

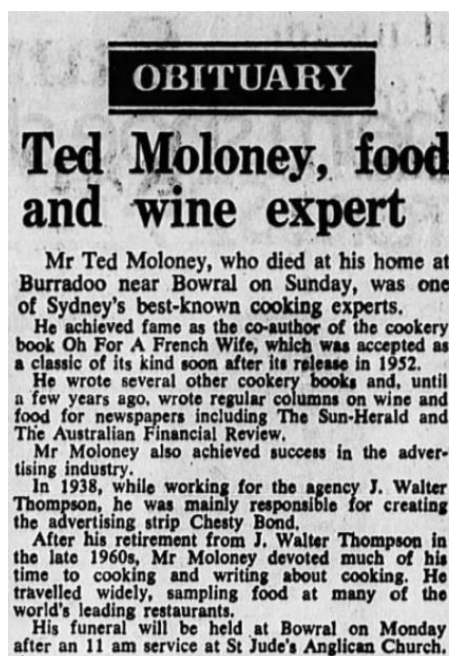
Queer Eye for the Moloney Guy

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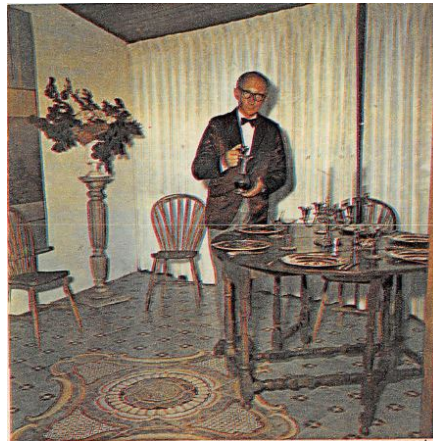
When I first read *Oh, for a French Wife!*, the 1952 book written by Ted Moloney and Lloyd Ring (Deke) Coleman, my gaydar, that unspoken set of signals gay men often have when in the presence of another gay man, pinged. The book is something of a curiosity for its time: Coleman's seven entries are, in his words, 'On the Chemistry and Philosophy of Cookery'; Moloney's entries are recipes and take up the bulk of the book. It's these latter that set off my gaydar. Why that happened is the subject of this paper. I think what Moloney created in this book, and in the half dozen other cookbooks he would go on to write over the next 20 odd years, are gay male cultural objects.

From the outset I have to declare that I have no direct proof that Moloney was homosexual. Try as I might I can find virtually no biographical information on him. The Australian Dictionary of Biography has an entry on Coleman but not Moloney. Inquiries via two Facebook sites – Lost Gay Sydney and the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives – turned up nothing. The one item I did find, however, registered high on my gaydar again.



This is Moloney's obituary notice in the Sydney Morning Herald of April 1982. To a gay man like me, an obit like this speaks through its absences. There is no mention of a wife and children either deceased or still living. It's the kind of obit whose coding, albeit unconscious, could be read by other homosexuals, like me, but not by the general public

Margaret Fulton who worked with Moloney at the advertising company J Walter Thompson in the mid-1950s writes in her autobiography of visiting Maloney on a number of occasions for cocktails at his 'little penthouse – actually a charming converted attic in a large house in the Eastern Suburbs'.ⁱ No mention of a family then nor later when she visits him at his property Burradoo in the highlands south-west of Sydney. Moloney and his house were featured in a photo essay in *Woman's Day* in 1967. There are no pictures or references to a wife or children. The article does, though, again unconsciously describe Moloney and the house in ways that set that gaydar urgently pinging.



... the house is a treasury of beautiful furniture and art pieces collected over the years by its much-travelled owner. His own distinctive personality and good taste are in evidence everywhere ... A huge, gilt-framed early Edwardian mirror over the fireplace adds to the effect of spaciousness ... Exquisite Japanese prints decorate the walls and on either side of an old Dutch colonial mirror is a delicate French desk of the Third Empire period ...

Perhaps the most unusual room in the house is the dining room ... the floor is in subtle blue Florentine tiles, with a centre design in gold.ⁱⁱ

What is being described here, I contend, is the home of a particular kind of homosexual man of the 50s and 60s: one with enough money and no family ties who can travel extensively and furnish his house with objects that express a gay male sensibility, a house that is also a gay male cultural object.

