

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.

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### 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)

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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