be a valuable resource for many in the field: those constructing the portfolios and those struggling to evaluate them.  

Stony Brook, New York


Reviewed by Aesha Adams, The Pennsylvania State University

In an aptly titled introduction, “Literacy in African American Churches: A Conversation Between the Academy and the Church Begins,” Beverly Moss explains how she came to the project of examining literacy within African American church communities. As a member of this community, she recalls listening to a sermon as both a church member and as a researcher. She was intrigued by what the minister said as well as how it was said. This moment, as the title reflects, speaks to the larger significance of her work: that is, Moss’s study dismantles the dichotomies between the academic and the spiritual. Often under the guise of the mantra “separation of church and state,” matters of the spirit are characterized as irrationality or at best, emotionality. As such, they are devalued and pitted against the rational, logical academy. Moss’s ethnographic study of four African American church communities merges both religious and academic concerns as she asks, “what constitutes a literate text in African American churches?” (139). Because she values these church communities and takes them seriously, she does not attempt to separate their belief systems from their literacy practices but instead recognizes them as interdependent. As such, Moss’s work disrupts dominant notions of literacy and literate texts as static, autonomous, written texts. Her study offers an alternative model of a literate text that holds profound implications for the composition classroom.

Moss situates her project within larger, on-going conversations about literacy acquisition and the literate practices of African Americans. Drawing upon the scholarly traditions of the New Literacy Studies as well as African American Literacy studies, Moss makes a case for the social nature of literacy. New Literacy theorists argue that literacy cannot be separated from its social context, which includes politics, culture, and power (see Heath, Gee, Street, Giroux, and others). These scholars use the term “literacies” rather than literacy to underscore opposition to monocultural, monolithic, and ideologically neutral conceptualizations of literacy. In addition to the political nature of literacy, African American literacy theorists emphasize that reading and writing are not the only components of literacy; cultural practices, identity, and language use influence the purposes and modes of oral, literate, and postliterate texts among African Americans (see Royster, Logan, Richardson, and others). Moss extends these discussions by broadening the domains
where one can find literacy, namely, the African American church, thereby confronting the myths that African Americans are illiterate and their language practices are deficient.

Her project is based on several key conceptions of literacy, all of which seek to highlight the social nature of literacy. For Moss, literacy is “a complex, social process involving multiple levels of participation by rhetors and audience, intertextual relationships (i.e., interdependent relations between oral, written, and sometimes musical texts) and complex belief systems of members of particular communities” (6). Moss names three key markers of literacy in churches that she develops in later chapters: “the presence of multiple participants in the literacy event; the presence of intertextual relationships; and the influence of cultural norms and ideology that shape the way participants, intertextuality, and discourse interact” (7). This conception of literacy as a social process, also referred to as “community literacy,” assumes collaboration by multiple participants in interchangeable roles in order to create a literate text. In this way, literacy is both process and product. Therefore, Moss challenges dominant conceptions of the radical individual, dismantles rigid boundaries between writer/speaker and audience, and punctures the illusion of the static text found in conceptions of academic literacy.

Moss extends this idea of literacy as a social process in African American churches by means of her textual analyses of sermons, artifacts, interviews, and other data gathered from her ethnographic study of four African American church communities. Moss spent five years collecting data from three churches in the Chicago area and one in Columbus, Ohio in order to demonstrate the cross-locational nature of the literacy events she describes throughout the book. To the extent that Moss’ conception of literacy as social process is tied to cultural ideology, she must first lay out the complex belief system that undergirds the Black church and shapes participants’ beliefs about language use, behavior, and their roles within the community. For those unfamiliar with this community and its rituals, Moss provides extensive background knowledge of the historical, cultural, and at times, theological belief systems of the communities. For those already familiar with these communities, she provides provocative interpretations of these texts.

The bulk of the study focuses on three different ministers from three varying denominations who represent different preaching styles and composing practices: Reverend M, a “manuscript minister” from a United Church of Christ, who wrote out his sermons in their entirety; Doctor N, a “nonmanuscript minister” from a Baptist Church who rarely even used notes when he preached; and Reverend P, a “partial manuscript minister” from a Pentecostal Holiness Church who “wrote out approximately one fourth of his sermon” (10). Moss’s goal in selecting these varied preachers was to explore the relationship between written and oral texts within African American churches.

