

***Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body.* By Rosemarie Garland Thomas, editor. (New York: New York University Press, 1996. Pp. vii + 400, contributors, index, \$24.95 US, ISBN 0-8147-8222-1, pbk., \$65.00 US, 0-8147- 8217-5, cloth)**

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to return to solid articles by Ann Romines and Elizabeth McDougall that deal with recipe collections these authors grew up with and use. McDougall's essay that focuses on Ontario is particularly noteworthy for Canadian readers. Using a pickle recipe as her central text, McDougall draws on literary theory to explore ways in which recipes and community cookbooks (like literary theory) emphasize the relationships between reader, writer, and text (106).

But in the end there are not many insights. And my final assessment is that these articles about recipes are not nearly as entertaining reading as the community cookbooks they describe. I'd recommend that those, who like me, enjoy reading recipes, stick to cookbooks. It is perhaps not surprising that a food analogy came to mind as I evaluated this book. I remembered an organized tour I took of industrial heritage sites in Britain many years ago during which I found myself sitting next to the same couple for most of my meals. Pat, who clearly had more interest in and relish for food than her husband, inquired upon his first bite at every sitting, "How is it Gordon?" To which he replied, "It's ok." I wish that I had more enthusiasm for *Recipes for Reading* than Gordon had for the food on our tour but like him, my final evaluation of this collection of essays remains ambivalent: "It's ok."

## Reference

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Eighteen years after the release of Leslie Fiedler's groundbreaking work *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self* (1978) comes *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, a collection of essays that progresses

interestingly from Fiedler's initial explorations of the physically anomalous. The reader is introduced to the collection via a "Foreword" written by Fiedler who discusses his own foray into academic freakery and the subsequent disdain of his colleagues for venturing into such sensationalistic and popular terrain. Less than two decades later Fiedler is "a little surprised" to be writing *Freakery's* "Foreword," a work of identical subject matter, yet which now "comfortably participate[s] in the academic arena" and is "grounded by the scholarly apparatus that I myself sought to avoid in my flight from the traditional limits of criticism and toward a mass audience" (xvi). The release of *Freakery* is as much a comment on modern academia as it is an intriguing exploration of the enduring fascination with the construction and presentation of those "who have been coarsely categorized as 'freaks,' 'curiosities,' 'prodigies,' and 'monstrosities'..." (Grosz, 55).

The twenty-eight *Freakery* contributors are predominantly literary scholars, but the disciplines of History, Philosophy, Women's Studies, American Studies and Medicine are also represented here. The range of material is impressive and is treated in a multidisciplinary fashion, adding to the overall diversity of the collection. There are two major themes, however, that arise continually throughout the work which serve to maintain a certain consistency of voice. The first theme derives from Fiedler's classic definition of physically anomalous individuals in his work *Freaks*, which sees the "freak" as being subject to classification, much like an aesthetic object: "The true Freak... stirs both supernatural terror and natural sympathy, since, unlike the fabulous monsters, he is one of us, the human child of human parents, however altered by forces we do not quite understand into something mythic and mysterious" (*Freaks* 24). The second theme stems largely from Robert Bogdan, whose own work, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit*, has been instrumental in shaping contemporary approaches to the freak show phenomenon. He argues that "'Freak' is not a quality that belongs to the person on display. It is something that we created: a perspective, a set of practices — a social construction" (xi). *Freakery* contributor Brian Rosenberg formally addresses these two thematic concerns by stating that Bogdan rejected the notion that the state of "freak" is inherent to the subject, but rather "constructed" and that "the freak, however deformed, [is] not born but made" (306).

The result is a collection of works that addresses the complexities of "enfreakment," or the process of labelling those who defy cultural norms and boundaries as other. It is here that *Freakery* is most successful in that the gaze

is shifted from the "freak" to those who have constructed not only the freak entity, but the status whereby the classification can be applied. What this means is that *Freakery* is an innovative and often enlightening collection of cultural criticism, not a voyeuristic sojourn into the bizarre and the exotic. This collection lends itself well to any student/scholar of culture and has applications far beyond its immediate frame of reference.

## References

- Bogdan, Robert. *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.
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### **Engendering Song: Singing and Subjectivity at Prespa Albanian Weddings.**

By Jane C. Sugarman. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997. Transcriptions, photographs, tables, glossary, index, bibliography, CD, xix + 395 pp, \$65.00 US, ISBN 0-226-77972-6, cloth; \$29.95 US, 0-226-77973-4, pbk.)

This is a thorough and multi-layered book which raises and discusses issues concretely related to the title and, through them, explores broader questions, such as gender, relations of power, multi-site ethnography, concepts of honour, negotiation of identity, the role of the ethnographer and the politics of representation. A generous compact disc is included.