gluttony and sloth convey a sense of the longevity of the revulsion and fascination with the corporeal embodiment of excess. Another strong chapter is “Popular Images of Obesity,” which ranges from eighteenth-century satirist Hogarth to joke postcards of obese bathers from seaside resorts in early twentieth-century Britain.

The book may be a find for those who are fascinated by fat trivia. For instance, for those who have a hankering to revisit the iconic “Fat Lady in the Circus,” there is a chapter entitled “Fat Folk on Show.” The authors rightly note that these early fairs are precursors to the “modern day freak shows” of contemporary television weight-loss shows. For a book that claims to unpack prejudices about obesity, it certainly hits on all of the classic stories that many of us thought were apocryphal. Take the phrase “he/she was so fat that…” and fill in the blank with one of the following answers offered in the book: “he fell through the floorboards” (p.34); “he was buried in a piano case” (p.35); or “a television remote control was said to have been discovered hidden between the folds of her flesh” (p.37). We are told of the untimely death of the obese woman who choked on her own vomit (p.55); of the young man who broke the industrial scale when they tried to weigh him (p.12); and of the obese mother and son who had to be “evicted from their home by a fork lift truck” (p.34).

The authors, David Haslam, chair and clinical director of the United Kingdom’s National Obesity Forum and physician of “obesity management,” and Fiona Haslam, a former medical practitioner and scholar of the relationship between medicine and art, are flippant in parts—as when they describe the quack weight-loss techniques of the past, dangerous ones like arsenic, mercury, and tobacco, or uncomfortable, ineffective ones like soap enemas, which were believed to emulsify fat (p.135), or when they query whether a prehistoric figure like the Venus of Willendorf was a fertility symbol or a prehistoric “Playgirl of the Month” (p.86). Yet their often amusing or intriguing anecdotes, examples, and illustrations are interspersed with dire reminders that obesity is a chronic disease with various unsavory “co-morbidities” like heart disease and diabetes. Every story of a seemingly healthy, happy fat person seems to be followed by a stern reminder of his or her sudden early death. The dangers of visceral abdominal fat and inactivity are mentioned repeatedly, ultimately privileging the “truth” of the contemporary science of medicine over literary, moral, or pictorial representations and interpretations of fat.

The book has but the loosest of an overarching argument, although to be fair, readers are alerted early that the book is “not intended to engage with critical theory or analysis” (p.8). The authors’ assertion that “Present-day food, fashion, fads and fat cannot be dissociated from history” (p.11) is true enough, as far as it goes. They suggest that by learning lessons from “mistakes” of the past, we might move in progressive directions for the preservation of health in the future. In the introduction, the authors claim that when obesity has been eradicated, like smallpox, the importance of this book will be “documenting its rise, prior to its fall” (p.3). However, the book ends less optimistically with an account of memento mori (Remember thou shalt die) images over time and suggests that we need a new set of memento mori images for the twenty-first century as, they warn us, the “Fat, Gluttonous and Slothful are still dancing, or dicing, with Death” (p.202). Like a dish of pure fat, the book is rich but ultimately unsatisfying, and definitely not for the faint of heart or the queasy.

—Anne Meneley, Trent University

Steeped in History: The Art of Tea
Edited by Beatrice Hohenegger
Los Angeles: Fowler Museum at UCLA, 2009
236 pp. Illustrations. $40.00 (paper)

“What do we think about when we think of tea?” asks Elizabeth Kolinsky in the final line of this catalogue of an exhibition at UCLA’s Fowler Museum (p.215). For many, the answer might involve either the casual comfort of a fragrantly steaming mug or the old-fashioned elegance of fine china and crustless sandwiches. These essays by eleven scholars complicate such popular associations with richly documented discussions of the material culture and social, economic, and political history of the most widely consumed beverage in the world.

The book consists of four sections that explore the production, circulation, and meanings of tea in diverse cultures and periods. The first section begins with Steven D. Owyang’s survey of the changing roles of tea in China since the eleventh century B.C.E., including its preparation, medicinal uses, aesthetics, and significance in Daoist philosophy and imperial economies. Tradition meets contemporary practice in the following chapter, with Terese T’s Bartholomew’s personal account of a trip to Yixing to learn ancient artisanal methods of teapot manufacture.