Moss’ analysis of the literacy events surrounding the sermon as a way to examine interaction between written and oral texts within the church is particularly interesting. Following Shirley Brice Heath, Moss defines literacy events as “any
action sequence, involving one or more persons, in which the production and/or comprehension of print play a role” (146). For instance, Moss focuses on the phenomena of the church bulletin and offers a fascinating read of these artifacts that explores the relationship between oral and written texts to complete the text. Depending upon the church community, the bulletins list the order of service, church-related and non church-related announcements, prayer lists, calendars of events, names of church officials, spaces for sermon notes, and memory verses, Scripture readings, and responsive readings. Moss interprets these weekly bulletins as ways to disseminate information that is important to the church community. They also serve as markers of the ways in which reading, writing, and speaking interact in the church. Most of the information on the bulletins requires reading that is individual in nature; congregants usually read it alone before the service or use it to take notes about the sermon. In other words, these events do not take place in unison. However, there are prescribed literacy events that do engage the congregation as a whole, namely the responsive readings, scripture memory verses, and hymns which are read and/or performed in concert. For Moss, these events represent a shared knowledge within the community. Furthermore, the church bulletins demonstrate that “value is placed on reading, memorizing, and reciting . . . and also on community participation” within African American churches (41).

Moss builds upon this notion of shared knowledge, among other important concepts, in her third and fourth chapters, where she offers a more rigorous analysis of the transcripts of the sermons. Ministers enter a unique rhetorical situation in which they are both leaders and members of the community and must therefore rely upon several key strategies within the sermon to create, maintain, and negotiate a community identity: shifts in point of view, use of the familiar, codeswitching, shared knowledge, and dialogue, otherwise known as call and response. These rhetorical strategies work to blur the distinctions between preacher and congregation, creating spaces for the people to “enter the text and become part of the dialogue that constitutes the text” (81). In Chapter Four, Moss argues that the literacy events and traditions she identifies in the three church communities are not unique to these sites; instead, they exist across locations and point to a larger literacy tradition. To support her claim, she follows Rev. M to her home church in Ohio where he was preaching a week-long revival. Rev. M’s revival sermons also represent intertextuality, that is, the interweaving of song and the spoken and written word (127). Moss explains that this intertextuality is indicative of the cultural ideology of the community: “intertextuality is a key concept in understanding relations between texts (including conversational and written texts), between and among events, between events and cultural ideology” (128). Rev. M quotes songs within his sermons and sings to illustrate major concepts, as well as using songs at the end of the sermon as an extension of the sermon. According to Moss, this intertextuality works to link his sermons to African American history, creates space for the audience to enter and sometimes even take over the text, and blurs distinctions between the sacred and secular.
Although her intent is to demonstrate that church literacy traditions are cross-locational and that these literacies help to create and maintain communities, I found Moss's analysis of Rev. M in a “new” community strained. She undercuts her claim when she describes the “new” community Rev. M enters. The host pastor of the Ohio church revival, a woman Moss calls Rev. S, was Rev. M's protégé. She served as an intern at his Chicago church during her seminary years and moved on to be an associate pastor there. Although the Ohio church is smaller than the Chicago one in terms of membership and resources, Rev. S models her church after Rev. M's. Also, Rev. M is no stranger to the congregation; he regularly preaches revival here, and the people anticipate his visits. I therefore question how “new” this community really is. While the opportunity to see him outside of his own four walls was useful, the argument could have been strengthened by providing another context or even looking briefly at a preacher not previously discussed.

Furthermore, Moss's study glosses over the question of gender. She addresses it parenthetically in her first chapter: “Of course, I refer specifically to the men listed here, not ministers as men generically. A growing number of African-American churches are pastored by women. Most of the scholars I quote from directly regretfully use the male pronoun to refer to preachers” (24). While Moss does not claim the study of Black women preachers as an intellectual project, the fact that they are missing from the analysis is particularly odd considering that Moss's own minister, Rev. S, is female. This problem may be indicative of the limitations of her methodology. Through ethnography, Moss offers us a panoramic view of the African American church and the people and places she observed, progressively narrowing the scope, presenting varying snapshots of particular churches, preachers, and sermons with each chapter; although she focuses and narrows the discussion on various sites, some aspects are blurred within the picture; others are missed entirely by the scope of the lens. For instance, we hear only voices of the audience as a whole (i.e., call and response during a sermon) and do not get individual reactions to the preachers. Moss claims that ministers are spokespersons and representatives of the community, but she does not interrogate how this may affect women in the congregation.