That is a provocative statement, as is my contention that Moloney's books are also gay male cultural objects. To make my argument I am going to do two things. First, I am going to identify some key elements of gay male culture as described by gay theorist of sexuality David Halperin's in his 2012 book *How to be Gay*. I use Halperin's book because it resonates with me, a gay man who consciously engages in the creation of instances and objects of gay male culture, this paper being one. Then I want to read Maloney's books through this lens. To do this I am going to imagine a gay male Moloney in Sydney in the 50s and 60s and how his books become a safe place in which to perform gay maleness. Here I draw on material from gay academic Gary Wotherspoon's 2016 book *Gay Sydney. A History* and on the culture of advertising companies of the time as depicted in the television drama

Mad Men, in particular the character Salvatore Romano, a closeted gay man. I also draw on Australian academic Sian Supski's 2007 work *It was another Skin. the Kitchen in 1950s Western Australia*.

The key elements of Halperin's thesis for the purposes of this paper are the following. 'Gay male culture generates and elaborates a distinctive way of feeling and a unique way of relating to the world, through the practice of reappropriating bits of mainstream culture and remaking them into vehicles of gay or queer meaning.'ⁱⁱⁱ 'Gay male culture uses a female subject position and a feminine identification to contest the context of the normal coding of cultural objects and activities...while also taking up a female subject position in order to make possible a sexualising – in fact a homosexualising- of cultural activities (sports, opera) that are normally coded as heterosexual'.^{iv} From a gay male perspective... 'everything in the social world is also a performance ... There is no relation of externality for gay male culture between being and playing a role, between actor and act. They may be distinct, but they are not separate; rather, they constitute each other...Playing a role is the mode of existing in the social world.'^v Finally, gay male culture 'locates meaning or content in form itself, finding value in any object that exhibits perfect conformity to a specific aesthetic order, to a specific style'.^{vi}

Let me turn now to imagine the world of Ted Maloney, a male homosexual in Sydney in the 50's and 60's. He works as a copywriter in the creative section of a multinational advertising company. It's a relentlessly heterosexual workplace. The men, both married and single, take every opportunity to openly and volubly sexually appraise the women in the office, the secretaries and models. They boast of their office affairs. They socialise after work at bars where women are again sexual objects to be seduced, and to become the butt of bragging and jokes in the office. He *has* to join in this heteronormative behaviour. He has heard effeminate men denigrated as poofers and pansies by his fellow workers. He has to be careful what he says. He once nearly outed himself disparaging the taste in aprons and upholstery on a television show.

He did daringly 14 years ago create a character called Chesty Bond to sell men's underwear. He and the illustrator gave Chesty a physique right out of the fitness magazines that circulated among homosexuals like him at the time.^{vii} They got away with it by saying it was to capitalise on the popularity of the new *Superman* comics from the US.



His options for being a homosexual outside of work are limited. He can opt out of after-work drinks with his work colleagues and dine at a handful of restaurants where gay men are tolerated - the Shalimar, or the Latin Café, whose proprietor Madam Pura calls them 'the people I adore'.^{viii} He can find sexual partners at the Sportsman's Bar in the Australia Hotel. Looking for sex in the public toilets is too risky: police often entrap homosexuals there and employers are quick to dismiss anyone whose arrest appears in the press. Homosexual activity is a crime punishable by a prison term of 14 years.

But he does have a circle of homosexual friends who meet for dinners and Saturday afternoon salons at each other's houses, and it's here he finds a safe place to perform gayness and create gay male culture. For women in the 50s and 60s, writes Sian Supski, 'The importance of preparing, cooking and eating food not only satisfies a physical need, but expresses an emotional relationship which is also perhaps sexual... [the women] are intimately connected to their families through the preparation of food and cooking and the emotion it inspires is a sensual experience as they cook and watch their families eat.'^{ix}

Moloney has no family, but he can find a sensual experience and emotional connection through identification with the feminine role of hostess not only with his circle of queer friends, but more importantly with heterosexual men he works with and undoubtedly at times falls in love with. He can ask them to dinner and get pleasure out of watching them eat and compliment his cooking. He can, in Halperin's terms, reappropriate this bit of mainstream culture and invest it with gay meaning safely.



As the perfect hostess, he stands outside of the group of guests, keeping an eye on how the dinner, the al fresco afternoon do is going, ready to serve the next round of canapes or refresh a drink.

