

BOOK REVIEWS

GENERAL

EPSKAMP, KEES. *On Printed Matter and Beyond: Media, Orality and Literacy*. CESO Paperback No. 23. The Hague: Centre for the Study of Education in Developing Countries, 1995. 136 pages. Illustrations, tables, bibliography, appendices. Paper Dfl. 30.—; US\$15.00; ISBN 90-6443-210-4.

This book is a collection of Kees Epskamp's papers presented at various international meetings. Most were written in Dutch and translated into English by the language lab of CESO. Though not always related in terms of sequence and logic, they all seem to touch in some degree on the theme of the role of media in transmitting culture. The topics of literacy and education act as subthemes in the book, since they are often brought up in relation to media; this is probably why *Media, Orality, and Literacy* was chosen as the book's subtitle.

The first chapter starts with an interesting contrast and comparison of oral tradition and literary tradition; for instance: "In literate societies, messages can be stored and transferred in *absentia* of the sender. In oral cultures, however, messages are always transferred in *presentia* of the speaker. Oral tradition brings people together, the written tradition engenders greater individuality—reading being a rather solitary activity." After discussing literary tradition, the author moves on to talk about the history of written cultures by going back to ancient scripts, e.g., Egyptian, Sumerian, etc. The author calls this graphic communication, which renders literacy visible by introducing broad areas of visual materials.

The second chapter examines a variety of visual media, such as comic strips in North Atlantic countries, photo novels in Latin American and Mediterranean countries, and cartoons in China. The author discusses how these newly developed media have been used for social and political propaganda as well as for education. Chapter 3 switches back to look at the relationship between oral tradition and printed matter, particularly in Brazil. In Brazil there is a traditional genre called *cordel* literature that is presently used in novels and newspapers, as it is suitable for the description of both traditional and modern subject matter (including current events). It is thus seen in the oral tradition, in print, and in the electronic media.

Chapter 4 moves to another form of communication: audio media—that is, the radio. The relation between storytelling and radio drama is discussed using case studies from African countries. Chapter 5 continues on the topic of radio, this time focusing on the role of radio in adult education in Latin American countries such as Ecuador, Bolivia, Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic. Chapter 6 introduces the audio-visual media: television and film. The author discusses how American soap operas function as a new form of melodrama that has replaced traditional folktales and created new lifestyles for American audiences. Similarly, *telenovelas* are made to suit the tastes of Latin American audiences. The characters and stories in both American soap operas and Latin American *telenovelas* reflect the family relationships and family problems in their respective societies.

Chapter 7, unlike the other chapters, is devoted to various forms of media in Indonesia. The range is wide, including traditional oral media, conventional printed media, television, and radio, and also covering the subjects of school textbooks, and general books. The focus

then seems to shift to a consideration of how various forms of media are used to promote reading, literacy, and education. The author is also concerned about how to stimulate and develop reading among children and how to help people in rural areas get access to reading materials, which are mainly distributed in the urban areas.

The last two chapters concern literacy in developing countries, particularly in Asia and Africa. The popularity of the electronic media, especially television, is questioned and identified as the cause of the setbacks in literacy, since people seem to spend time watching television rather than reading. However, the author recognizes that television is not the only cause of failures in promoting literacy—other causes lie in the home environment, community environment, and school environment. Turning to historical and cultural factors, the author accepts that in most rural areas the local languages are still used in ordinary daily life, while the national language (which came later with the concept of nationhood) is more of an “outsider’s language,” and that this is why it is hard to convince people of the importance of literacy. Some countries in Africa solved the problem by transcribing folktales related by traditional storytellers in the local languages, translating them into the national language, editing and printing them, then using them to practice reading in order to achieve literacy.

Overall, it appears to me that the book touches upon a variety of topics, and oftentimes it may seem confusing to go back and forth between media and literacy. My guess is that the author has three subjects in mind at the same time: one, the importance of folklore in oral societies; two, the emergence and the use of new forms of (mass) media in various countries; and three, the problem of literacy in conjunction with the existence of these new media. The link between these three subjects in the author’s mind lies, I believe, in the fact that, first of all, traditional folklore deals with “the folk” in nonliterate societies, while modern media are the new form of communication of “the mass” in literate societies. Whether it be the “the folk” or “the mass,” they comprise the majority of the population in the respective types of country. Second, traditional folklore through time has functioned as both entertainment and education in traditional societies, and so have the mass media in modern societies—this is why the function of the mass media in entertainment and in education are brought up alternately in the discussion. Third, folklore and mass media are mediated by the fact that traditional folklore, to some extent, shapes both the form and content of the programs broadcast in the mass media today. Thus, though the book may appear eclectic, it is at the same time comprehensive and insightful.

All in all, I think this is quite an interesting work. It discusses various forms of media and cites case studies from a number of different cultures. The book, in effect, illustrates the development of the media, from oral tradition to written tradition and up to the modern mass media in the present age of information. Besides, one rarely finds books on mass media that try to bridge oral-traditional cultures and literary-modern cultures, as this one does.

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AVERBUCH, IRIT. *The Gods Come Dancing: A Study of the Japanese Ritual Dance of Yamabushi Kagura*. Cornell East Asia Series 79. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University East Asia Program, 1995. xvi + 326 pages. Glossaries, b/w photographs, bibliography, index. Hardcover US\$25.00; ISBN 1-885445-67-9. Paper US\$15.00; ISBN 1-885445-79-2.