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**Mikita Brottman**. *Meat is Murder!: An Illustrated Guide to Cannibal Culture (Creation Cinema Collection).* London: New York, 1998. 213 pp. $19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-871592-90-0.

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Mikita Brottman's book, *Meat Is Murder! An Illustrated Guide to Cannibal Culture*, takes the reader on a gruesome but fascinating tour through the anthropological, criminological, literary, and cinematic history of cannibalism. The book is an entry in Creation Books' series on "extreme" culture–other titles include *Deathtripping*, by Jack Sargeant (about transgressive cinema); *Killing for Culture*, by David Kerekes and David Slater ("snuff" movies as urban myth); and *Inside Teradome*, by Jack Hunter (freaks in cinema). Like many of the titles in the series, Brottman's book applies scholarly analysis to a "fringe" topic in cultural studies. The results are compelling. It should be noted in passing that while the book's illustrations are at times a little murky, they are nevertheless quite graphic in some instances and are not for everyone.

Part One of the book is entitled "Cannibal Culture, Cannibal Crimes." Brottman begins by surveying what she calls the "anthropology of anthropophagy." She identifies various categories of cannibalism, the first being dietary (the existence of which is hotly debated by anthropologists such as William Arens and Carleton Gajdusek). A second type is symbolic, or "eating one another for ritualistic purposes" (p. 9). A third is hunger, or cannibalism "which occurs as a result of sheer necessity and utter desperation, generally in times of famine and warfare or during plane crashes, shipwrecks and other human disasters" (p. 13). Lastly, Brottman defines psychotic cannibalism as "the extreme and terrifying reaction of a society or an individual whose moral boundaries have been forced to collapse, whose moral foundations have been shaken to the core, and whose basic human needs have been exploited and abused" (p. 19). It is no coincidence, Brottman says, that the twentieth century has produced a number of such psychotic cannibals: "As long as the twentieth century continues to lose its enchantment–that is, to become more controlled and rationalized–we will continue to breed psychotic cannibals, driven to seek out increasingly solipsistic ways of re-enchanting their own barren worlds" (p. 25). In the book's second chapter, Brottman discusses detailed case histories of some of the infamous psychotic cannibals, such as Germany's Fritz Haarman, the Soviet Union's Andrei Chikatilo, and America's Albert Fish, Ed Gein, and Jeffrey Dahmer. The introductory chapters thus serve to place the actual practice of cannibalism within a historical context–a valuable starting point.

Brottman then moves from a survey of "real" cannibalism to examine its depiction in popular culture. In Chapter Three, she argues that fictional narratives act out taboo-breaking so that we may see the results of transgression in a safe fashion and thus view our taboos with renewed appreciation of their wisdom. Cannibalism, of course, is one of those taboos. She starts by acknowledging the number of myths and fairy tales worldwide that feature explicitly or implicitly cannibalistic gods, heroes, and parents and other familial figures. Various works of classical literature, such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Hesiod's *Theogany*, and Dante's *Inferno*, also yield up instances of cannibalism. Of course, in more recent centuries, Swift uses cannibalism as a satirical weapon in *A Modest Proposal*, and authors as varied as Poe, Flaubert, Tolstoy, Norman Mailer, and Tennessee Williams have all included episodes of cannibalism in their work. Beginning with this chapter, Brottman decides upon a survey-type approach to the subject matter, giving brief synopses and quick but cogent explications of the most significant themes of the selected cultural examples.

Brottman's survey continues in Part Two of the book, entitled "The Cannibal Camera." In her analysis of cinematic cannibalism, she first cites relatively obscure examples of what she calls cannibal documentaries–"films describing or depicting images of cannibalism for a purportedly educational, informative, academic, or natural-historic purpose"–and arthouse cannibal films–"those

unorthodox or eccentric avant-garde cannibal-themed movies limited to the arthouse, small theatre or film festival circuit" (p. 75). Some of the arthouse cannibal movies include 1982's *Eating Raoul* and 1989's *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover*.

Chapter Two of Part Two "provides a brief overview of films where cannibalism is indulged in because its perpetrators have either become accustomed to the consumption of human flesh as part of their daily diet, or else find themselves in circumstances where their own survival depends on their ability to overcome their natural repugnance, and feed on the bodies of their former friends" (p. 93). Brottman is referring here to 1993's *Alive*, a film adaptation of Piers Paul Read's celebrated book about the cannibalistic survivors of a plane crash in the Andes in 1972. Some other films surveyed in the chapter include 1973's *Soylent Green* and 1995's *Cannibal: The Musical*, directed by Trey Parker of cable television's *South Park*.

Chapter Three examines films focused on cannibal families, such as 1974's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, 1978's *The Hills Have Eyes*, and 1989's *The People Under the Stairs*. A chapter entitled "Eating Italian" surveys Italian cannibal films, all having wonderful titles such as *Last Cannibal World* and *Prisoner of the Cannibal God*, but spends the most amount of time with 1979's *Cannibal Holocaust* and 1980's *Eaten Alive*. Finally, Chapter Four studies cannibal-criminal movies. Brottman explains the popularity of cannibal "psychos" in horror film: "narratives of cannibalism by psychosis combine madness and mayhem with the exhilarating frisson of the broken taboo–and all in an otherwise 'civilized' setting" (p. 161). The prototypical slasher film, 1963's gore spectacular *Blood Feast*, and the neo-classical slasher film, 1991's *The Silence of the Lambs*, receive treatment here, as do a number of others. Throughout Part Two of her study, then, Brottman scrutinizes not only a wide variety of such generally recognized films, but also far more obscure ones in world cinema.

As the title promises, Brottman gives the reader an overview of the fact and fiction of cannibalism as represented in popular culture. She argues convincingly that cannibalism, a staple in lesser-appreciated cinematic genres such as the "mondo" film, is actually far more mainstream in cultural representation than is generally recognized. Hannibal Lecter, the serial-killing psychiatrist in Thomas Harris's novels and the subsequent film adaptations, is probably the most famous example of a fictional cannibal known to both the "common" reader/viewer and the "refined" critic. But the tales of cannibalism extend far back into our collective folklore and literature. The taboo breaking enacted in these narratives, in some paradoxical fashion, reinforces our communal solidarity in the face of horror–a point Brottman argues persuasively.

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