

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 sdate *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

the gazpacho that I learned from a burly Irishman during my Fulbright year in Algeria. I recalled his merrily chopping up vegetables, then assaulting them with a strange electric mixer that protruded from his hand like a sword or a chainsaw as he nonchalantly tossed in ice cubes, finally producing the perfect relief from the North African sun. I put it on the menu and continued reading.

Defensiveness aside, it seemed silly to be “irritatingly insistent” about the male “exceptions” in the generally feminine tradition, and I found Leonardi’s disavowal of her attempt to imply such a tradition puzzling. It was downright discomfiting, then, to find support of the same implication introduced by an innuendo marker like “It is interesting, however, that . . .” (343). The long digression on E. F. Benson’s “gender-diffused background” (343) seems similarly unnecessary at best, sounding like the connection we used to hear drawn between a black person’s achievements and his or her familiarity with white people and their culture. Leonardi then confirms that resemblance by complimenting Benson on his lack of masculinity in the notoriously mean “spirit of the male critics who” compliment women writers on their possession of it (343). This witticism, like the labored digression on “Freudian-Lacanian theory,” seems designed simply to exclude males from the central construct, a project that seems—given their exclusion from the concrete reality—superfluous.

The expression “feminine readers,” then, moved me to look again at the abstract, which says that “masculine” readers can be male or female, as long as they are “unaware of the recipe’s social significance” (276). Having enjoyed the analysis of *Heartburn* (I was glad finally to be able to make sense of the pie-in-the-face scene in the film), I was reasonably confident of my awareness of the recipe’s social significance, but I still could not see why I should therefore call myself “feminine.” So I gave the article up and, grateful to have been given the awareness, returned to my menu.

Specifically, I deferred the decision on the entrée and proceeded to check the ingredient list for my widely admired cheesecake. (The secret is to be unafraid to give the batter a good macho beating and stir up the cheese that settles to the bottom of the bowl.) As I read the straightforward, businesslike, unembedded recipe written out for me by my wife before our marriage, during my years as a single parent, I remembered Leonardi’s examination of *Joy of Cooking*. Still grumpy, I suppose, about being a “feminine reader” (or not), I took another look at the comparison between the Rombauer and Becker editions: “I am suggesting,” says Leonardi, after a comparison of their acknowledgments, “that the intrusion of masculine figures into the heretofore women’s world has significantly altered the context of the recipes,” a clearly *post hoc ergo propter hoc* suggestion (343). And the reference to “male chefs,” as well as the irresistible pun about male entrance into the woman’s bed (343), seems to belie the

abstract’s distinction between sex and gender. Yet I found that the 1975 edition (the one I use at home) acknowledges mostly females.

More important, when Leonardi says earlier that Becker had “already asked for a straightforward exposition or definition of conventions” for the 1951 edition (341), she leaves doubtful both the date and the significance of the masculine intrusion into Becker’s world. The evolution of Becker’s world becomes moot, finally, when Leonardi points out that Rombauer’s style was “characteristic of nearly all early cookbooks” (345) and thus indicates that influences other than masculine intrusions into Becker’s life might be at work in the differences between the Rombauer and Becker editions.

It occurred to me that there is more than one social context that a reader—masculine or feminine—might be aware of and that might account for what might be called the machofication of many cookbooks in the last quarter century. There has been enormous growth in the numbers of people—both male and female—who, like myself, spend almost all their adult lives as single parents or in families where both partners work outside the home and who cannot afford, as Rombauer could, a “household cook.” Like George Bradshaw’s, our “presence in the kitchen signifies less a passion for the art than a determination to eat regularly” (*Cook until Done*, New York: Ace, 1970, pref.). We need meals, not literary texts. Such changes in social context produce a change in the market for cookbooks, a change of which cookbook writers and editors—male and female—are equally aware.

At this point, I felt that I understood my mixed feelings about “Recipes for Reading,” a fascinating example of how sensitivity to women’s experience can help illuminate literary texts, but I also felt burdened by an antimale subtext that distracts me, at least, from the main thrust of the analysis.

Perhaps my response is indeed all just defensiveness, for I certainly put an inordinate amount of time and energy into it. I became so weary, in fact, that I decided to let my wife take care of the entrée. Being the man in the house does not make me, after all, responsible for everything.

JOEL ROACHE

University of Maryland, Eastern Shore

To the Editor:

Susan J. Leonardi’s “Recipes for Reading” whetted my appetite. Her point is well taken that recipes are traditionally embedded in a context of feminine conversation and that authors who are conscious of this tradition can use it in their writing (although in her zeal to share this point with her readers she has perhaps offered them too much pasta and dessert). In response to Leonardi’s concluding request for “stories . . . about recipe sharing,” I would