of meat and milk, which he takes to be a rabbinic gloss of a Biblical proscription, or on cultural anxiety about bugs in the broccoli, a late twentieth-century phenomenon, he relates them both to extra-gastronomic trepidations about identity, some generated from within and others from without. Heightened concern about combining meat products with dairy ones, Kraemer argues, came into being in response to conditions on the ground in ancient Palestine, then a fiercely heterogeneous assemblage of cultures. “Mixing was perhaps the single most important Jewish identity question from the late Second Temple period through at least the first several centuries of the Common Era. With whom may a Jew mix? To what extent may he or she mix with non-Jews?” And “what mix of the elements of ambient identities—traditional Jewish and new Jewish, Jewish and civilized Roman—should the ‘good Jew’ seek to achieve?” he asks (p.54). One way to find out was to peek into the kitchen.

Anything but static, the strictures of *kashruth* continue to unfold well into our own day. Take, for instance, mounting contemporary apprehension in traditional Jewish circles about the possible infestation of broccoli, Brussels sprouts, spinach, asparagus, and romaine lettuce with invisible insects, rendering them unkosher. Before putting nature’s bounty on the table, kosher-keeping Jews these days are exhorted to soak their vegetables in salt water for a half hour and then to examine them under a bright light. Whatever for? Surely the Bible or, for that matter, the Talmud did not discourse at any length on bugs or, for that matter, on microscopic copepods. Given that their fidelity to ancient practices runs deep, how, then, to account for why contemporary observant Jews are holding themselves to a higher standard? To Kraemer’s inventive way of thinking, the answer resides in the instability of modern times and with it, the instability of Jewish identity. Fishing for bugs, he suggests, is a form of boundary-making, a way to distinguish between those modern-day Jews whose Judaism is deemed authentic and those whose Judaism is suspect. “Once upon a time, a Jew was a Jew. You could, more or less, take his or her word for it….there was no need to check” (p.170). But today, what with intermarriage at an all-time high and Reform and Conservative Judaisms more than holding their own, that’s no longer the case. “Jewishness has become much more complicated…You probably have to check” (p.170). Under these confusing circumstances, the business about bugs is perhaps best understood as a symbol of fraught times and as a cautionary tale about the limits of internal religious pluralism.

All too often, though, the imaginative sweep of the book doesn’t quite make itself felt. For one thing, those not well versed in the ways of the Talmud may lose themselves in the maze of Kraemer’s exceptionally close readings, detailed analyses, and theoretical formulations of the densely layered text; they are not for the faint of heart or the untutored. A needlessly fussy prose style given more to recapitulation than to clarity also gets in the way. What’s more, at times the text reads less like a book with a narrative arc and a forward sense of motion than a series of individual lectures or classroom exchanges designed to keep the listener on her toes. It stops, starts, meanders, falters, and then races to a stunning finish.

Still, this account of the ways in which food is not just fuel but the stuff of identity—and a continuously fluid identity, at that—powerfully reminds us that institutions and practices that are divinely inspired are just as likely to be shaped here on earth by all-too-human hands.

—Jenna Weissman Joselit, Princeton University

**A Short History of the American Stomach**
Frederick Kaufman
224 pp. $23.00 (cloth)

In New York City in 1821 a businessman named Gibbons decided to put on a show. He bought twenty cows, had
them slaughtered, and then promenaded the raw meat on carts through the avenues of Manhattan, while bands played and flags waved. As Frederick Kaufman describes it in his discursive and very entertaining new book, A Short History of the American Stomach, “The flies buzzed, the blood dripped over the mud and cobblestones, and the enraptured multitude stood mesmerized by the spectacle” (p.110). Nor was Gibbons a lone freak: New York’s Canal Celebration of 1825, according to a contemporary observer, included hundreds of butchers on horses escorting two floats of cattle (one living, one dead) under a banner with the Wordsworthian motto: “We preserve by destroying” (p.111).

Even beyond the alarming public-health implications of these so-called “fat parades” (p.111)—i.e., did the parade-goers stick around for hamburgers afterward?—questions abound. What would convince someone to put perfectly good food to such a use? And, more interestingly, how on earth did Americans become the kind of people who would applaud a cart piled high with presumably rotting dead meat? Kaufman—also a writer for The New Yorker, Harper’s, and Gastronomica—has spent years, it seems, plumbing the depths of America’s various food-related neuroses, and has come up with a fascinating, if occasionally queasifying, book all about the tortured history of eating in, as he puts it, “one of the most gut-centric and gut-phobic societies in the history of human civilization” (p.11).

The journey begins with an adaptation of a Harper’s article in which Kaufman wrote about the similarities between food TV and pornography. As with many of the broad theories in A Short History, the analogy between gastroporn and sex porn is perhaps more fun than it is convincing: “As a slave descends into the S&M dungeon to undergo strange transformations,” Kaufman writes, “so the squid, through extreme mediation, would eventually find itself squid risotto” (p.21). Kaufman tends to skip away from serious analysis, keeping tongue firmly in cheek and the food puns flowing while he leaps from Rachael Ray’s thighs to a long discussion of feasting and fasting among the Puritans. One star of A Short History is über-Puritan Cotton Mather, who liked to call his soul “the Main Digester” (p.46). Mather had some peculiar ideas about health, including the prescription of urine for jaundice and consumption and a preoccupation with vomiting as the cure for all ills: “In the case of cough, a gentle vomit,” Kaufman sums it up. “In the case of distemper, seasonal vomits. In the case of asthma, vomit. In the case of dropsy, a vomit may not be amiss” (p.51). Again, Kaufman makes an attempt to sweep all this puke and pee into a grand theory (in this case: vomiting as moral purification, exorcising the devil in our gut) that ends up paling in comparison to his enthralling and bizarre source material.

A chapter on the raw-milk black market allows Kaufman to roam through the history of “moral” eating, including a fascinating exploration of the history of kosher food in America, the best detail of which is Crisco’s advertising slogan from 1912: the “Hebrew race has been waiting 4,000 years” for this non-meat-based cooking fat (p.74). From there, Kaufman jumps to the connection between food and Manifest Destiny, organized on the twin poles of competitive eating and American Wild West gigantism: “Add to the fastings and pukes of our Puritan ancestors the sheer abundance of the new continent and the geographical opportunities for expansion, and the result was an obsession with physical control and consumption on a scale the world had never before seen…Call it imperialist eating” (p.89). This conceit also seems a trifle overblown, although Kaufman’s litany of evidence (Paul Bunyan eating raw moose, Melville’s description of the American propensity to “bolt down all events, all creeds, and beliefs, and persuasions” [p.105], the early American preoccupation with cannibalism) does form an interesting mesh of ideas.

Kaufman closes, appropriately, with the end of the American stomach: the extinction of our native foods, in this case East Coast oysters, and their replacement with test-tube born clones: “The American stomach had once been traumatized by the abundance of the water and the land, but now it was the other way around” (p.181). The force of American innovation pitted against the American capacity for consumption: as Kaufman recognizes, and as this charming book elucidates, it’s an old, old tale.

—Britt Peterson, Washington, D.C.

Dough, A Memoir
Mort Zachter
University of Georgia Press, 2007
173 pp. $24.95 (cloth)

“Mort, what’s with the umbrellas?”

“When it rained, customers would sometimes forget their umbrellas in the Store. You are looking at the final resting place of seventy years’ worth of leftover umbrellas. My uncles never threw anything away.” (p.123)

Umbrellas are just one image of what seventy years of hoarding and saving will do to a family. The other, more relevant, image in Mort Zachter’s memoir, Dough, is several million dollars in stocks and bonds. At the age of