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From the Editor

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FROM THE EDITOR

The theme of our spring issue of *Moebius*, “The Dumbing Down of America,” explores significant issues the U.S. faces: political change, the economy, education, etc.

We’re proud of this issue. We’re publishing Ruth Ozeki’s talk from fall 2007. *All Over Creation* was chosen as the Preface book. Her talk is smart and funny.

In addition, we have an analysis of how religious groups are using the Internet, and a fine investigation of the subjectivity of thinking about the judgments we have as to cultural “dumbing.” Interviews are always a popular feature of *Moebius*; we have seven provocative people with much on their minds. Do take a look at our two wonderful short stories and the fine, strong poems in this issue. Our two book reviews, one giving us a vision of China’s development and the other a sense of Afghanistan, will make you want to read some non-fiction.

Are we, as Emerson observed in 1837 “The American Scholar,” aiming at low subjects? The answer is complicated, probably “yes” and “no.” But, evidence from various study groups and research suggests that students are not being well-prepared in traditional ways:

- video culture has triumphed over print culture;
- even though Americans are better “educated” than ever, they have a shaky grasp of basic geography, science and history;
- reading has declined, not only among the poorly educated, but among college graduates;
- research suggests strongly that babies between 8-16 months recognize an average of 6-8 fewer words for every hour spent watching TV;
- the average sound bite of a presidential candidate is now 7.8 seconds compared to an average of 42 seconds forty years ago.

Educational demands have clearly changed. My first college composition texts were very different from the texts I now use when I teach. The “how to write” text was called *Using Rhetoric*, and the chapters all had the word “rhetoric” in them: “Rhetoric and the Self,” “Rhetoric and Knowledge,” “Rhetoric and Logic.” Unlike today, then, the word “rhetoric,” did not have only negative connotations. My other text was all the fiction big names: Chekhov, Conrad, Faulkner, James, Joyce, Lawrence, Mann, Mansfield, etc. (notice the one woman writer).

Nevertheless, we’ve moved forward in important ways: education is more egalitarian and many more students are able to go to college, the Canon has opened to many writers of different genders and ethnicities, and educators have improved teaching strategies to fit better the changing student populations.

Whether we’re dumber or not as a culture, we should be vigilant and thoughtful about where we are and where we may be headed. ☹

*Mary Kay Harrington, Managing Editor
Moebius*