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 by 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
downtown to have dinner among friends. The following interaction is recorded between the host, Tim, and Hesser:

“Dinner will be a little late,” Tim said when we arrived. “I’m sorry. It happened last time you were here, as well. Didn’t it?”

“It had, but this time dinner seemed irrelevant.” (p.114)

Hesser’s two-word observation (“It had”) can, however, be read two ways: the first (and more likely) is an obliteration of the emotional and psychological sentiment she is reaching for regarding the restorative powers of food. The second is a factual acknowledgment that carries with it the sense of realization of her previous follies, an admission of past mistakes. The book is filled with these kinds of difficult-to-interpret declarative statements that present a conflicting second is a factual acknowledgment that carries with it the image, and hunger for food itself and for what food symbolizes, the satisfaction or denial of which can be a source of pleasure, danger, power, or weakness.

Heller and Moran’s introduction provides a useful overview of the emerging field of feminist food studies, to which this volume should be considered a significant contribution. They argue that, at its most utopian, eating is a form of female rebellion against a patriarchal tradition and against the phallocentric view of mothers as stifling or denying forces, symbolized by the ways they force food upon or withhold it from their daughters. The editors assert that “recipe novels and culinary memoirs” constitute an alternative form of writing that “preserve[s] the bodily encounter” (p.21) between mother and daughter denied by the symbolic order. Similarly, Chris Foss explores Cixous’s celebration of eating in The Book of Promethea as a way to blur the self-other dichotomy. Cixous’s trope of “good cannibalism” becomes a metaphor for a new reciprocity between self and other and a new relation to desires and appetites, one that puts eating at the center of a feminine “ethic of generosity” (p.149) and of “love/writing” (p.152).

Such euphoric explorations of the pleasures of appetite and consumption contrast with other more sobering explorations of the role of food and hunger in women’s texts. Ann Folwell Stanford, in “Death Is a Skipped Meal Compared to This’: Food and Hunger in Toni Morrison’s Beloved,” illustrates the ways in which Morrison implicitly critiques any idealized version of self/other, mother/daughter blurring through her description of Beloved’s dangerous appetite, a hunger that cannot be satisfied. For Sethe the self-abnegation she practices for Beloved, represented by the central metaphor of Sethe’s starvation, literally diminishes her sense of self. What is idealized in French feminism as a liberating form of boundarilessness is instead represented here as the giving over of self to another, something that recalls the abuses of slavery. Many of the best essays in this volume share this emphasis on seeing disordered eating as a response to oppressive cultural conditions, as opposed to being evidence of individual pathology. Sue Thomas connects the anorexia of Nyasha, one of the central characters in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s