

Fags and Dykes at the Table of Love. Finger-food from a meal in progress.

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Two moments in the global history of fags, dykes and food resonate across the last 100 years. The first, when a bed-bound Marcel dipped that madelaine in his chocolate condemning us all to endless hobby courses in memory writing and sundry experiments with biscuits and hot liquid of which the tim-tam dunk is the most recent manifestation. The second when Alice, exhausted after one of those afternoons when that vile Pablo had carried on about painting with his prick, turned to Gertie and casually inquired – 'Shall I fix us a little something?', creating both the cause and the cure for the munchies and condemning us to endless re-runs of films in which people wear tie-dye bandanas and say 'groovy' a lot.

Of late, well as late as my all-to-brief sojourn as food critic for the Sydney Star Observer, these moments have occupied my mind. What, I have wondered, have their antipodean brothers and sisters cooked up that can stand beside them? What can we salvage from the farce of the failure of our wet republican dream to bring to the millennial banquet at which shall all sit will-we nil-we over the next year. What influence, in shortbread, have fags and dykes had on the development of Australia's food culture?

At this end of the century, two local moments could perhaps be offered. But do we as communities want to be known only for the soggy Sao competition, that pallid imitation of the Proustian moment whose authenticity has been much-debated and which has resulted in works whose literary durability are yet to be proved, or the much-applauded public performance extraction and subsequent consumption of a single strawberry from Maud Davey's cunt. These, as I have been known to observe on other platforms, may be at the cutting edge of a queer gastronomy, but they do not in themselves a cuisine make.

I've spent the last month searching for more of substance, and today I want to present to you something of a degustation, a sampling, of what I've found, hoping they will whet the appetite for a more considered and bountiful banquet I hope in the future to prepare. I indicate in advance that should you feel the need to come up to me after the paper and offer your petit four of five, my plate is ready.

The Magic Pudding

Having begun with international examples of the influence of food literature or food in literature, I think it only proper to begin my local report with a similar synthesis, which will also have to do for the resonant moment of the early part of the century. It's blissfully shorter, has more laughs, and is even more allusive than

Marcel's tome. It is brilliantly post-modern in its deployment of food as a protagonist in the text yet has I dare to say been read by more people and influenced the way more people see the world than any other po mo text. It is of course *The Magic Pudding*, authored by that grand old ponce Norman Lindsay.

What are Bunyip Bluegum, Sam Sawnoff, Bill Barnacle and Benjamin Brandysnap but a bunch of old queens, for whom Bunyip Bluegum says 'without food everything is rather less than nothing'. I put it to you that not even Oscar could have more accurately and succinctly limned the male homosexual.

And what after all is this pudding, why nothing but a young and desirable queen, screwing his way madly through the whole Sydney Bohemian scene? There's his name, Albert, a clear reference to the much admired penile accessory. Of him, Bill Barnacle says that "there's nothing Puddin' (do we hear here resonances of Wilde's "Bosie") enjoys more than offering slices of himself to strangers'. Indeed, we have in Albert, probably the first portrait in Australian literature of a sexual obsessive, one, again in Bill Barnacle's words 'Always anxious to be eaten, that's this Puddin's mania' Sam Sawnoff emphasises this, telling us that Albert is a 'cut-an-come-again' pudding.

The story centres around the formation by the four older queens of the Noble Society of Puddin Owners. Bill Barnacle, assuming the role of queen bee, declares the duties of members of this Society to be 'light. The owners are required to wander along the roads, indulgin' in conversation song and story, eatin' at regular intervals at the Puddin. This Society being formed the narrative becomes an extended description of that staple of fag life in Sydney till well into the 1950's, the progressive dinner party.

Tension in the book comes from the puddin' thieves, Possum and Wombat, intent on stealing Albert for their own consumption. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to recognise this as the desperate attempts of a rival coterie of queens to capture into their circle this studly chameleon who we are told can be whatever the particular pudding fancier wants him to be.

Lindsay suggests that S&M practices were already a part of the scene. When Albert is captured by the puddin' thieves, Bunyip Bluegum laments 'Our Puddin' in some darksome lair/ In iron chains is bound/ While puddin-snatchers on him farel And eat him by the pound'.

And size queens get a look in, too. Our heroes try to lure the puddin thieves by turning up at their place masquerading as travelling salesmen, purveyors of 'Pootles Patent Pudding Enlarger', "one of the wonders of modern science, (which) has but to be passed over the puddin' with certain incantations and the puddin' will be instantly enlarged to double it's normal size'.

