & Illust.
Names of the Omeo Highway 48p. Illust. 2nd. Print.
Names around the Gippsland Lakes 48p. Illust.
Names of the Victorian Alps 48p. Illust.
Names of East Gippsland 48p. Illust.
Names of South Gippsland 48p. Illust.
Names of the Latrobe Valley and West Gippsland 46p. Illust.
Gippsland Massacres 2nd. rev. ed. 120p. Illust. 1993
Through Foreign Eyes, 2nd ed. Illust. 1994
The Scab Train, 1993, 28p.
Too Old to Rat, 48p. 1994

Ngarak Press deals in secondhand books and

- buys books in bulk. Offers will be made for collections of more than 100 hard cover books anywhere in Gippsland

- has issued lists of books for sale on Gippsland and the Alps, Aborigines and Collectables

- operates the Old PO Bookshop at Johnson St., Ensay attached to the Little River Inn (11am-5pm Mon-Fri and holiday weekends)

KURNAI POEMS (gunnai wark)

A. Angove has lived in east Gippsland for more than twenty years and has been writing for most of that time. She has published four volumes of verse, *Bungeleen and other bush songs* (1989), *love songs the tao and mt. nugong* (1990), *Bun Jirrah Gingee Munjie* (1991) and *Mt. Nugong No.22* (1993). The former received favourable reviews in *The Small Times* and *Bun Jirrah Gingee Munjie* has a forward by well-known poet and author of *The Ash Range*, Laurie Duggan. Angove has had work published in many small and off-beat poetry magazines and performed on community radio. Two of the poems have been anthologized in PIE (WAC, Melb.,1974) and Shadow and Shine (P.Morgan, CGS,Traralgon, 1988). A. Angove is a pseudonym.

A. Angove

ISBN 1 875254 15 3