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 undocumented ‘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, egotistic 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 tasting 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
This richly illustrated book, he demonstrates that artists of the sixteenth century produced inventive food subjects, but it was Dutch painting of the seventeenth century that provided the basis for all subsequent food images; in fact, these artists developed a visual vocabulary that is still used by painters today. As Bendiner explains in his introduction, “Food images echo and revise their predecessors, incorporating the character of their different societies, but they are never quite divorced from their own particular history as depictions of food” (p.8).

This book follows the pattern of many recent thematic museum installations in which the emphasis is on ideas, sometimes unconscious, that underlie a certain theme. Within the chapters, which collectively chart the passage of food from the market to the dinner table and beyond, paintings are discussed in loose chronological order, often breaking out of the linear pattern in order to amplify a point and draw larger connections. This is not a traditional art historical study; rather, Bendiner’s approach represents what many students and museumgoers seem to crave today: creative connections and nonlinear thinking, more in tune with the relatively new field of visual culture in which chronology is sublimated to ideas.

As someone who delights in the colors, textures, and smells of open air and covered markets, I was especially enticed by the title of Bendiner’s first chapter, “The Market.” It is representative of the author’s approach to each chapter in that his discussion incorporates such seemingly strange bedfellows as Pieter Aertsen, French eighteenth-century artist Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, American early twentieth-century painter and printmaker John Sloan, and British postmodern painter and sculptor Damien Hirst. As Bendiner takes the reader on a wild ride through seventeenth-century Holland to twentieth-century Britain, he demonstrates the ways in which images resonate with one another formally and theoretically, in the process constructing a picture of food painting that is both fluid and dynamic. For example, he discusses American painter Wayne Thiebaud’s early 1960s “gooey and machine-made desserts, repetitiously aligned and un-individualized in a store display” in terms of Aertsen’s pictures of “satisfaction, delight, appreciated nourishment,” at the same time connecting Warhol’s soup cans to Aertsen’s depictions of abundance, suggesting that the soup can, no matter how mechanized, “stretches on infinitely, a vision of copiousness…” (p.53). Such generalized but compelling connections work well in the context of a study that draws on the anthropological views of Claude Lévi-Strauss and the concept of “fetishism” as conceived by Marx and Freud.

A theme running throughout the book that makes it so refreshing and pleasurable to read is Bendiner’s focus on the seduction of food images. He makes the importance of this aspect of his project clear from the start. In his introduction he recalls standing in a ticket line to enter Amsterdam’s Rijksmuseum behind a corpulent visitor and later finding the fellow in the galleries rapturously scrutinizing seventeenth-century food paintings. While many students of art history have been taught about the moralizing aspect of seventeenth-century food paintings, much less has been written about the enjoyment that such images incite. As the author argues, his book presents an “open-minded approach” (p.9). This open-mindedness leads to an intriguing and provocative study. Reading Bendiner’s book leaves one with the general tools to consider images of food in Western art from the Renaissance to the present in relation to one another, resulting in a rewarding game for the reader/viewer and a refreshing contribution to the field of art history.

—Dorothy Moss, University of Delaware

The Mycenaean Feast
Edited by James C. Wright
Princeton, NJ: The American School of Classical Studies
at Athens, 2004
xi + 217 pp. Illustrations. $25.00 (paper)

Archaeologists have long considered feasting an important area of research, although their presence at contemporary feasts is not always for purely scientific purposes (see, for example, Dietler and Hayden’s notable Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics and Power, 2001). The Mycenaean Feast is based on a session organized by James Wright at the annual meetings of the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA). Both the AIA session and this volume highlight the formidable assortment of disciplines that archaeologists can bring to their research. The study of the Mycenaean civilization, named for the site of the fortified city of Mycenae, has long been the subject of much attention in field and laboratory. This clearly written and carefully researched collection of eight chapters by various authors begins with James Wright’s introduction, followed by his overview of feasting in the Mycenaean society. Wright interestingly points out that we lack a broadly accepted definition of the word “feast” and provides his own definition as the “formal ceremony of communal eating and drinking to celebrate significant occasions” (p.13).