

Recipes for Reading: Community Cookbooks, Stories, Histories.
By Anne L. Bower, editor. (Amherst, Massachusetts: University
of Massachusetts Press, 1997. \$17.95 US, ISBN 1-55849-089-2 pbk,
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[See table of contents](#)

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However, even as a teaching aid, I have some reservations. Each documentary is quite dense with a lot of information to both tease out and digest. And with a running time of sixty minutes per episode, to show an entire documentary as a teaching aid takes up too much class time, as I myself have discovered when I used *Jazz Parades* for a class. In reviewing this series, I obviously needed to take notes on each tape, and that put me into a slightly privileged position of having my own generated map of the series, complete with counter times. For example, I know when I lecture on acculturation I can now fast forward *Appalachian Journey* to the relevant discussion twenty-six minutes in, and that it runs for about twelve minutes. This break from my lectures visually demonstrates how white Appalachian music was influenced by many regional black traditions and enough time remains for discussion.

Even though I think study guides are too often used as a crutch to replace proper preparation, in this case, a study guide to the series would be useful. Until such a guide is made available, or is produced unofficially, using the “American Patchwork Series” will be difficult (except perhaps as an electronic babysitter), but ultimately well worth the effort.

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Recipes for Reading: Community Cookbooks, Stories, Histories. By Anne L. Bower, editor. (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997. \$17.95 US, ISBN 1-55849-089-2 pbk, \$45 US, 1-55849-088-4 cloth).

I have a professional and personal interest in recipes and so I looked forward to *Recipes for Reading*, a collection of fourteen articles that interpret community fundraising cookbooks. I hoped that it might hold insights for my own research on women’s traditional culture as well as utility for my undergraduate and graduate teaching. And, as someone who shares Margaret Atwood’s passion for recipes — I’m one of those people who read cookbooks the way other people read travel writing: I may not ever make the recipe, but it’s fun to read about it, and to speculate on what kind of people would“ (51) — I expected that I would enjoy reading these articles about recipes. But I finished *Recipes for Reading* feeling disappointed.

Grouped into three sections: Approaches to texts, Experiencing Texts (case studies), and Community Cookbooks in Context, essays argue that women speak and sometimes effect change (by fundraising) through these cookbooks. But many of the articles do not go much beyond this basic premise, which I understood before reading the book. I was looking for something more than the general thesis of *Recipes for Reading* that community cookbooks comprise a genre and that women tell stories—usually autobiographical, but also historical, and sometimes fictitious or idealized—through them. As I made my way through the articles, I couldn't help but wonder if there is not more to be said about community cookbooks and if there is not, I kept asking why I needed to read fourteen essays reiterating similar points. But, unfortunately, I found little new here and too many of the discussions, like Janice Bluestein Longone's overview of American charitable cookbooks, are simplistic and lacking in depth analysis. Longone surveys cookbooks and identifies sources for researchers but she offers few insights.

That said, this collection is not a write off. I leave thinking there are four essays I will return to and draw on. Editor Anne Bower offers an intriguing discussion of narrative elements in community cookbooks in her article, "Cooking Up Stories: Narrative Elements in Community Cookbooks." Describing the recipe collections as "communal partial autobiographies" (32), Bower links them to other forms of women's autobiographical writing and identifies narrative elements in them. Her search for setting, character, plot and theme in the cookbooks is somewhat forced in places but her discussion convincingly connects the recipe collections to central aspects of women's lives and roles.

Perhaps the best piece is Colleen Cotter's stimulating linguistic analysis of pastry recipes. Through a discourse analysis that examines the language and structure of a recipe, Cotter argues for a recipe "as a text form that is 'locally situated' as a community practice, and as a text that embodies linguistic relationships and implies within these relationships a number of cultural assumptions and practices" (53). Examining a recipe's distinctive syntax, semantics and narrative elements, Cotter demonstrates how it is a story, "a cultural narrative that can be shared and has been constructed by members of a community" (52-53). Her work is fresh and insightful and I will certainly go back to it.

A strength of the book is the way in which it combines theory with women's—and that often includes the authors'—lived experience so I also plan

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

Atwood, Margaret. "Introducing The CanLit Foodbook," in *Literary Gastronomy*, ed. David Bevan. Amsterdam: Rodope, 1988.

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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).

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