tive reading of social niceties.—*Margaret Schaus, Haverford College, Haverford, Pennsylvania.*

Dillon, George L. *Contending Rhetorics: Writing in Academic Disciplines.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Pr., 1991. 175 p. acid-free paper, $27.50 (ISBN 0–253–31743–6). LC 90–25572.

Many branches of scholarship have in the past decade become increasingly preoccupied with their own discourse. While this is certainly a healthy preoccupation, it can also be distracting and perhaps even hazardous—rather like trying to drive while looking at one's windshield instead of through it. *Contending Rhetorics* is an attempt by George L. Dillon, a professor of English at the University of Washington, to sort out and evaluate some of the main recent contributions to the study of how different academic disciplines use written language to create and regulate themselves.

The book begins with an examination of the relationship between rhetoric and rationality, and of the extent to which rationality can be defined as a (or as *the*) fundamental attribute of academic discourse. This is followed by a discussion of the norms of formal academic communication, principally those of "impersonality/autonomy/universalism." The author then identifies two "aspects" of academic communication: there is a technical aspect that aims to contribute to a body of public knowledge in the discipline, is based on specific (but normally unexamined) assumptions, and conventionally ignores the personal or political background of the contributor; but there is also a critical aspect that seeks to study and evaluate those assumptions that underlie the production and acceptance of knowledge—the technical aspect—of the discipline. The latter activity is often undertaken by an outsider, someone who is not a practitioner of the discipline. Dillon then discusses three instances of this critical activity in the form of social studies of science; all three of the works he examines are examples of social constructionism, a per-

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spective or method that approaches social phenomena as ultimately discursive constructs. Considerable attention is devoted in this section to the perennial question of whether or how the social scientist observer fundamentally influences (or, in a sense, even creates) the phenomena observed. The concern here, therefore, is not simply about the extent to which scientists can communicate about the natural world, but also about the extent to which social scientists can communicate about communication among scientists.

The next section of the book reviews three efforts by social scientist practitioners—in the fields of economics, sociology, and ethnography—to study and evaluate the scholarly discourse and rhetorical conventions of their own disciplines. This is followed by a review of three works by historians on the problems of defining historical discourse, especially its differences from scientific discourse and its relationship to literature and literary studies. Dillon then considers theories of academic discussion and argument—or, as he prefers to call it, dialectic. In this section, he concentrates principally on Michael Billig's work on social psychology and Richard Rorty's theory of philosophy as conversation. The final section of the book considers the teaching of the techniques of scholarly communication, in which Dillon reviews three essays that "regard the academic world as a discourse community . . . and view the writing course . . . as a means of initiation into that community."

This book expects a great deal from the reader. It assumes that the reader is already somewhat familiar with current trends and discussions in the social sciences and humanities. The intent of the book, however, is neither to redirect those trends, nor to single out or endorse any particular group of the perspectives it considers—a point Dillon makes clear at the outset: "Our account, or account of accounts, will therefore be more academic than polemical, more oriented toward drawing distinctions and pursuing implications than kicking butts, tipping the boat to the other side, or making a clean and thorough break with the past." The book also leaves to the reader much of the work of evaluating and comparing the different "accounts" discussed. To be sure, by choosing to examine these particular works, Dillon is making a value judgment about the special utility and contribution of those particular studies, and certainly he provides an erudite and considered commentary, but the book remains for the most part a relatively unconnected series of critical summaries, a kind of extended literature review. The purpose and intended audience of the book are, therefore, somewhat obscure, as if the author were unable to make up his mind as to whether he was writing an introduction or a scholarly contribution to the subject. There is also no real justification as to why these particular works were selected for analysis, and the author makes very little effort to cumulate, synthesize, or even to contrast in any depth or detail the different perspectives presented. Useful and insightful comments are certainly made along the way, but one misses any effort to pull all of these varied ideas into any kind of meaningful whole or vision that would provide some overview of the current state of the study of academic discourse. The book ends with a three-page conclusion which certainly makes a few good points (e.g., the "rhetoric of impersonal objectivity" is "being challenged by the rhetoric of reflexive self-awareness"). These same points, however, could have been made (and, for the most part, were made) in the "Introduction" and the body of the book.

