

not mean that there are no other means of saying what is and is not literature. (See, for example, Jerrold Levinson, "Refining Art Historically," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 47 [Winter 1989]: 21–33, for a historical definition that is, in my view, quite plausible.) Finally, Morra mentions reader-response theory as a form of scientific criticism. It is, I would have thought, a straightforward example of a hermeneutic, a method for interpreting.

Raymond J. Wilson III raises a difficult question: what is a science? I accepted the scientific critics' distinction between science (objective and general) and hermeneutics (subjective and particular). If, however, à la Nietzsche, everything is a matter of interpretation, then the claim of the scientific critics to distinguish what they did from hermeneutics is defeated from the start. The point of Wilson's six examples is to suggest that the general-particular distinction won't hold up. I might agree (there are issues here I do not understand), but the founders of modern poetics did not. Furthermore, the model adopted by the scientific critics was the science of linguistics, where the distinction between system (*langue*) and utterance (*parole*) reigned supreme. If this distinction is untenable, then the effort to create a science of literature again collapses from the start.

I agree with Wilson that scientific critics initially use "this object [a poem] in a project aimed at understanding the principles of the entire class to which the object belongs." But Tynyanov and Wellek and Warren were not happy with that project. In the passage Wilson quotes from my essay, Wellek and Warren assert that *every work has a system of its own*. That assertion would be the equivalent of claiming a system for each and every rose, not for the species (or whatever "rose" designates). Wilson's examples 2, 3, and 6 are confusing because "particular molecule," "gene sequence," and "specific ball of plutonium" refer not to unique entities with unique structures but to classes. It is this particular *sort* of molecule that is being investigated, not this *particular* molecule. What I believe I found was that in practice scientific critics sooner or later end up attending to individual works. They then write what look to me like good old-fashioned interpretations, and no general principles are discovered. A classic instance is Jakobson and Lévi-Strauss's essay on Baudelaire's "Les chats." I quote Michael Riffaterre on a typical "move." "The weak point of the method is indeed the categories used. There is a revealing instance where Jakobson and Lévi-Strauss take literally the technical meaning of *feminine* as used in metrics and grammar and endow formal feminine categories with esthetic and even ethical values"—that is, values relevant to the individual poem but not to underlying structures (*Structuralism*, ed. Jacques Ehrmann, Garden City: Doubleday, 1970, 197). Scientific critics need not have done this, but they did, and I take their doing so as evidence that they themselves were not happy with "scientific" results and instead gravitated to what comes naturally to academic critics, interpretation.

In his last two paragraphs Wilson conflates "the principles of the entire class" (of literary works or of a kind) with "the assumptions on which interpretations have been based." Aristotle presented the principles of a class of literary works, but we have no idea how he interpreted any tragedy and thus we have no idea what his interpretive assumptions were. The notion that we can (finally) straighten things out by getting at what is going on underneath all the interpretive confusion was the noble hope of the scientific critics, and Wilson keeps the faith. My prediction is that there will be no Crick and Watson for poetry, just more interpretations—some better, some worse than those we already have.

ROGER SEAMON

University of British Columbia

Recipes for Reading

To the Editor:

Susan J. Leonardi concludes her literary culinary article "Recipes for Reading: Summer Pasta, Lobster à la Riseholme, and Key Lime Pie" (104 [1989]: 340–47) by asking her readers to respond to a smorgasbord of questions, including the following: "Would the tensions that academic women face between the domestic and the professional make it more or less difficult for them to extend credibility toward a writer who begins with a recipe? . . . Do I erode my credibility with male academics by this feminine interest in cooking, cookbooks, and recipes?" (347).

In a passage from her *Journals* (New York: Ballantine, 1983), Sylvia Plath helps answer the questions Leonardi raises:

I was getting worried about becoming too happily stodgily practical: instead of studying Locke, for instance, or writing—I go make an apple pie, or study *The Joy of Cooking*, reading it like a rare novel. Whoa, I said to myself. You will escape into domesticity & stifle yourself by falling headfirst into a bowl of cookie batter. And just now I pick up the blessed diary of Virginia Woolf which I bought with a battery of her novels Saturday with Ted. And she works off her depression over rejections from *Harper's* (no less!—and I can hardly believe that the Big Ones get rejected, too!) by cleaning out the kitchen. And cooks haddock & sausage. Bless her. I feel my life linked to her, somehow. (151)

MARK DUNPHY

Flaming Rainbow University

To the Editor:

