whose Can-Opener Cook Book was one of many telling housewives how convenience foods could make their lives enjoyable, emphasizes the satisfaction Cannon herself felt from being a professional woman. Shapiro even finds positive views of working outside of the home lurking among the women behind the nation’s über homemaker: the fictional Betty Crocker. As for those who stayed at home, she cites the many housewives who wrote to the Boston Globe’s “Confidential Chat” column grumbling about their lives. She places Peg Bracken’s popular I Hate to Cook books in the context of “the literature of domestic chaos” that questioned and laughed at how the housewife’s role in the family was popularly apotheosized.

According to Shapiro, all of this, plus the sniping of food writers such as M.F.K. Fisher, helped set the stage for the portentous year 1962, when two saviors rode to the rescue of cooking from scratch: One of them was Julia Child, whose first TV program aired that year. But the other, curiously, is Betty Friedan, whose Feminine Mystique challenged the Happy Homemaker image by portraying housework as mindless drudgery that precluded the expression of women’s creative impulses. It is hard to see how this contributed to better eating, but Shapiro, clutching to a rather flimsy reed, asserts that Friedan was not against good cooking; instead, according to Shapiro, Friedan thought that the happy home was one where both men and women shared responsibilities, including cooking.

As for Julia: Yes, Mastering the Art of French Cooking did inspire many of us to get back to (or learn) the basics, and the following years did see a new aversion to ultra-processed foods. However, cooking from scratch on a regular basis still had a tough row to hoe, a point that even Julia herself might concede. In 1988, while lunching at her home, she asked me if I would like mayonnaise with my roast lamb sandwich. I accepted, expecting to be served the homemade mayo I had assiduously prepared from her cookbook, only to have her pull a bottle of Hellmann’s from the refrigerator.

By then the shot in the arm Julia had given to good home cooking was being counteracted by the fact that not only were a large majority of middle-class, married women now working outside the home but also, more importantly, a majority of them were now returning to the workplace relatively soon after childbirth. This, along with the rise of nontraditional households, finally produced the enormous market for time-saving, packaged foods that the food processors had dreamed of in the 1950s. Still, Shapiro is heartened by the many women who try to avoid convenience foods, as well as by the number of men helping to fulfill Betty Friedan’s dream by cooking in the home kitchen. Has she mellowed into a starry-eyed optimist as well?

—Harvey Levenstein, McMaster University

Poet of the Appetites: The Lives and Loves of M.F.K. Fisher
Joan Reardon
San Francisco: North Point Press, 2004
544 pp. Illustrations. $27.50 (cloth)

Joan Reardon has written about Mary Frances Kennedy Fisher before. In M.F.K. Fisher, Julia Child and Alice Waters: Celebrating the Pleasures of the Table (1994), now out of print, she created a kind of collective biography of the three women who, over three decades, revolutionized food preparation and food appreciation in the United States: Fisher with her writing about gastronomy, Child with her cookbooks and television programs, and Waters with her showcase Berkeley restaurant, Chez Panisse. In this volume Reardon attempts to parse the oldest of the three, M.F.K. Fisher, who wrote with such gusto and well-crafted prose about the intersection of tastes and places, foods and feelings, that many of us can still remember passages we read decades earlier.

To that end Reardon interviewed Fisher herself before her death in 1992, one of her daughters, one of her sisters, and many friends, colleagues, and neighbors, building on the insights and information she gleaned from an enormous range of written sources. Reardon has sifted with care and sensitivity the profusion of M.F.K. Fisher’s published writings, beginning with Serve It Forth in 1937 right up to her last new volume—the literary autobiography Dubious Honors (1988)—and the several collections of earlier writings published posthumously. Fisher, even more than others of her background and generation, took correspondence seriously, writing self-consciously and copiously to family, lovers, even strangers, and Reardon has mined the effusion of Fisher’s unpublished papers, now housed at Radcliffe and in the Fisher Literary Trust. The result is a conscientious, thorough, indeed comprehensive life of a woman Reardon herself calls “elusive” and about whom she says in her preface, “She was not who I thought she was.”