The second section shifts the narrative to Japan, where tea was introduced in the ninth century by Buddhist monks who had studied in China. Dennis Hirota explains how aspects of three different Buddhist traditions shaped
the aesthetics and spirituality of chanoyu, the ceremonial consumption of whisked powdered tea in a highly refined setting. In an interesting counterpoint, Patricia J. Graham explicates the lesser-known practice of souchado, a ritual structured around steeped leaf tea, and suggests that its invocation of Chinese monastic and literati values during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries challenged what was seen as an ostentatious, rather than spiritual, pursuit of chanoyu by the samurai class. Reiko Tanimura also addresses the secularization of chanoyu in an assessment of women’s participation in this traditionally male ritual, but whereas Graham understands both spirituality and materialism as culturally constructed values that productively shaped social identities, Tanimura criticizes the shift from a “numinous” experience to a “trivializing” pastime (p.125).

Section three considers the transformation of tea from exotic luxury to democratized staple in Europe and North America during the eighteenth century. Woodruff D. Smith shows how tea drinking came to define specifically Western, middle-class notions of morality, healthfulness, and domesticticy. Angus Trumble discusses family portraits in which tea services signify status, and Barbara G. Carson presents a document-based study of consumption patterns in the American colonies. Jane T. Merritt nuances the conventional understanding of the American Revolution, which emphasizes the Boston Tea Party as a pivotal event, by examining other instances of resistance to British taxation in various cities both before and after the infamous destruction of a large tea shipment in Boston Harbor in December 1773.

Political concerns continue in the final section, which returns to Asia to confront the imperial policies, violence, and suffering that enabled tea consumption in the modern West. John E. Wills Jr. reveals the insidious interdependence of the tea and opium trades in China between 1700 and 1842. Elizabeth Kolsky discusses oppressive indentured labor at Indian tea plantations in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, where harvests were destined for sale not only to the prosperous people depicted in period advertising, but also to a growing population of poor British factory workers. Linking past and present, editor Beatrice Hohenegger prefaces these closing chapters with a call for improved working conditions, better support for small-scale growers, and environmental sustainability in the contemporary tea industry.

The book’s greatest strengths are its interdisciplinary scope; the interplay among chapters illuminated by cross-references and the editor’s introduction and section prefaces; and the large number of high quality, informatively captioned, color illustrations. These include scenes of tea consumption in Chinese scrolls, Japanese woodblock prints, and European caricatures, as well as a remarkable variety of tea wares from Asian drinking bowls to colonial American silver to contemporary ceramicists’ riffs on the conventions of teapot design. Readers with special interests might wish for more discussion of certain objects or topics, but the book does not claim to be comprehensive. Rather, it offers insightful glimpses of history in an attractively designed format that rewards both casual browsing and close reading. With accessible erudition, Steeped in History demonstrates how the values, practices, and artifacts of many societies over hundreds of years have shaped the shifting meanings of a beverage that many of us take for granted. Hohenegger and her collaborators have given us much to think about when we think of tea.

—Mimi Hellman, Skidmore College

**Bookends**

**Bitter Greens: Essays on Food, Politics, and Ethnicity from the Imperial Kitchen**

Anthony Di Renzo

Albany, NY: Excelsior Editions/State University of New York Press (sunny series in Italian/American Culture), 2010

xxii + 218 pp. $19.95 (cloth)

Anthony Di Renzo’s essays do exactly what Dr. Johnson said literature should do: entertain and instruct. But they also flay, skin, skewer, grill, boil, and toast their subject, be it food, family, history, ethnicity, politics, or the self. At their best, and in faultless prose, they reveal the workings of an examined life with deft wit and pathos. Like Ruth Reichl and other food memoirists before him, Di Renzo includes recipes, from antipasto to nightcap, but they are mostly beside the point. This is a book of memoir spiced with unabashed political critique and salted with astirgant self-examination. Quoting a panoply of sources, from Samuel Beckett to Cicero, Horace to Ray Kroc, Di Renzo asks us to examine the costs of free market capitalism from the perspective of a first-generation Italian-American foodie. He links the rise of Wegmans, the highly successful central New York gourmet supermarket chain, to the decline of the neighborhood grocery and the disappearance of affordable Abruzzese soppressata; relates the contribution of an Italian-American classicist to McDonald’s success in the global market; recounts his grandfather’s fatal addiction to chocolate via the history of Sicilian chocolate-making; and