

## **Carmen curlers, extra marital lovers, and some damn good food. The quartet of Bernard King's 1977 seasonal cookbooks as camp texts.**

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I admit freely and often that I am not qualified as a chef, only as an entertainer.<sup>1</sup>

Through the course of 1977 Celebrity Chef Bernard King released a quartet of cookbooks, one for each season beginning with Autumn.<sup>2</sup> King was an openly camp gay man on his television cooking show *King's Kitchen*.

Camp has been variously defined over the years. I borrow from these to define camp as a style and an aesthetic that is deliberately theatrical, frivolous, excessive, audacious, satirical and questions traditional modes of expression and practice.

The quartet is unique among Australian cookery books for its content. It's the content with which I deal here to show that the quartet are camp texts.

I don't deal at all with King's television program.

### **Theatricality**

King had been an actor and topical revue writer so it's no surprise that theatricality is the core of the books.

Let me suggest, with characteristic modesty, that my book will supplant all the others that you possess.<sup>3</sup>

There is nothing modest about King.

I don't really cook – I don't really work – I throw things into a pot, I throw recipes out of the window, throw caution to the winds, throw modesty in the air and, coincidentally, turn out some damn good food.<sup>4</sup>

This dish is frankly stunning.<sup>5</sup>

King also says of his books that they are understated.<sup>6</sup> There is nothing understated with the covers for Spring, Summer and Autumn. Each features King on the cover shirt open to just above waist height exposing gold chains around his neck photographed in his kitchen. In Winter he is sensibly wearing a jumper.

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<sup>1</sup> King, Bernard, *Bernard King's Autumn Cookbook*, Rigby 1977 p.6

<sup>2</sup> King ... Autumn p.6

<sup>3</sup> King ... Autumn p.6

<sup>4</sup> King ... Autumn p.6

<sup>5</sup> King, Bernard, *Bernard King's Summer Cookbook*, Rigby 1977 p.8

<sup>6</sup> King ... Autumn p.6

Theatricality is embedded in descriptions of recipes.

Fanfare for glamour! First, prepare the birds – then pour the champagne, clutter the fingers with jewels of rare value, prepare finger bowls. And lay out the heirloom serviettes – your top 400 will eat the bones.<sup>7</sup>

My Bolognese is more of a meal than a sauce – it's costly but guaranteed to generate applause as they wheel you away to debtors' prison.<sup>8</sup>

Recipe instructions show theatricality.

Here is a participatory dish for all the gang. You have only to buy the steak. Slave for days marinating it, thread the skewers, pour the drinks – and clean up the mess.<sup>9</sup>

I would still recommend that the skin be removed. Throw it into the yawning mouths of passersby or return it to the stockpot and refrigerate for another month, and then throw it out!<sup>10</sup>

Presenting a dish can be theatrical.

The flourish of the flash of the flame suggests a table presentation - everyone goes 'Aaah' when the alcohol explodes. Keep the kiddies tied to a heavy piece of furniture in the back shed.<sup>11</sup>

The showmanship of the serving is the most important feature in this dish.<sup>12</sup>

Presented as a work of art, an expression of the arrangers skill, and dressed with a lavish curry sauce.<sup>13</sup>

## **Audacity**

I allow time in my recipes for social intercourse: and perhaps an extramarital affair between entrée and main course.<sup>14</sup>

The most audacious feature of the cookbooks is bringing sex into recipe writing. Sex was not so much a taboo subject in cookery books as to be not even contemplatable. King's books on the other hand make regular references to it.

For the late rising lover try an offering of gourmet treated lamb's fry – he'll be ready for bed again in no time.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> King, Bernard, *Bernard King's Winter Cookbook* Rigby 1977 p.14

<sup>8</sup> King ... Winter p.18

<sup>9</sup> King ... Winter p.22

<sup>10</sup> King ... Summer p.16

<sup>11</sup> King, Bernard, *Bernard King's Spring Cookbook* Rigby 1977 p.20

<sup>12</sup> King ... Autumn p.8

<sup>13</sup> King ... Summer p.14

<sup>14</sup> King, Bernard, *Bernard King's Autumn Cookbook*, Rigby 1977 p.6

<sup>15</sup> King ... Spring p.23

The most boring job in the kitchen is prawn peeling. Enlist the aid of your ... extra marital lover...'<sup>16</sup>

(Re a butcher) So set your cleavage on low, flick out the bouffant, glitter with Orotin and make him an offer that he can't refuse.<sup>17</sup>

## Satire

King satirises the practice of giving dishes French names; Pan Pork Bernard Avec Stubby<sup>18</sup>. Every salad is a Salade: Chicken and Tomato Salade A La Bernard and Basil.<sup>19</sup> To take satirising titles further he gives a vernacularly titled dish: One Pot Chook 'N' Spag Bernard<sup>20</sup>.

The claim that the recipes 'have been tried and tested for at least a minute each on *King's Kitchen*, my television series' parodies the practice in other cookbooks or newspaper columns of assuring cooks that the recipes have been tried in a test kitchen.

King satirises the health conscious.