Maloney knows that he, like his female counterparts, are, in Halperin's words, playing the role of hostess as a mode of existing in the social world, and the formal dinner is the stage on which it is played for high stakes, socially for the hostess and professionally for their husbands. It begins before the guests arrive. 'Rehearsal! Rehearsal! Rehearsal!', he writes in *French Wife*. 'It's the secret of success with any recipe and with any dinner worthy

of the name'.^x The kitchen he builds in his house has an island bench, an innovation which allows him to prepare the penultimate touches of the meal facing the lounges that open from the kitchen into the sitting room. It's a view that draws the audience, his guests, into the otherwise private world of backstage. The performance is completed at the table. This might be for something simple like Potatoes Anna which 'look like an upside-down cake, crisp and glistening, when they go to the table to be served. We'd never dream of cutting into them in the kitchen where there'd be no applause'.^{xi} Or 'two masterpieces that are going to be brought in as the climax to our party and not served until they've been seen by all. These masterpieces are those two wonderful open-face French tarts known as Quiche Lorraine and Onion Tart'.^{xii} The double entendre of 'French tarts' is intended, a shared thrill in illicit sexuality.

Somewhere along the way, Moloney has arrived at a meal aesthetic of balance. This is not balance in the sense of nutritional value. It's something he never formally defines, but you get some sense of it in his asides when describing a meal: 'One vegetable, in addition to potatoes, is all you should ever serve if you are going to do justice to that vegetable...'^{xiii}

It's the antithesis of the kinds of dinners being promoted in the cookery pages of magazines like the *Women's Weekly*.



It's an aesthetic that informs even the simplest of cocktails. 'Ted', Margaret Fulton wrote, 'would never serve gin on the rocks as a martini. Four to one was his accepted ratio. Three to one is OK for those who like vermouth. Ted would offer a tiny green olive with the drink but preferred a twist of lemon peel. The peel would never be dropped into the drink, just squeezed over the precious liquid. With Ted Maloney, the making and offering of a martini was lifted to an art form. He believed a good martini set the mood for a good meal'.^{xiv} Here the balance is not only in the contents of the drink, but in the performance of its making and its place in the theatre of the meal.

He found the perfect expression of the aesthetics of meal balance in French cooking. 'When I dined at home solo,' he wrote in his 1973 *Good living cookbook*, 'I invariably composed the meal in advance with what I considered French balance. Always a salad after the meat...'^{xv} His teachers in French cuisine were the women whose menus form the final

section of *French Wife*, titled 'Perfect Balance in the Serving of the Meal'. He later wrote: 'When the urge hit me to learn French cooking, just as a hobby I thought, I had Gianni D'Espinay, Louise Coleman and Paulette Pellier to take me in hand.'^{xvi} I hear echoes here of the women in Supski's study who 'learnt to cook primarily from their mothers through interplay between observation, imitation, active participation and instruction'.^{xvii} Here is Moloney, the gay man, challenging a heteronormative practice, looking not to French male chefs or cooking schools for instruction, but to women who were perfect hostesses for the guests of their executive and ambassadorial husbands.

Maloney identified with another aspect of the experiences of the women in Supski's study. 'Women's self-confidence (or lack of it),' she writes, 'seems directly related to their beliefs in their own foodmaking ability.'^{xviii} He often acknowledges the trepidation women reading his recipes may feel faced with what look like elaborate, difficult dishes, but assures them that they can make them. 'Your first little miracles', he writes in the 1965 *Cooking for Brides*, will be '...profiteroles light as clouds...This is quite a promise we make you. Profiteroles are cream puffs. Yes, you can. Oh, yes! You can make them. Cream puffs of any size. They look desperately difficult. They are not. You can make little ones. Medium-sized ones. Or puffs the size of cricket balls, light as a feather, which you fill with delicious savoury things as a first course for your much talked about little dinner parties.'^{xix} Of serving Crepes Suzette he writes elsewhere, 'When all the pancakes are folded in add a generous, a magnificent, dash of brandy. Count one, two, three. Tilt the pan so that the cooking flame can ignite the brandy and curacao. Whisk the pan to the table and serve the Crepes Suzette still flaming. Let's face it. This needs rehearsal'.^{xx} In *Oh for a man who cooks*, Moloney hilariously recounts an attempt at these that ended in the pan becoming 'a Vesuvius ... An atom cloud of black smoke shot up all around the pan and stretched up to the ceiling. In seconds it spread and started coming back down the walls. The chandelier was like an eclipse sun through dark glasses'.^{xxi} Did I mention that one of the other characteristics of gay male culture Halperin identifies is the capacity to turn tragedy into melodrama?

