had Saint-Ange’s example to follow. Those of us who were fortunate enough to learn from it as late as the mid-1950s will recognize our own experiences in Madeleine Kamman’s fine introductory essay in this present translation.

In some respects the book has become quaint. There are illustrations, but they are so simple that at times they are funny. A long thin stick is said to be a julienne of carrot; a flattish lump with crisscrossed marks on top is described as dough resting for two hours. They are reproduced in the present translation. There are recipes that are unlikely to appeal to the modern American cook, such as calf’s head fritters, and techniques they no longer need, such as a sorbetière, which is like the inner container of the old crank-operated ice cream machine, minus its crank. The cook simply removes the lid from time to time and stirs the mixture with a spatula. Most of us are no longer using eighteenth-century equipment. We certainly eat less butter, cream, and animal fats such as lard.

It is not clear whether the publisher and translator intended to publish this book as a historical document or a practical cookbook. As I have suggested, Mme. Saint-Ange’s voice is now speaking of practices that are a century old. Its recipes work; the dishes they produce are delicious; the extensive advice is empowering. Like so many others who encountered La Bonne Cuisine, the translator, Paul Aratow, had a revelatory experience with Saint-Ange’s book in France. As he notes in his introductory essay, he has aimed for precision in his translation, and for the most part he succeeds in this. Yet translators have the option of translating words or meanings, and despite Aratow’s evident enthusiasm for the book, his strict translation of words rather than meanings can result in bewildered readers. The novice cook, especially, needs a helping hand in the form of advice about how to convey the correct meaning to the modern reader. Such lapses are serious, because this is a book that cries out to be read. Who wouldn’t want to know more about the table of the author who took his food and drink so seriously? Susan Rossi-Wilcox, an American scholar with a strong background in the history of science and the culinary arts (she is now curatorial associate at the Botanical Museum of Harvard University and administrator for the Glass Flowers collection), does an admirable job of extracting as much as possible from Catherine’s slim work.

With meticulous attention to detail, and drawing from a wealth of sources, including the letters of Charles Dickens, Rossi-Wilcox evokes the world surrounding the great man. At times her story unfolds like one of his novels, especially when she falls into something akin to his rich, dense style. Here, for instance, is how she describes a dessert: “Standing proud were the glories of the confectioner’s art: a glistening, traditonal English pudding, although in the Saxon pudding baked and not boiled, it resembles a clafoutis more than a traditional English pudding, although in the Saxon pudding tradition breadcrumbs are added to the mixture. In addition, Eliza Acton’s example to follow. Those of us who were fortunate enough to learn from it as late as the mid-1950s will recognize our own experiences in Madeleine Kamman’s fine introductory essay in this present translation.

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I very much enjoyed Rossi-Wilcox’s insights into the culinary world of the time. Being German, I searched my library for a recipe for the Saxe Gotha pudding that Rossi-Wilcox contends is “a mystery” (p.297). This dessert resounded in my ears as Sächsischer Pudding. It turns out that Eliza Acton provides a recipe for it. Since this dessert is baked and not boiled, it resembles a clafoutis more than a traditional English pudding, although in the Saxon pudding tradition breadcrumbs are added to the mixture. In addition...
to red currants, Acton recommends using Kentish cherries, and that is likely the connection to the Dickens household, as the family had a summerhouse in Kent for some time. In any case, Rossi-Wilcox’s failure to uncover Saxe Gotha pudding is, like her conflation of English and Italian ham (p.256), a minor slip amid the multitude of sound interpretations and assumptions. As she herself reflects, “The lack of pears in Catherine’s menus exemplifies the limits of the written record, and [the limits] to our understanding of how her book reflects the meals served in the Dickens household. All culinary history should be savoured with an undocument ‘grain of salt’” (p.288). She is certainly right to present Catherine Dickens as a very capable and resourceful woman who even today is misunderstood by some.

In addition to its insights into culinary history, the merit of this book for me lies in its fascinating portrayal of a mid-nineteenth-century marriage and of a boastful, chauvinistic, egotistical male. Dickens is so obsessed with promoting himself and his work that when in 1858 he discards Catherine, his wife of twenty-two years and mother of his nine children, for a girl younger than his oldest daughter, he carefully issues a statement to make sure that public opinion does not turn against him. He even engages his estranged wife’s sister to run his household and look after the children.

It seems telling that Catherine Dickens published her work under the pseudonym “Lady Clutterbuck,” a character in a play that her husband staged repeatedly and whom Catherine herself once played. As much as Dickens liked to cast himself as an advocate of the poor and the lower classes, he seems to have taken a wife’s role as servant to her husband for granted. Without any property, rights, or voice of her own, a wife was to serve her husband’s social ambitions, functioning like such other objects of status in his bourgeois world as his house, his servants, and his vacations.

Reading Rossi-Wilcox’s book, it occurred to me how little has changed since the nineteenth century. When she mentions deteriorating conditions in the butcher industry (p.251), overfishing and concern for wild fish populations (p.232), scientific cookery (p.107), or “foodstuff out of season” (p.88), I see parallels between mid-nineteenth-century industrialization and colonialism and the technological revolution and globalization of today. Furthermore, most of Catherine’s recipes still seem quite fresh.

Since Dickens’s time, women have obviously made considerable progress in terms of individual rights and social standing. Charles Dickens’s behavior, however, and Catherine’s fate are still all too familiar today. As John Sutherland recently wrote in the Financial Times (April 16–17, 2005): “Britons still live morally and (to a large extent) ideologically within the frameworks erected by the Victorians…to know ourselves we must know the Victorians.” I think Sutherland is too cautious; the term “Britons” could be extended to most of the Western world. In her study of Catherine Dickens’s book, Susan Rossi-Wilcox has not only thrown light on the culinary side of Dickens’s life but also helped us to understand more about our own social past and its implications for our world.

—Ursula Heinzelmann, Berlin

**Food in Painting: From the Renaissance to the Present**
Kenneth Bendiner
London: Reaktion Books, 2004
238 pp. Illustrations. $35.00 (cloth)

The experience of reading this book is similar to the journey one takes when dining in a fine restaurant and choosing a tempting menu of small plates with each portion offering just enough to whet the appetite but not enough to satiate it completely before moving to the next course. Through the duration of such a meal, one often longs to have more of one particular course and less of another, yet this play with desire is all part of the chef’s tantalizing game. Bendiner, too, plays a provocative game with his readers.

Just as the skeptic might question why the author has not expanded on an idea or discussed an artist’s work in more depth, Bendiner revisits the work in another chapter in a different context, adding richness and texture to his initial insights and making often surprising connections between time periods and cultures. For example, Norman Rockwell’s Freedom from Want (1943) debuts in chapter two, “Preparing the Meal,” and is discussed briefly in terms of the artist’s sanctifying of a national food, the turkey. Bendiner here explains the image as “the Last Supper American style…an act of national communion” (p.71). The painting reappears in chapter three, “Meals,” and is put in the context in which it was painted, the Second World War. The turkey’s position at the helm of the table is described as a symbol of victory over adversity, offering a therapeutic image to viewers, much in the same way, Bendiner argues, that Dutch seventeenth-century painter Pieter Aertsen’s images of market scenes on one level comforted his contemporary viewers.

Bendiner’s project is to prove that food painting is a separate genre of art history, one that has been surprisingly neglected in the past. He contends that food painting should be savored for the variety of information such images reveal about myth, medicine, religion, and politics. Throughout