Ultimately, Moss’s work offers up an alternative model of a literate text. She rests her case in Chapter Five in which she outlines the major implications of her study for literacy learning and teaching. In her review of the major tenets of the literacy practices within African American churches, Moss exposes the disparities as well as the commonplaces between the academic literacy model of the classroom and literacies students bring into the classroom. Because of the ways in which the sermon blurs the boundaries between speakers/writers and audience through dialogue, shifts in point of view through first person singular and plural pronouns and collaboration through intertextuality, sermons function as community texts. According to Moss, a community text is one “where multiple participants must be present to ‘write’ in order for the text to exist” (138). A particularly provocative implication of the notion of the community text is how it complicates questions
about plagiarism and ownership of texts. As the preachers noted, the “sermon belongs to the moment” (143). As both process and product that is dependent upon audience-speaker relationships, the sermon becomes a new text each time. It cannot be duplicated. As such, the community “owns” the text.

This community text requires the reconfiguration of traditional conceptions of relationships between speakers, writers, and texts as well as the development of new terms to describe these relationships. Western conceptions of the rhetorical appeals become inadequate. Whereas logos, reason, is privileged and presented as a universal concept in Western traditions, the Black sermon, through its dependence on intertextuality, reconfigures what counts as logos. Moss argues that the sermon also calls into question the privileging of the essay-text model of literacy in the academy. Her study offers an alternative model that does not necessarily replace the dominant model but demonstrates that they are all models that work simultaneously. Students who have the sermon as their primary model of formal literacy bring it into the classroom and must negotiate between the two models.

Moss argues that this burden should not rest solely on students; educators must develop tools to help them navigate their way. The first step is the recognition of multiple literacies as effective, not deficient, literacies in the classroom. Then teachers can develop dynamic pedagogies that address students’ needs. Moss suggests that teachers use discourse analysis in the classroom as a way to discover both conflicts and common ground between students’ community literacies and academic literacy. In this approach, both teachers and students would bring in examples of formal discourse from their home communities to discover commonalities and sites of conflict. Recognizing that this approach is no easy task due to political and budgetary constraints on teacher-training, Moss ends her study by calling for more research.

I see myself as a member of Moss’s audience due to my personal experiences in church communities as well as my research interests in the rhetorical strategies of Black women preachers. As such, I found Moss’s study to be a refreshing, ground-breaking look at an important community that has been overlooked in rhetorical, composition, and literacy studies. Moss takes these communities seriously, analyzing their literacy traditions on their own terms. Through her writing style, especially the use of personal narrative, she demonstrates how her own membership in these communities has influenced her writing practices. Additionally, because of the broad audience she is addressing, which includes compositionists, literacy teachers, researchers, critical theorists, and the church community members themselves, Moss strikes an intricate balance between providing contextual information and textual analysis. Readers will benefit from the larger implications of her study, as she provides a useful framework for pedagogy development.

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WORKS CITED


Reviewed by Kelly Lowe, Mount Union College

In WPA Circles, the question of how best to organize the administration of writing programs has not been widely debated. Many programs are the result of forceful personalities or historical accidents rather than conscious planning.

--Christine Hult, “Politics Redux: The Organization and Administration of Writing Programs”

Ten years ago Christine Hult’s comments were particularly apt. At that time, I was writing a dissertation which theorized a postmodern Writing Program Administration, and I began by arguing that there was little at the time that could be called Writing Program Administration Theory, citing Edward White’s book Developing Successful College Writing Programs as “the only book-length theory of writing program administration to date.” How things have changed. The past decade has seen tremendous growth in the scholarship of writing program administration. Books and edited collections by Joseph Janangelo and Kristine Hansen, Diana George, Linda Myers-Breslin, Irene Ward and William Carpenter, and Shirley

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