Solemnly swearing, to swear as an oath to you
who have somehow gotten to be a pale old woman;
swearing, as if an oath could be wrapped around
your shoulders
like a new coat.

But to what oath has the critical teacher sworn? What actions and certainties
lie at the heart of the imperative, "Make an Oath"? What (in)active duty and
what (un)certain guilt? What's the story, here?

*Academic Literacies: The Public and Private Discourse of University Students*,
Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater (Portsmouth, NH: Boynton, 1991, 205 pages).

*Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness*, Patricia Bizzell (Pittsburgh: U

Reviewed by Gesa E. Kirsch, Wayne State University

These two books share a concern with academic discourse and literacy, but
they take very different approaches to exploring that topic. Elizabeth
Chiseri-Strater reports on an ethnography of college students as they learn
to speak, write, and think in the language of the academy. She shows us one
year in the life of several college students as they move from a required
writing class to courses across the curriculum. Importantly, Chiseri-Strater
also attends to the "private discourse" of these students, to their struggle with
defining moral values, forming an identity, setting career and life goals, and
imagining a future for themselves. These issues are the very ones that Patricia
Bizzell urges us to attend to in our classrooms, but, as we learn from Chiseri­
Strater, they often go unattended in the educational experiences of college
students. Bizzell's book, essentially a reprint of her previously published
essays, presents a theoretical perspective on what academic discourse is, what
justifies its teaching, and how it might be linked to critical consciousness (in
Freire's sense).

In *Academic Literacies: The Public and Private Discourse of University Students*,
Chiseri-Strater examines how factors such as gender, personal
histories, and learning styles shape the development of students' intellectual
lives. In the first chapter, we see how students in a sophomore-level prose
writing course negotiate their way through reading and writing assignments
and learn to respond to a collaborative pedagogy where group work, peer
response, conferences with the instructor, and collaborative writing prevail.
Chiseri-Strater examines several dimensions of this classroom—the role of
talking, of writing, of intertextuality, and of collaboration—revealing both
the moments of students' learning and of students' resistance. Because she
is well-read in feminist theory and research, Chiseri-Strater observes subtle gender differences in students' behavior—in classroom interactions, in writing types and preferences, in career goals and expectations—that other ethnographers might easily have overlooked.

Two case studies stand at the center of the book, Anna and Nick, whom we first meet in the writing class and then follow into courses in their majors. Chiseri-Strater shows us the larger context of these students' lives; we learn about Anna's interests in the classics and in dance, her rebellion in high school, and her visual style of learning. And we encounter Nick, who has changed majors three times, keeps a personal journal, sketches political cartoons in his spare time, and worries about his future although he holds a certain contempt for his career-minded peers. In these two chapters, we get a glimpse of what it means for students to be asked to learn various forms of academic discourse—forms that often seem incongruous to them—and we see the frustration and alienation students experience as they are immersed in the academic culture. In Anna's art history course, we observe the process whereby Anna, other students, and Chiseri-Strater herself struggle to make sense of the "autobiographical information, visual information, and sociopolitical information" provided in course lectures, reading materials, and slide presentations. Interestingly, in this course Chiseri-Strater not only functions as a participant-observer, but she actively intervenes in the course. After Anna's poor performance on the midterm, Chiseri-Strater consults with the professor and suggests pedagogical changes: more student participation, more class discussions, and more guidance with writing assignments. The professor, also disappointed with the midterm results, listens to her colleague and incorporates some of these changes in the remainder of the course (some with more success than others). While the class, and Anna in particular, seems to benefit from these changes, as readers we are left wondering about the ethical and methodological implications of a study where the ethnographer creates rather than observes the phenomena she studies. In Nick's political science course we meet a professor who is formal with his students (calling them by their last names), encourages "verbal duels," interrupts students frequently, and assigns study questions and written responses to readings regularly. Chiseri-Strater shows us how Anna and Nick adapt to the different demands made by the lecture format of the art history course (students have to absorb and synthesize large amounts of material without much guidance) and of the debate style of the political science seminar (students have to "perform" on the spot and can feel exposed and vulnerable), and she discusses the pedagogical and gender issues implicit in these different classroom styles.

But the story does not end here. Both students, bright and gifted, struggle with finding their educations meaningful. In the end, they fail; or rather, their educations fail them. We learn in the epilogue that both students dropped out of college the next fall—at least temporarily. Chiseri-
Strater offers her strongest criticism of academic institutions when she asserts in the concluding chapter that Anna and Nick "can be considered literate in spite of, not because of, their contact with the academy," and she characterizes their "experiences in their liberal arts courses as those of silence and emptiness with respect to literacy and learning." This harsh criticism seems only partially justified; Anna and Nick seem to value the courses in their majors more than Chiseri-Strater; Anna, for example, praises the art history course as "one of the best she has ever taken."