I was sitting down to write a letter of praise for *PMLA's* publication of Susan J. Leonardi's article when I happened to read further in the same issue and came to Michael Shapiro's letter regarding the review process for

articles submitted to *PMLA* (356–57). Having recently served as a reader for a manuscript submitted to *PMLA*, I must report that I was shocked not only to learn that my identity as a reader was available to the author unless I put a check mark in a small box on the form but also to receive a copy of another reader's report to *PMLA* on the same manuscript. Shapiro's argument that readers should be willing to "stand behind their written evaluations" misses the point. I am certainly willing to "stand behind" any critique I write, in the sense that I take full responsibility for providing an informed, balanced evaluation of manuscripts sent to me for review (I serve on the editorial boards of two scholarly journals), but I fail to see what purpose it would serve for authors to know which specific individuals have recommended acceptance or rejection of their manuscripts. Indeed, despite the hordes that descend on MLA meetings each December, the academic world is actually quite small; and whereas we might like to think that, as academics, we are above the common herd in our ability to be objective and to take criticism, in reality we can all cite instances of professional jealousies and vindictiveness.

But to return to the Leonardi article. When I read the abstract, I initially thought the article might be a parody of academic discourse, and this did not disturb me, for we are apt to take ourselves far too seriously sometimes. Upon reading the article, however, I found it a graceful, intelligent reading of texts that raises significant issues of gender, style, and community, and I particularly appreciate Leonardi's overt challenge to male colleagues who might find her "feminine interest" in cookbooks and recipes cause for an erosion of her credibility. Thanks, *PMLA*, for having the courage to publish this piece.

NANCY WALKER
Vanderbilt University

To the Editor:

When I casually perused the table of contents in the May issue of *PMLA*, my eyes were instantly drawn to Susan J. Leonardi's "Recipes for Reading." I concocted several possibilities to explain the presence of what seemed a zany piece in your typically staid, dignified publication: "the editors have gone mad"; "this must be the April issue and it's an April Fools' Day joke"; "they got mixed up and bound the wrong innards inside these sedate *PMLA* covers."

Keeping an open mind, I went into class to proctor an hour-long examination, during which I read the Leonardi contribution. I was absolutely dazzled by it. The piece is brilliant in every respect, combining valuable information on literary embedding with feminist matters, with issues of kinship, with an analysis of symbolism, and with all sorts of other choice matters that I gleaned on my second and third readings of the piece, which is now begin-

ning to look ragged from the use I have given it. Besides all else the article accomplishes, it shows by subtle example the very sorts of techniques its author comments on.

I have wheedled a number of my colleagues into promising to read this article at once; a few of them already have done so, and we have had more spirited discussions over the piece than I have had over anything in *PMLA* since Dorothy Bethurum and Sister Amelia Klenke were locked in mortal combat for several years in the letters-to-the-Editor pages back in the far reaches of my dimmest memory.

It is a credit to the journal that it is willing to take a chance on a contribution as far out of the ordinary as Leonardi's contribution is.

R. BAIRD SHUMAN
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

To the Editor:

The Editorial Board is to be congratulated for its breadth of vision in approving for publication Susan J. Leonardi's excellent essay. Seldom have methodology, form, style, and content been so beautifully integrated in an article for *PMLA*, the first one I have *wanted* to read in ten years. It is an impressive tour de force.

There are many of us in the profession who believe that the *whole* of our culture deserves scrutiny and that the definition of a literary text should be expanded beyond the traditional genres and the narrow confines of the canon. Leonardi demonstrates the rewards of examining what some consider to be the ephemeral corners of our culture.

I suspect the methodology of studying embedded discourse helped win approval, but we will take what small foothold we can. I hope that her article's acceptance is a sign of things to come and that *PMLA* can become an essential text itself once more.

M. THOMAS INGE
Randolph-Macon College

To the Editor:

The May issue of *PMLA* arrived as a welcome interruption of my plans for a small dinner party. I've mastered only two entrées—coq au vin and flounder almandine—and flounder is out of season, while my wine sauce is probably too heavy for springtime. So I was happy to postpone the decision and turn to Susan J. Leonardi's "Recipes for Reading." Its exposition of the "almost prototypical feminine activity" of recipe sharing (343) and the ways that activity is reflected in both cookbooks and novels is as entertaining as it is illuminating, and it even helped me in my dinner plans. For it engendered a nagging defensiveness that led me to remember