

TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURE

Michèle Grossman, *Entangled Subjects: Indigenous / Australian Cross-Cultures of Talk, Text and Modernity* (Rodopi, 2013)

Michèle Grossman's *Entangled Subjects: Indigenous / Australian Cross-Cultures of Talk, Text and Modernity* explores, as the very title of the book suggests, issues of 'talk' and 'text' in the area of contemporary collaborative Indigenous Australian writing. This work represents a continuation of Grossman's scholarly work on cross-cultural research and Indigenous Australian writing and representation, highlighting important debates and issues surrounding this complex and important field of inquiry. Grossman untangles her topic eloquently using compelling argumentation and generous referencing. Positioning her research in the context of her own cultural history, location and privileges, as well as her previous academic work, Grossman exposes and intervenes in current debates surrounding 'orality' and 'literacy' and their problematic rendering as dichotomies.

In her 'Introduction', Grossman discusses the complexity and the socio-historical and political underpinnings of 'orality' and 'literacy' figured as 'vexed' terms. She discusses the identification of literacy with the rise and development of Western modernity as a way of demarcating the 'civilized' and the 'primitive'. Engaging with contemporary discourses on literacy, Grossman criticises certain social anthropologists whose work contributed to associating 'orality' with premodern and primitive forms of cognition which are in turn 'transformed' by acquisition of literacy.

Chapter One, entitled 'Unsettling Subjects: Critical Perspectives on Selves in Writing and Writing Selves', continues the discussion on the written word in a cross-cultural setting. Grossman sees Indigenous Australian cultures of the written word as both constituted by and resistant to paradigms of Western-based knowledge and representation. As a direct consequence of colonialism and imperialism, Aborigines are amongst the most researched and the most heavily textualised peoples in the world, with Western scientists writing about them without even visiting the continent, as a part of, in Grossman's own words, the 'bid for advancing and refining the central, globalizing narratives of modernity'. Within this context, the introduction of literacy carries a particular historical burden of imperial domination, dispossession, repression and disenfranchising Aboriginal ways of viewing and being in the world. Nonetheless, Grossman argues that writing and literacy are not primarily or merely 'tainted fruits of the imperial tree' for Indigenous peoples, either in Australia or elsewhere. Challenging attitudes that the process of decolonisation necessarily involves a complete repudiation of the coloniser's language, Grossman draws from numerous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander intellectuals and writers who use this language for various emancipatory, revolutionary and cultural projects and aims, highlighting the ways in which the Indigenous peoples have interacted with and made their own systems of writing and literacy-based forms of knowledge. Continuing with a critique of a popular trope constructing Aboriginal culture and people as 'naturally oral' Grossman challenges the very concept of 'nature' which govern the discourses of 'primitivity'. Associating Aboriginal culture with a monolithic view of 'orality' serves to perpetuate discourses of authenticity, contrasting 'nature' (as 'oral' or 'Aboriginal') and 'civilisation (as the 'literate West')'. Grossman sees this identification with the natural as part of a neo-colonial and ahistorical project which maintain hierarchies and oppressions.

Chapter Two, entitled '(Re)writing Histories: The Emergence and Development of

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Indigenous Australian Life Writing', focuses on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life-writing figured as relevant genres for Indigenous Australians in which they re-write hegemonic historical accounts of invasion and settlement, intervening in historical accounts with their own perspectives. The chapter also engages with an influential essay by Stephen Muecke which generated a great deal of debate. The essay criticises the 'repressive / expressive' matrix which according to Muecke constituted a great deal of early theoretical analyses of Indigenous Australian life-writing. Grossman engages with the critical responses to the essay and offers her own reading of its meaning and influence. Using Foucault's term of 'dispersed genealogies' applied to Indigenous Australian life writing, Grossman underscores the importance of the essay in its refusal to provide a homogenous theory, offering instead multiple locations of the emergence of the genre.

In Chapter Five entitled 'Gularabulu: Stories of West Kimberley', Grossman returns to the discussions of 'orality' and the damaging discourses of primitivity. She finds that the idea of 'progress' and 'civilization', when figured teleologically, (along with the 'rise' of modernity) poses problems in its inability to account for the persistence of oral modes of production without resorting to primitivity and perpetuating binaries. Arguing for a consideration of the complex interconnections between oral and textual modes of Aboriginal production, Grossman explores how these two intersect in a specific historical and cross-cultural setting. This way, Grossman moves from a problematic ahistoricism that homogenises Aboriginal experiences and ignores the role of literacy around issues of Aboriginal struggles and rights.

Using the examples of Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors and editors and examining their collaborations as sites of tension, encounter and exchange that are never neutral and frequently vexed, Grossman's work intervenes and contributes to discussions surrounding Indigenous Australian writing and the critical and scholarly attention it inspires. Engaging with certain theories and arguments, Grossman complicates ideas surrounding orality and literacy to reveal complexities, historical junctures, meeting points and dynamic entanglements.

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