

**Belinda Wheeler, ed. *A Companion to Australian Aboriginal Literature*.
New York: Camden House, 2013. 240 pp.
£55.00
ISBN: 978-1-57113-521-6 (Hbk)
<http://www.camden-house.com/store/viewItem.asp?idProduct=14267>**

A Companion to Australian Aboriginal Literature makes an important contribution to the study of Australian Aboriginal 'writing' and situates the text alongside the two major works in this area: *Anthology of Australian Aboriginal Literature* (2008) and *The Literature of Australia* (2009). Since at least the 1970s, Aboriginal literature has gained mainstream popularity, but until recently very little work has been written which 'summarizes and contextualizes the canon for scholars, researchers and general readers' (2). This text attempts to fill this void.

The companion begins with a foreword by Nicholas Jose, who defines Aboriginal literature 'as a set of creative and communicative practices that reach into deep time, "time immemorial" as Aboriginal people sometimes call it, while also having a vital and diverse presence in contemporary culture' (vii). Jose urges us to expand our understanding of the emerging literary canon, to expand the limits of where literature 'begins and ends' (ix) and encourages us to appreciate each work in itself but to also acknowledge that it is 'part of something larger, both an Indigenous record and a participant in a larger process of communication, not limited to Australia's borders.'

Jose's foreword is followed by an impressive chronology of Australian Aboriginal history, which works to place Indigenous history and literature at the centre rather than in the periphery, where it has far too often been relegated from settler-colonial perspectives. Over several pages, the chronology details the approximate 68,000 years of Australian Aboriginal History up until 2013. This chronology is important for several reasons, the most notable being that it raises important questions: What is Australian Aboriginal literature? When did it begin? What does it encompass? Rather than attempting to answer these questions, Wheeler demonstrates that Australian Aboriginal literature reflects past and contemporary periods of oppression and segregation. This oppression and segregation has been, and continues to be rooted within Australian governmental policy. This is further exemplified throughout Wheeler's Introduction, where she accepts that Aboriginal literature, within the life-writing genre, must be considered alongside the larger cultural and historical context within which these life-stories are written/practised.

Companion articulates the varied and dynamic nature of Australian Aboriginal Literature through its eleven essays. Wheeler's Introduction examines the Western treatment of Indigenous literature and discusses the problematics of what is and is not considered to be Aboriginal literature, as well as what is and is not considered for publication. She also demonstrates some of the core issues with the way that the publishing industry has valued, or rather devalued, Aboriginal authors in the process of commodifying Aboriginal literature. This is an important point when considering how Aboriginal writing should be treated within the contemporary environment and addresses issues around who is writing for whom. Wheeler calls for us to place the author's voice at the centre of our reading, and acknowledges that this has not always happened.

The major themes of this book highlight the various obstacles in the recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty. These obstacles continue to delineate Aboriginal voices today. This text, while centring on Aboriginal voices, challenges the way that we think about traditional literature and Aboriginal literature as being dialogically different. Aboriginal literature challenges traditional literary genres by connecting past, present and future Aboriginal cultural practice. It is living, breathing, dynamic and encompasses many different forms of self-expression. *The Companion to Australian Aboriginal Literature* provides readers with a broad view of the central concerns of Australian Aboriginal literature, as well as the issues and concerns which have threatened such works. Each of the eleven essays in the text asks us to expand our understanding of what we do and do not consider Australian Aboriginal literature to be.

Jess Coyle, University of Melbourne