Anne Brewster. *Giving This Country a Memory: Contemporary Aboriginal Voices of Australia*. Cambria Press, 2015. 300pp
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From Barthes to Foucault, declarations of the death of the author have been crucial in de-fetishizing the singular authority of a work's originator as the guarantor of that text's meaning. Writers from colonised backgrounds, however, have often worried about the erasure of identity and cultural specificity implicit in this nonetheless crucial caveat. Postcolonial theorists who have nuanced or challenged the claim of authorial death/absence include Edward Said in his *Beginnings: Intention and Method* and Édouard Glissant across multiple topoi within his oeuvre.[i] If the modernist author had to die to reopen the possibility of multiple interpretations, the Indigenous subject has often been absented in advance from any role in the interpretive paradigm surrounding their work. Aboriginal authors in Australia have been conscious of such limits of the 'death of the author' thesis for some time, but it seems that this past year heralded a new attention and reorientation in relation to this question. In her keynote, delivered at the opening of the 2015 ASAL Conference, held at UNSW Canberra, Melissa Lucashenko boldly stated: the 'Aboriginal author is not dead.' Non-Indigenous scholars of Aboriginal literature will, it seems, need to be increasingly self-conscious of the ethics of methodology today and it is into this situation that Anne Brewster's new work inserts itself in a timely fashion.

Brewster contributes to this disciplinary shift by noting that the 'expressive modern individual' premise of the Western author-position has been withheld from Aboriginal and other Indigenous writers (xi). Brewster's *Giving this Country a Memory: Contemporary Aboriginal Voices of Australia* is structured around single-author focused chapters engaging with a range of important established and emerging Aboriginal writers including Kim Scott, Romaine Moreton, Jeanine Leane, Melissa Lucashenko, Marie Munkara, Alf Taylor and Doris Pilkington Garimara. Each chapter provides a survey of each author's career and work that is, crucially contextualised through an edited selection from extensive interviews that Brewster conducted with each of the authors. As such, the book functions effectively both as a resource and as scholarship: an introduction to the field for new students and scholars and a novel work of scholarship in its own right.

Brewster's point is not only to restore the privilege of speech to Aboriginal authors that has been withheld by traditional literary criticism, but to show how the author position itself might change in light of such a methodology. For her, 'Aboriginal indigenous literatures' manifest 'a renegotiation of the literary contract—recoding and resignifying subjectivity, aesthetics, canonicity, indigeneity, whiteness and the nation, and transnational connectivities' (xii). This process is engaged implicitly, in the book. Brewster does not seek to theorise how such a recoding and resignifying occurs at an abstract level (which might, indeed, foment a further epistemic blindness), but rather she seeks to exceed the bounds of exegesis in the play between her engagement with the authors and her own analysis. Over and against interpretation in a vacuum, the book aspires to draw out, 'the complex and entangled specificities of the various contexts (bodily, spiritual, cultural, historical, gendered, generational, geopolitical, regional, classed, religious and sexual) from which the work emerged' (xiii).

Brewster's book succeeds in this endeavour particularly when it calls attention, for the reader, to the way the interpretive sections develop observations of the author her or himself. For instance, when Brewster evokes sovereignty in her interview with Kim Scott, Scott notes that

'sovereignty is a translation—it's a metaphor and it's strategic. It's not a Noongar word,' before he proceeds to suggest the complex relation between notions of 'life force' and path manifest in the Noongar word *Birdiya* (19). In Brewster's interpretation, this is registered as a move in Scott's career from a 'deconstructive gaze' addressed to 'the regulatory discourses mobilised for the superintendence of indigenous peoples' (28) toward a process of '"anchor[ing] a shimmering nation state via regional indigenous roots"' (Scott's words, 37). While Brewster still refers to sovereignty in closing her chapter on Scott, this concept is implicitly resignified through his nuancing of the term vis à vis 'regional' Noongar 'roots.' Similarly, Romaine Moreton, in conversation with Brewster, deploys the concept of 'reverence,' by which she means the ability to 'appreciate all sides of an argument rather than occupy a single position'—a process seen to emerge from embodiment (45). Brewster's discussion of Moreton's work dutifully and with detail engages its corporeality, the bodily presence signified in lines like 'this is my earth /she's the colour of /blak' given in Moreton's poem 'Blak Beauty' (71). Similarly, in Brewster's engagement with Jeanine Leane's work, the trope of secrecy given in the title of her poetry collection *Dark Secrets* is examined, discussed and theorised by the two thinkers in the interview (84) to return as a rethinking of satire in Brewster's reading of Leane's work (105–6).

The interview and essay on Lucashenko's work calls attention to themes of authenticity to violence and the latter is particularly usefully taken up by Brewster in a reading of feminine agency. For Brewster, down to the level of Lucashenko's sentences, an intersectional account of lateral violence emerges in which readers are exposed to the 'multidimensionality of oppression' (136). This analysis of multidimensionality engages violence against Aboriginal women in such a way as to avoid dismissive stereotyping. The question of stereotypes also becomes a focus of Marie Munkara's work, which readers often find difficult because of the stereotypes (say, of Asian characters) that is seems to conjure. Brewster is able to show, following Homi Bhabha's critique of the stereotypes of colonial discourse that, in Munkara's work—as differently in Alf Taylor's—'appropriating and redrawing stereotype' (183) Munkara sabotages these colonial tropes themselves. Munkara, in her interview, also points out the sarcasm and ironic of such depictions, when they appear to manifest as internalisations of colonial stereotype (159). In both her analyses of Munkara and Taylor's work, Brewster draws out a complex and mobile reading of the objects and subjects of Aboriginal humour deployed in these authors' works. As Brewster puts it, 'Aboriginal gallows humour is not an index of passivity but of survival in the face of extreme suffering' (181). Along with, for instance, Sally Morgan's work, Doris Pilkington Garimara's writing has been, perhaps the most influential of stolen generations narratives. Brewster calls attention to this leadership role to show how even as Pilkington Garimara, "bears witness to a violent history of child removal and gendered abuse, she is writing from a position of authority and not that of a powerless victim" (253). This positionality leads Brewster to a whole reading of the unsettling of the passive position of the analysand in trauma theory and psychoanalysis. In each of these subtle ways, Brewster theorises out of the authors' own observations around the praxis they are implicitly performing and nuancing in their writing.

As such, part of the effectiveness of Brewster's method is to draw on and develop observations the writers themselves make of their own work, to ground interpretation in a (re)conceptualisation of the author's work in the themes and concerns of Aboriginal thought and lived experience. The simple and subtle strength of Brewster's ethical method implies a shift in modalities of reading for critics (and particularly non-Indigenous critics) of Indigenous literature. Will all analyses of Aboriginal literature need necessarily to be structured explicitly around such a methodology? Brewster herself notes, through Lucashenko's and Leane's

observations that the texts will no doubt have a life of their own and critics will continue to depart from them with novel observation. Lucashenko notes that the Indigenous author 'can't [always] makes [her]self available to readers' (xiii) but is quick to assert that the texts themselves will, at their best, 'shift that readership slightly' (xiii). Whether literally present to the reader or the critic, the texts of Aboriginal literature will ensure that "the Aboriginal author is not dead" and Brewster's work makes a worthy contribution in emphasising this fact.

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[i] See Michael R. Griffiths, 'Toward Relation: Négritude, Post-structuralism, and the Specter of Intention in the Work of Édouard Glissant' in *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture*. 36, 1 (2014). Special Issue: 'After Glissant: Caribbean Aesthetics and the Politics of Relation,' Edited by Kahlil Chaar-Pérez and Emily Maguire.