Who Fisher was, biographically speaking, was the eldest daughter (b. 1908) of well-educated parents who moved to Whittier, California, when she was quite young, her father to run a newspaper, her mother to manage an affluent household (four children, eventually, plus grandmother and staff). Fisher’s interest in good food began early but flowered after
her marriage to Al Fisher in 1929 and their first lengthy sojourn in France. Thereafter she spent most of her time in California, with spells in New York and trips to Mexico and Europe, France especially, as often as she could manage. In books like *How to Cook a Wolf* (1942), *The Gastronomical Me* (1945), and *An Alphabet for Gourmets* (1949) and in her many magazine articles, she merged personal experience with larger social context, combining common sense about preparing food with the ability to precisely evoke sensory memories. The unpretentious pleasures of fried-egg sandwiches on a Pacific beach delighted her as much as elaborately truffled pâtés in Aix and the ornate glories of the Dijon foire gastronomique. She garnered good reviews early on, and her translation of Brillat-Savarin’s *The Physiology of Taste* (1949), a project she’d worked on for years, added her own brilliant marginalia to what remains the standard translation of that classic text.

It takes backbone for a biographer to resist falling for her subject. Reardon is honest enough to acknowledge that the literary gifts that made Fisher shape her gastronomic writing to such good effect made her an unreliable observer, indeed sometimes a damaging distorter, of reality, and the people closest to her suffered as a result. She had many brief and several enduring emotional and sexual relationships with both men and women, but all were troubled, notwithstanding years in therapy. Reardon’s reticence about the sexual problems in Fisher’s marriages and in her most profound attachment to Dillwyn Parrish, with whom she lived for several years, does not serve readers well: one wants not necessarily more details but to understand better the impact of Parrish’s presumed infertility and of her third husband Donald Friede’s sexual proclivities, just as one wants to understand better the causes and consequences of Fisher’s brother’s suicide at the age of twenty-three. Fisher’s worst emotional failure involved her daughters: they didn’t much like her, nor can one blame them, given Fisher’s unrealistic expectations for them and the inconsistent and contingent affection she bestowed upon them. She was never entirely absent from their lives, but no intimacy survived their adolescences.

Readers who already know and love M.F.K. Fisher’s books will find much in Reardon’s account of her rather unhappy life to interest them. But the very best of M.F.K. Fisher unquestionably resides in her writing. If readers of this biography do not yet know Fisher’s work, I hope they will be drawn to it despite, rather than because of, her life. A real treat awaits them.

—Josephine Woll, Howard University

**Cooking for Mr. Latte: A Food Lover’s Courtship, with Recipes**
Amanda Hesser
New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003
288 pp. $23.95 (cloth)

We live in a culture where voyeurism takes precedence over just about everything cultural, political, anthropological, and sociological. At this juncture it’s redundant even to list the voluminous number of reality television series, romans à clef, celebrity rapes, insider trading scandals, and murder trials that are saturating our landscape like dots on a pointillist painting. It’s no surprise, therefore, that Amanda Hesser’s book about her romantic and gastronomic courtship with (and eventual marriage to) New Yorker writer Tad Friend has become infamous more for its exposé-like treatment of her family, his family, and their inner circle than for the recipes. Apparently we’ve (d)evolved into a species that garners our nutritional essentials from “Page Six” of the *New York Post* and *Court TV*.

The book, culled from essays from Hesser’s *New York Times Sunday Magazine* food column (fourteen new pieces were written specifically for the publication of the book), orbits around Hesser’s attempts to refine and expand Friend’s gastronomic tendencies as their relationship progresses. For example, Hesser relates in what reads as genuine horror their first date, on which Tad had the gall to order a latte *after dinner (quel horreur!*) —the origin of the moniker Mr. Latte. Interspersed are chronicles of Hesser’s life as girlfriend, friend, daughter, daughter-in-law to be, granddaughter, and food columnist, all through the lens of cooking and food.

Without a doubt Hesser is a good, strong, and oftentimes very funny writer, especially when it comes to her descriptions of food. Adroit at the same time as they are mouth watering, her sketches of meals are a balance of sensual delight and reportorial panache: “The shrimp were coated in a generous crust of salt and pepper. Fried with their shells on, they crackled under my teeth as the warm, salty juices washed over my tongue. I drank my beer, then worked my way through the salad. The tender romaine leaves sagged a little under a salty, tangy dressing and a cloud of garlic. Every few bites I got dabs of anchovy and tough little croutons” (p.60).

But what is, unfortunately, lacking overall in the collection is a warmth and accessibility that invites you into Hesser’s life. Rather, there exists a coldness in her dealings with others that renders her in some instances pompous and alienating. An example can be found in chapter fourteen, “Dinner When No One Wanted to Be Alone,” written shortly after the September 11th attacks. Hesser and Mr. Latte travel