In analyzing how educational institutions fail students like Anna and Nick, Chiseri-Strater points to narrow definitions of literacy that recognize only "verbocentric and propositional knowledge" while students' "singular ways of interpreting the world go unnoticed by educators as the lines are drawn between private imaginative experiences and public academic expression." Chiseri-Strater urges educators to draw on students' multiple literacies, to introduce students to diverse ways of thinking, talking, reading, writing in the disciplines, to employ principles of feminist pedagogies, and to integrate the "private" discourse of students into the curriculum in order to make college education more meaningful to students. Chiseri-Strater's call for attending to multiple literacies is important, indeed critical for success and reform in higher education, but I would have liked to have seen further discussion of what such a pedagogy might look like, how one might include "alternative literacies such as dance, art, sculpture, film, theater, pantomime, music, and song" into a college curriculum in practical terms.

Chiseri-Strater is to be commended for her critical awareness of ethnographic methodology and its potential pitfalls. She locates herself in the study, carefully documents her interactions with students and professors whose classes she observes, and reflects on how her presence in students' lives and classrooms might influence her observations. (The book contains an appendix useful to any would-be ethnographer because Chiseri-Strater chronicles the development of her research questions, her study design, and her data analysis.) The extensive data collection, the length of time of the study (a full year of weekly observations, interactions, and interviews), and the careful analysis and interpretations of findings all should ensure that this book will be widely read and much quoted. I concur with Dennis Taylor's judgment in the foreword that the book is "quietly revolutionary" and will be "applauded loudly."

Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness by Patricia Bizzell contains thirteen essays written between 1978 and 1990, all but two previously published. Collections of already published work can be valuable by providing readers easy access to articles dispersed across a variety of journals, but they also raise the question of what justifies the reprinting of previously published material. No doubt, Bizzell is an important thinker on the scene of composition, and her work is worth being read back-to-back, particularly since it is unified by a central theme: the nature and value of teaching
academic discourse. But for readers who have followed the debates about academic literacy in the journals, there is not much new here, except Bizzell's candid introduction, in which she reassesses her own thinking, and an afterword in which she describes her current pedagogical approach and intellectual projects.

The introduction presents an interesting intellectual journey in which Bizzell looks back and evaluates how her scholarship, and her life, has evolved. There is mention of important personal events: her wedding date with Bruce Herzberg and their adoption of two children (and the demands, interruptions, and changes in priorities that parenthood brings), of important mentors in her early professional life (Ann Berthoff, for example), and of intellectual crises in her thinking (rejecting Freire's notion of critical consciousness; living with the debasement of authority that anti-foundationalism brings). Bizzell recognizes that she is writing an unfinished story, one that is likely to change as her life moves in new directions and her thinking takes new turns.

Reading the essays in sequence provides a fascinating portrait of the intellectual life of a scholar and makes for an interesting study in intertextuality; we see the scholars who most influenced Bizzell's early work: Shaughnessy, Fish, Kuhn, Freire, Hirsch. In the first four essays Bizzell advocates teaching academic discourse and studying its conventions in order to enable students from different backgrounds to join the academic community. Because Bizzell understands "language as a social product and embodiment of ideology," she attacks E.D. Hirsch's *Philosophy of Composition* for claiming to be "above ideology." Here we can feel Bizzell's outrage and passion triggered by Hirsch (whom she calls her "dark double") that has led her to develop her social constructionist view. In her most important early essay, "Cognition, Convention, and Certainty," Bizzell for the first time articulates her notion of discourse community, a notion that since then has become very influential in composition studies.

Having argued in her early work that academic discourse is valuable and should be taught to college students, Bizzell then faces the question of how to justify this enterprise, particularly in light of the possible alienation and deracination students may experience in the process. In the next four essays, Bizzell explores this question. For example, in the often-cited essay, "What Happens When Basic Writers Come to College," Bizzell expresses the hope that after learning to write and speak academic discourse, students will want to retain ties to their home communities and work for social justice and equality. But a nagging doubt comes to bother Bizzell: too often, she tells us, she has seen that students who learn to enter the academic community successfully are content to enjoy the place of privilege they have come to occupy. This "theoretical impasse," as Bizzell calls it in the introduction, leads her to wonder whether any connections can be forged between academic discourse and critical consciousness, whether learning the first will
lead to the second (hence the title of her book). At this crisis point she began to rethink, and reject, Freire's work because it presents itself as "strictly objective and value free," thereby ignoring the poststructuralist insights that ideology and politics are always intertwined in academic discourse.

