

## **TOSSED UP BY THE BEAK OF A CORMORANT** **POEMS OF MARTUWARRA FITZROY RIVER** NANDI CHINNA AND ANNE POELINA

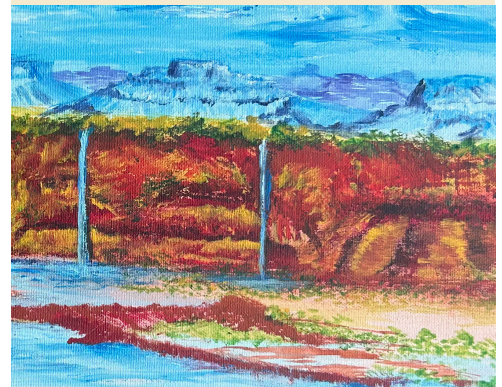
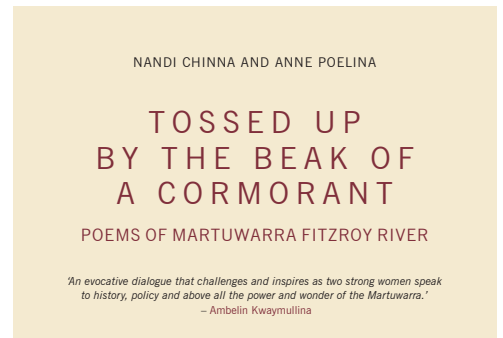
### **ABOUT THE BOOK**

An urgent and stunning collaboration between poet Nandi Chinna and Nyikina Warrwa Martuwarra guardian Professor Anne Poelina. Punctuated by four long poems from Anne Poelina, this book-length collection explores meaningful and respectful responses to place through dialogue between Poelina and settler-poet Chinna, and embodied immersion in Martuwarra River Country. Together, the poems explore the beauty and complexity of the Kimberley region in Western Australia and the importance of a connection to land and place.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

Nandi Chinna works as a research consultant, creativity facilitator, and poet based on Bunuba lands in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. Nandi received the 2021 Western Australian Premier's Writing Fellowship for her project *Two Rivers: First Nations Voices on Rivers and Wetlands*. This project utilises a decolonising methodology which primacies the voices of First Nations people. Her poetry collection *The Future Keepers*, (Fremantle Press, 2019) was shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Literary Award 2020, and the Victorian Premier's Award for Poetry 2019.

Prof. Anne Poelina, PhD, PhD, MA, MEd, MPH&TM, Chair of Indigenous Knowledges and Senior Research Fellow Nulungu Institute Research, University of Notre Dame Australia, is a Kimberley, Nyikina Warrwa Indigenous woman; Chair, Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council, an active community leader, human and earth rights advocate, and filmmaker. Professor Poelina is the Associate Commissioner for the Productivity Commission National Water Initiative (NWI) Review and the Inaugural First Nations appointment independent Advisory Committee - Murray Darling Basin (MDBA) Social, Economic and Environmental Sciences (ACCESS). She holds membership to national and global think tanks, is a Peter Cullen Fellow (2011), Adjunct Professor, College Indigenous Education Futures, Arts & Society, Charles Darwin University with Visiting Fellowships at the Australian National University. Anne shares the 2023 Zonta Award for Women Taking Climate Action. The award recognises women whose climate actions contribute towards climate change innovation and engagement with women. She was awarded the Kailisa Budevi Earth and Environment Award, International Women's Day (2022) recognition of her global standing. Poelina continues to collaborate with Indigenous scholars in New Zealand, the USA and Canada and the International Global Aboriginal Research Network GARN.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think the collection's title is *Tossed Up by the Beak of a Cormorant*?
2. Why might it be important to do as Nandi Chinna says, 'to just step back, to shut up for a minute and listen' (p. 10)?
3. What does Nandi Chinna mean when she says, 'the question of my responsibility as an artist working in a colonised country relates to finding a mode of representation that is outside of ideas of "belonging" and its opposite, "alienation"' (p. 11)?
4. What does she mean when she writes of "settler poetics"?
5. What is the effect of including a glossary and notes in this collection?
6. Which is your favourite poem and why?
7. What is the threat to the Martuwarra Fitzroy River right now?
8. What are the different ways that Anne Poelina and Nandi Chinna speak to this threat in the collection?
9. In what ways can poetry be political?
10. What is the effect of the placement of Anne's poems around Nandi's? How do the roles of Guardian-Elder and settler poet express themselves through these poems?
11. What glimpses do you receive of real-time conversations between the two poets?
12. In what ways is the River a third voice in this collection?
13. On p.8, Anne Poelina says 'You need to form your own relationship with the River as a living system'. Is there a natural body of water near you with which you can form a relationship?
14. What poems might arise from your dialogue? How do you think doing so might change the way you saw the world?

## INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHORS

### ***Nandi: What did you learn from your practice of active relationship the river?***

I have learned so many things from my practice of active relationship with the river. Hopefully a lot of this is articulated in my poetry. But if I have to name it here, I suppose some of the important things I have learnt would be listening, being quiet and listening to the voices of Martuwarra water and the beings that live in her, and along her banks. I have learned a quietness and a stillness from the practice of deep listening, filling my mind with the sounds, voices and encounters that are immediate and alive when I'm in the presence of the river. Every sentient being has something to teach us, and we also learn from the rocks and the layers of history embedded in them. Listening to the people of the river whose culture is so totally and deeply entwined with the river's life offers a rich and profound understanding of how important this place is as a living ancestor.

### ***Nandi: Do you think non-Indigenous writers in Australia have a responsibility to the way they inhabit place?***

Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but for me as a writer from a settler background, I feel I have a responsibility to ask for guidance and for permission if I want to write about Aboriginal places, which is the whole of Australia. If I don't engage with Traditional Custodians, it would be kind of like a writer walking into my house and settling down to write a detailed and intimate story or poem about me and my house without even knocking at the door, or asking if it was okay to do so. It's not as simple as that, of course, but I believe a working-with methodology is a way of showing respect for First Nations, and acknowledging that your art practice is taking place on their country, which was never ceded but stolen.

### ***Anne: What can people from beyond Fitzroy Martuwarra do to help save the river?***

Firstly, to understand Martuwarra is globally unique, its diverse cultures and valley tracks and living waters, will see the River listed as the first in the world, as a 'Living Water Museum'. We are populating the website, [www.martuwarra.org](http://www.martuwarra.org), with an interactive map, showcasing world culture and heritage and the guardians, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians who have come to feel and hear the River Country. We are

creating the Martuwarra Walking Track, to share with visitors from far and wide. Check out the website and get to know this special place where we share our poems with people and places.

***Anne: Why it is important to you to share your knowledge with others?***

It is important to share my knowledge with others, particularly incorporating poetry as artistic ways to bring you with us to share the magic, the living spirit of this place. Martuwarra is one of the world's last remaining globally intact Rivers and it is very much at the crossroads of invasive unjust development. The knowledge making and sharing is about sustaining our lifeways and livelihoods, so Martuwarra, can continue to live and flow.