The legibility of the book is somewhat hampered by its style, which ranges from breezy, hip slang to very intricate and occasionally obtuse compound sentences: "The books we have examined . . . are both apologies for their disciplines (as they conceive them) and challenges to their opponents to answer specific criticisms of their own work and to field alternative accounts both of the knowledge to be gained from the discipline and the appropriate rhetoric for developing it." Tracking down the antecedents of all the "theys," "thems," and "theirs" (not to

mention the final "it") in such a sentence requires considerable time and ingenuity. Surely a professor of rhetoric and composition can write better sentences than this. Difficult texts are warranted and expected, if the authors have difficult things to say—if they need to stretch the language, to express the inexpressible. That is not the case here. This book should aim to elucidate the complex and relevant ideas it examines, but instead it sometimes needlessly obfuscates them.

Although a difficult and problematic book, it has nevertheless the potential to be quite useful for a few very specialized audiences, including especially academic librarians. Since it is the ultimate function of academic libraries to support and promote scholarly communication across space and time, academic librarians need to learn as much as possible about the methods, conventions, and limitations of academic discourse—starting with some insight into just what academic discourse is and why it is an issue of such current interest in the social sciences and humanities. *Contending Rhetorics* is a very up-to-date starting point for such study. Individual chapters can be read relatively independently. The documentation in the notes is helpful and selective, so that readers less than fully familiar with current trends in the fields treated can—and will probably need to—locate and read some of the sources cited in order to make better sense of the text.

The book can also be approached as a kind of manual on how all types of scholarly communication can be critically examined. Academic librarians should be prepared to apply such methods to the study of the discourse that composes those disciplines for which they are responsible. The critical concerns and methods described in the book should also be applied to our own discipline of library and information science. We need to decide for ourselves (certainly no one else will do it for us) how the writings that populate our professional journals create our discipline and relate to reality.

Finally, *Contending Rhetorics* should also be of interest to academic librarians

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because it offers some valuable insights into the role and responsibility of the outsider inside the academy. Several of the writers discussed in the book, especially those who undertake the "critical" approach to academic discourse, are necessarily observers of, rather than participants in, the disciplines they seek to examine—a situation analogous to that of the academic librarian. The whole book, in fact, consisting as it does primarily of an "account of accounts," is itself fundamentally bibliographical, in the extended sense of a conscious (and, in this case, critical) restatement of what has already been written. For that reason alone, the book is well worth perusing.—*Ross Atkinson, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York.*

The Evolution of Library Automation: Management Issues and Future Perspectives. Ed. by Gary M. Pitkin. Westport, Conn.: Meckler, 1991. 189p. (ISBN 0–88736–811–5). LC 91–4988.

For those with literal minds or long memories, the term *automation* is likely to conjure up images of robot assembly lines or other machines replacing human workers. As the term undergoes its own evolution, however, automation has become nearly synonymous with the use of computers, and that newer sense is the one used in this collection. The essays in this volume are the papers from a seminar conducted during the Sixth Annual Computers in Libraries Conference. The authors represent a cross-section of management roles (library director, university administrator, automation vendor, etc.), and each covers the broad topic from the perspective of his or her position.

While some attention is given to past developments, the emphasis here is very much on the evolution yet to come. As seen by these contributors, the major theme of that future will be access: access that offers more varied sources of information, that is more widely distributed, and that makes use of more sophisticated searching capabilities. The same topics recur in almost every chapter—proliferation of information in electronic form; emphasis on access over acquisition; increasing demands for direct end-user access and document delivery; pressure for seamless interfaces and greater interconnectivity. Even in cataloging, the current interest in relations between local systems and utilities, intersystem searching, and record transfer is largely related to access. These are, of course, all familiar subjects to academic librarians, and they give promise of exciting developments to come.

Still, one might have hoped for both longer and broader views of library automation. The future depicted here is a well-mapped extrapolation of trends and forces that are already clear, but there is not much speculation about what lies beyond. Forecasting is a risky business, but it might have been well to ask at least one contributor to take the long-term perspective.

Asking each author to write from a particular role must have seemed a clever approach for a seminar, with its opportunities for discussion and debate. Unfortunately, the perspectives turn out to be not all that different. The same major themes are repeated at some length, while other important aspects are hardly covered. For instance, there is little discussion of the impact that electronic texts may have on the way research is done or on the library's role in the research process. Nor is there much mention of the potential for further automation of actual library operations, for example, through use of catalogers' work stations or expert systems for reference work. There are tantalizing glimpses here and there that show that these authors have more to say, if only they had the space and freedom to expand. Ronald F. Miller offers two paragraphs on the global village that could well serve as the basis for a separate chapter. Donald Riggs devotes half of his chapter to expert systems, but only after feeling obliged to fill the other half with a rather prosaic discussion of OPACs.

For all of that, there are rewards to be gained here with a bit of selective reading and judicious skimming. Clifford A. Lynch's chapter gives one of the most cogent, concise, and readable summaries in print of library automation from the