But as with Chesty Bond, Moloney finds opportunities to drop in references or make comments that appear not to have any sexual meanings but very much do so for homosexual male readers. Duchess Potatoes when dropped into hot fat will soon 'float light as Esther Williams to the surface.'^{xxii} Onions have a 'lusty peasant breath, which quickly changes so much for the better in the cookpot, [] always full of promise.'^{xxiii} At times he throws all caution to the wind: 'When buying pumpkin,' he writes, 'insist on your piece being fresh cut from a pumpkin which has just come into the shop. Blue skin shining. No scars of age. Flaccid, seed-drooling lumps of pumpkin are not for these recipes'.^{xxiv}

I want to end this queering of Moloney with a lovely example of how, in Halperin's words, as a creator of gay male culture he '... locates meaning or content in form itself, finding value in any object that exhibits perfect conformity to a specific aesthetic order, to a specific style'.

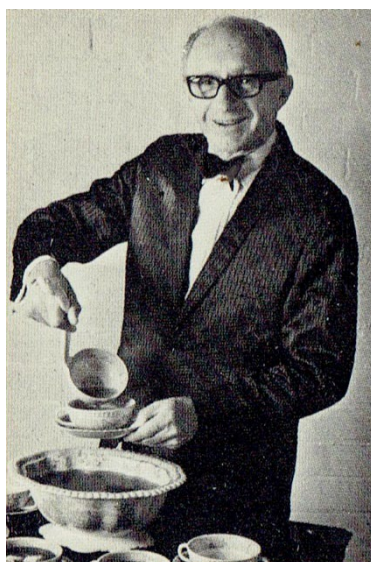
The clearest consommé, and ours shall be the clearest of clear, must carry in its own liquid all the flavour with which it is going to entrance the palate.

To get so much flavour into an absolutely clear soup takes only time, a generously big bird and fresh vegetables ... After five hours of gentle simmering you will have extracted just about all of the flavour from the fowl and the vegetables ...

Reheat the broth but not past the simmering point. Correct the seasoning and there's your consommé. It's so clear you can see the gold crest on the bottom of your soup plate and yet it has a most satisfying flavour.

Do we serve bread with this consommé? We do not! Instead, we make small puff pastry turnovers with a filling of chipped lettuce and egg.

Such a consommé stimulates the appetite for the course to follow and leaves no doubt that an important dinner has begun.^{xxv}



ⁱ Margaret Fulton, *I sang for my supper*, (1999), Landsdowne, Sydney, p.103

ⁱⁱ Susan Dunlop, 'A cook turns builder ... Recipe for an ideal home', *Woman's Day*, 9 January 1967

ⁱⁱⁱ David Halperin *How to Be Gay* (2012), Kindle edition Loc 2330

^{iv} Halperin op cit, p. 374

^v Halperin op cit, Loc 3327

^{vi} Halperin op cit, p. 236

^{vii} Garry Wotherspoon, *Gay Sydney. A History*, (2016), NewSouth, Sydney, p.74

^{viii} Wotherspoon, op cit, pp. 43 - 44

^{ix} Sian Supski, *It was another Skin. the Kitchen in 1950s Western Australia*, (2007), Peter Lang, Bern, p. 200

^x Ted Maloney and Deke Coleman, *Oh, for a French Wife!* (1952), p. 95

^{xi} Maloney and Coleman, op cit, p. 40

^{xii} Maloney Coleman, op cit, p. 17

^{xiii} Ted Moloney, *Cooking for Brides*, (1965), Ure Smith, Sydney, p. 71

^{xiv} Fulton op cit, p. 103

^{xv} Maloney, *Good Living*, p. 38

^{xvi} Maloney, *ibid* p. 38

^{xvii} Sian Supski, *It was another Skin. the Kitchen in 1950s Western Australia*, (2007), Peter Lang, Bern, p. 205

^{xviii} Sian Supski, op cit, p. 200

^{xix} Moloney, *Brides*, p. 87

^{xx} Carlos Zalapa, Sigurd Klingenberg, Frank Keane, John Walker, and Ted Moloney, *Oh for a Man Who Cooks*, (1957), The Shepherd Press, Sydney, p. 39

^{xxi} Carlos Zalapa et al op cit, pp. 34 - 36

^{xxii} Maloney and Coleman, op cit, p. 40

^{xxiii} Maloney and Coleman, op cit, p. 42

^{xxiv} Maloney, *Good Living*, p. 55

^{xxv} Maloney and Coleman, op cit, pp. 63 - 64