The last four essays reflect Bizzell's current thinking about academic discourse and critical consciousness (as does her recent JAC response to the interview with Fish [vol. 13, Winter 1993]). Bizzell now considers the decision to teach academic discourse a political act (with different consequences for students of different backgrounds) that writing teachers and composition scholars need to acknowledge openly. She sees her essay, "Foundationalism and Anti-Foundationalism," as "a first step in a new direction" because she comes to terms with what Fish calls "anti-foundationalist theory hope," the belief that once we reject foundational truth as the basis of knowledge, we can still use critical analysis (in this case critical analysis of academic discourse) to unravel the historical, political, and social contexts of knowledge. But because we can never step outside our culture and ways of thinking, we cannot confer "objective mental powers" to our students, Bizzell reminds us. In other words, we cannot hope that the teaching of academic discourse is a neutral activity that will help our students to negotiate among the many communities to which they belong; rather, adopting an academic world view is always and already a political act that radically changes one's perspective and relation to the world. Once we accept this promise, Bizzell hopes, "education for critical consciousness [can] be saved by open recognition of its ideological agenda and the dropping of all pretense of objectivity." But this premise poses another dilemma: how do we teach civic virtues and values—in Bizzell's case, values that call for social justice and economic equality—without "indoctrinating" students and being accused of "political correctness." Bizzell addresses this dilemma by urging teachers to announce to students what their political commitments and ideological values are so that students can anticipate the kind of classroom experience that awaits them.

As a whole, Bizzell's book is unified by an exploration of academic discourse, its privileged status in the academic community, and its potential for fostering students' critical consciousness. Two essays, however, do not contribute much to the central theme of this collection. One essay, "College Composition: Initiation into the Academic Discourse Community," reviews two textbooks and only in closing examines the value of initiating students into the academic discourse community; the other essay, "Composing Processes: An Overview," reviews approaches to composition research from an early 1980s perspective and does not advance the argument Bizzell makes in the rest of her book. The author herself recognizes that her "suggestions will not seem novel" for readers in the 1990s and we are left to wonder why she included this essay in the collection. These reservations aside, if you are teaching a course on the nature of academic discourse or want to track
Bizzell's impressive intellectual evolution, you will want to own this book; but if you are expecting a substantial body of new work, then you will have to wait for future publications.

*Academic Literacies* and *Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness* both center on academic literacy and discourse, but they take very different approaches: the former provides an ethnographic perspective, the latter a philosophical/theoretical one. Both books contribute to ongoing debates of what teachers of advanced composition do (or ought to do) and serve as valuable resources for teachers, researchers, and graduate students alike.


Reviewed by Robert L. McDonald, Virginia Military Institute

Based on the information Theresa Enos provides in "'A Brand New World': Using Our Professional and Personal Histories of Rhetoric," her introduction to this volume, one might be tempted to describe the academic career of Winifred Bryan Horner as a series of exceptions-to-the-rules. Or, perhaps more accurately, it might be described as a series of episodes in *remaking* the rules of what is possible, of visions of the past uniquely wedded to visions of the future.

Whatever the attempt at imaging, the facts of the matter affirm that Win Horner's career has indeed been an extraordinary one. For instance, many people are surprised to learn that Horner didn't receive her Michigan Ph.D. until 1975—and that was after having raised a family, having begun work for the M.A. in literature at age thirty-nine, and having worked as an instructor at the University of Missouri for some fifteen years. Her story becomes all the more remarkable when we note that by 1985, just ten years after earning the doctorate, Horner had given the profession *Historical Rhetoric: An Annotated Bibliography of Selected Sources in English* (1980), *Composition and Literature: Bridging the Gap* (1983), as well as the first edition of *The Present State of Scholarship in Historical and Contemporary Rhetoric* (1983), and on the basis of these and other accomplishments, she had become the first woman to be awarded a twentieth-century chair in rhetoric when Texas Christian University named her the first Lillian Radford Chair of Rhetoric and Composition.

*Learning from the Histories of Rhetoric* is a fitting tribute to a scholarly career consistently dedicated, as Enos says, to better understanding "the place of writing in the humanities, the ways in which human beings think through their ideas and communicate those ideas to others both in written
Academic Literacies suggests that the narrow focus on academic ways of reading, writing and thinking is limited and limiting for both students and teachers at the college level. Chiseri-Strater uses ethnographic field methods to uncover the multiple literacies that two college students bring to different disciplines and shows how factors such as gender, human development, Academic Literacies suggests that the narrow focus on academic ways of reading, writing and thinking is limited and limiting for both students and teachers at the college level. In addition, composition scholars who are involved in the emerging field of academic discourse communities will find Chiseri-Strater's position of interest. Students with an academic attitude appreciate the challenges of new subject matter but rely on transferable academic skills to face them. Technologies, professions, and workplaces certainly change often in our diverse world; academic strategies for critical thinking and problem-solving do not change as quickly and are easily transferred from one job to another. N discussions of how alternative discourses and hybrid literacies can enrich academic writing by adding creativity and personal connection; N practical advice for planning, drafting, and revising essays typically assigned by professors in the humanities and social sciences. Part of surviving and succeeding in college is a matter of opening your mind to new ideas and concepts. Keywords: academic literacy; academic literacies; social practice; transformative. Confronted by deficit framings and unconvinced by public and official discourses, many teacher-researchers in higher education with a responsibility or interest in language based pedagogy have sought out and engaged in research and theorisations of language use which take account of the complex contexts in which they/we work, as we discuss in more detail below.