

ADDITIONAL BOOK REVIEWS

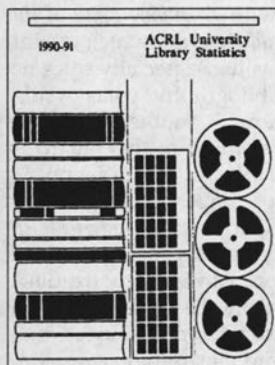
Distinguished Classics of Reference Publishing. Ed. by James Rettig. Phoenix: Oryx Pr., 1992. 356 p. alk. paper, \$55 (ISBN 0-89774-640-6). LC 91-33629.

Romans erected heroic statues and triumphal arches so that future generations would remember their glory. But for compilers of reference works, even those who labor long years in the bibliographic vineyard, immortality usually takes the form of a modestly signed foreword. Sometimes, like Roget, Brewer, and Bartlett, they have the semblance of widespread fame through their eponymous reference works. But who actually gives a thought to Edith Granger when tracking down a line of poetry?

Like their unsung editors, most reference works generate little critical comment aside from reviews in the library

literature. A very few have figured in the history of their publishing firms or in the biographies of exceptionally well-known compilers, like Leslie Stephen and James A. H. Murray. Occasional articles about major reference works do appear in *Reference Services Review*, most notably in the "Landmarks of Reference" series that began in 1980.

Editor James Rettig has set out to remedy this long-standing neglect by collecting profiles of thirty-one major reference works and their compilers. He has chosen the titles carefully to represent a variety of subject areas as well as a range of genres, from atlases and guidebooks to dictionaries and encyclopedias. Each chapter consists of four parts: an analytical, historical essay, the title's publishing history, a selective bibliography of secondary sources, and the chapter footnotes. Most of the analytical essays concentrate on describing and explain-



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ing the conditions surrounding the history and reception of the reference works. Some, like Emily Post's *Etiquette*, are obvious candidates for social analysis. However, Charles Bunge, in his essay on *Brewer's Dictionary*, perceptively identifies a number of Victorian values that contributed to the dictionary's unique mixture. These values included self-improvement, the sanctioning of controlled forms of popular entertainment, and the scholarly respect accorded philology and folk beliefs.

The essays in this collection should interest not only reference librarians but also all those concerned with publishing, scholarship, or information management. The publishing business in both Great Britain and the United States figures in the background of many of the essays, not simply in the histories of individual firms but also in the changes brought about by improved technology down to the current impact of computerized typesetting and CD-ROM. For librarians, these essays should prompt reflections on the beginnings of reference service as well as the role that librarians played in the development of such standard sources as the *Readers' Guide* and the *Encyclopedia of Associations*. At a more speculative level, the descriptions of editorial decisions and compiling methods should stimulate thinking about the organization of knowledge. For example, the intellectual distance between hypertext and Murray's working method for the *Oxford English Dictionary*, thousands of paper slips in cubbyholes, may not be as great as we imagine.

Although there is a great deal of interesting material in the essays, much of it has to be teased out of overly detailed accounts of editorial policies and publishing histories. Most of the authors do not relate their titles to the broader context of the organization of knowledge, the professionalization of scholarship, and the formation of a high culture. The collection would have profited from a concluding essay that drew on examples from the various chapters to present an informed overview of the changing role of reference works and their relationship

to scholarship and official culture. A good example of this approach to the theories, assumptions, and goals behind the compilation of dictionaries and encyclopedias may be found in Tom McArthur's *Worlds of Reference* (Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1986).

Readers opening *Distinguished Classics of Reference* may be disappointed that their particular favorite is missing. I would have liked chapters on Benjamin Spock's *Baby and Child Care* and the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. The absence of any titles dealing with people of color and women, however, is a serious oversight. In the current climate of racism and the backlash against feminism, it is important to profile editors and titles that have attempted to set the historical record straight, sometimes without benefit of academic sponsorship or lavish financial support from publishers and foundations. For example, the noted black scholar Monroe Work compiled, virtually single-handedly, a series of bibliographies culminating in 1928 with *A Bibliography of the Negro in Africa and America*, which retains its great historic value, especially since no comparable bibliography has subsequently appeared. Another reference title that comes to mind in this regard is *Notable American Women*, which set out in part to profile those important individuals omitted from the *Dictionary of American Biography*. Several of the essays in *Distinguished Classics* suffer from careless proofreading. This seems especially disheartening in a book devoted to reference sources that prize accuracy and clarity of expression. In most cases the errors are immediately obvious and simply disrupt momentarily the reader's train of thought.

In his introduction, editor Rettig emphasizes the pleasure that reference works afford readers. These essays, through their descriptions, analyses, and judicious use of quotations, serve to remind us of that pleasure as well as the value and influence of the works themselves. The chief virtue of *Distinguished Classics* lies in the fact that it will prompt readers to rediscover or explore for the first time these reference treasures, from Fowler's witty prohibitions to Emily Post's sensi-

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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