Not a calorie in this confection – eat, drink and be merry. I'll diet tomorrow.<sup>21</sup>

No calories counters are required – eat my food and I guarantee your body will grow more voluptuous and your mind will glow with enthusiasm for all the multifarious activities that you undertake in all the spare time I leave you.<sup>22</sup>

Riskily, King satirises Grace, the woman at which the cookbook is targeted. The satire in part revolves around Grace's pompadour made with the assistance of Carmen electric hair rollers.

So, my dear readers, heave out the pans, uncork the wines, back-comb the bouffant and welcome to my Spring Collection.<sup>23</sup>

So, thaw some fillets or purchase a mullet or two from the local fish market, and be ready, pan in hand and lacquered curls firm into a bouffant..<sup>24</sup>

King satirises Grace's drinking.

... allowing a refreshing sip at the Liebfraumilch as you stir.<sup>25</sup>

... the recipe needs time to simmer – giving you time to wet the throat and dry up your comedy routines!<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> King ... Winter p.11

<sup>17</sup> King ... Spring p.25

<sup>18</sup> King ... Spring 24

<sup>19</sup> King ... Summer p.15

<sup>20</sup> King ... Autumn p.14

<sup>21</sup> King ... Summer p.15

<sup>22</sup> King ... Autumn p.6

<sup>23</sup> King ... Spring p.7

<sup>24</sup> King ... Spring p.9

<sup>25</sup> King ... Spring p.16

<sup>26</sup> King ... Spring p.20

King comes close to being offensive:

You will find yourself applying it to many other white meats and, in desperate moments, to the crow's feet around your eyes.<sup>27</sup>

The other satirical character is Fred, Grace's husband.' An incendiary, conservative in taste.

Fred will then breast the Bessers, generate a holocaust, and incinerate all the meat and the tube<sup>28</sup> will never leave his hand.<sup>29</sup>

Including red wine in this recipe is daring and different and probably not to everyone's taste. Serve with that special air of confidence that let's your guests know it's terribly chic. Gag Fred.<sup>30</sup>

Your Fred will be so unsure about this one – try force feeding<sup>31</sup>

Simplify the task of serving many guests by offering a dish on the hour every hour. You sustain interest, relieve pressure on the kitchen . and prevent the Freds from wallowing in drunkenness.<sup>32</sup>

### **Questioning traditional modes of expression and practice**

King subverts the 1977 form of recipe writing, harking back to the form of much older recipe writing.

For my style of cooking, you will need no weights and measures - I rarely specify these, leaving it up to you to add your own brilliant touch to my clever creations.<sup>33</sup>

Where other cookery books anonymise makers of dishes except in the title of the cookery book King's recipes are virtually entirely ascribed to him: Fiji Fish With Coconut Cream Bernard<sup>34</sup>, Pan Sautéed Veal Bernard<sup>35</sup>, Chicken Maryland Bernard<sup>36</sup>, Gooseberry Schnapper Bernard.<sup>37</sup>

Apart from sexualising them as discussed earlier King continually breaches the boundaries of what is acceptable to say in recipes.

The most boring job in the kitchen is prawn peeling. Enlist the aid of your Standby Naked Nubian, extra-marital lover, the C. W. A.<sup>38</sup>, or the kids. When that's done, you'll find my dish a breeze to perform and luscious to eat.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> King ... Spring p.12

<sup>28</sup> A can of beer.

<sup>29</sup> King ... Autumn p.20

<sup>30</sup> King ... Spring p.10

<sup>31</sup> Summer p.10

<sup>32</sup> King ... Autumn p.10

<sup>33</sup> King ... Spring p.6

<sup>34</sup> King ... Summer p.12

<sup>35</sup> King ... Spring p.20

<sup>36</sup> King ... Autumn p.14

<sup>37</sup> King ... Winter p.10

<sup>38</sup> Country Women's Association

<sup>39</sup> King ... Winter p.15

The entire operation can be conducted at your bedside, using a chafing-pan and one hand. Keep the plate of rice warm on the hot side of your electric blanket.<sup>40</sup>

The fibre content of All-Bran assist the functions so well – this could be force-feeding for the kiddie – one a day could keep them away!<sup>41</sup>

To move the cabbage around in the saucepan place one hand on the knob of the lid and the other on the handle. Grip firmly and shake to the beat of a cha-cha - it's good for the bust, upper arms, and hips!<sup>42</sup>

## End and Exhortation

This article has shown Bernard King's 1977 quartet of cookery books are camp texts – theatrical, audacious, and satirical that challenged traditional form of recipe writing. The last words are from King.

So, ladies, begin each dish by opening the wine, consuming the contents, popping in the Carmen curlers, slapping on a face mask, gluing on false nails, and reciting eerie snatches from the *Kama Sutra*, while you dab extreme unctions<sup>43</sup> on your vital parts.

If you are a man, pop the ring pull on a tube. slip the navy singlet over the seductive waistline, adjust the boxer shorts below same, tangle the toes over the thongs, and hum a few beery bars of 'Tie My Kangaroo Down Sport.

Now let's get started!<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> King ... Autumn p.11

<sup>41</sup> King ... Autumn p.26

<sup>42</sup> King ... Winter p.24

<sup>43</sup> This is wordplay on the Catholic last rites.

<sup>44</sup> King ...Autumn p.7