The final strategy employed to gain back Albert prefigures the Mardi Gras. Bunyip Bluegum, the artistic one of the group, hits on a plan to hold 'A GRAND PROCESSION OF THE AMALGAMATED SOCIETY OF PUDDINGS'. He is sure that "puddin' thieves, unable to resist such a spectacle, will come hurrying to view the procession', which indeed they do, and Albert is rescued.

The book ends with a description of our heroes' retreat to a rural commune of sorts, where they grow vegies and have hot coffee for supper. And Albert, well he is safe in his 'Puddin' Paddock' from which he 'throws bits of bark at the cabbages, and pulls faces at the little pickle onions, or order to make them squeal with terror', a young queen having hissy fits at growing older.

If we in Oz have nothing else, The Magic Pudding can hold its head up with Maurice, the Well of Loneliness and even Ruby Fruit Jungle.

Six o'clock swills and swells - The post war years

I have yet to discover much about the period between the wars, outside of Lindsay and his fellow bohemians. So I'm going to leap ahead to the post WW II years. My guide here is Ron Turner, traveller, habitué of the pubs and clubs of the eras and former member of the Black and White Committee.

The way Ron remembers it, most of the social life of the 40's and early 50's was governed by the six o'clock swill. For you young uns out there, liquor licensing laws made it an offence for pubs to stay open and serve alcohol after 6.00pm on weekdays (there was of course no Sunday trading at all). For Ron and the hundreds of others who worked in the CBD of Sydney, this meant that you had between an hour and half an hour after work to get as much drinking and socialising done as you could because once you got back home you were very unlikely to venture back in to town to have a meal. Ushers, the Carlton, the Town Hall, the Hotel Australia and Erin's were popular. Barmaids ruled here - Miss Maclean at Erin's always sporting a corsage of gladioli on her ample frame, Fran of the voice 'like a saw on corrugated metal' which was once heard to transfix an incoming punter at 30 feet with the accusation that she didn't want anyone around who had been seen 'mixing with shits', and Rene at the Chevron where you could hardly see for the cigarette smoke in a shockingly air conditioned room.

If you did go on to eat, you went somewhere cheap in the CBD. You might head for Graves fish shop in King St, the Red Tulip (serving Dutch Indonesian fare like nasi goreng) in Margaret Street, or perhaps the Shalimar in Park Street. If you could make it, you might move on to Madame Wong's Chinese at the top of William St (that's Mrs Wong from Wagga Wagga) open till well-past midnight and serving Chicken Chow Mein, Fried Short Soup, Fried Rice. If you were with the press you probably went on to the Latin Quarter in the Royal Arcade; if with the

theatre crowd, at Pakis in Elizabeth Street; if with the racing crowd, at one of Vera Matthews's outlets, she of the famous "bower of flowers".

In Melbourne you may have gone to a coffee shop run by Pat Collins, who later went on to open one of the first bistros in Hobart at a time when, Ron says, there was 'fuck all of anything' in Tasmania, an observation that some would unkindly still make. If in Perth, you may have gone to the Heidelberg and gorged on rosti and boeuf Stroganoff. In Brisbane, the only place to go was the Pink Elephant, Frank Mitchell's place in the Valley, described by Ron as "gay as cricket. Frank 'fell foul of the law' and closed. In Adelaide you might try the Mozart. The food at these cafes and restaurants wasn't anything out of the box, but that it seems was par for the course in Oz at the time more generally. But that wasn't the point anyway. There were so few places where fags and dykes could meet openly that food was secondary to the experience. No, probably third behind socialising and boozing. And the sexuality of the owners was equally not an issue. Their tolerance was.

There were also dinner parties, though for safety you had to be careful whom you invited. You might find yourself at one run by Harry Sookie a.k.a. Sherie, or by Keys Hughes, a.k.a. Hazel, or Ugly Stella, or Daphne. Hostess gowns were the go, and there was often a fashion parade. The food at parties was no great shakes either. You drank, of course, lots - gin, or spirits and soda, never beer. A group of dykes in Perth were feared guests as they could be depended on to drink their weight in whiskey. Actually, you drank so much and for so long that it didn't really matter in the long run what you ate, so there was no real incentive to produce good food. If it was edible, it was likely to be the same fare time and again. In the face of this sameness and blandness, you had to think up new ways to make your party interesting. Ron recalls one where guests in groups of three each had to produce a course and re-set the table appropriately. The picture he has of it shows three drags with spatulas pushing at something unidentifiable in of three electric frypans. He also recalls a picnic where 'Bubbles' Williams recreated the Girl on the Red Velvet Swing. Bubbles was also famous for sending sequins rolling down the aisle of an airplane as he sewed away busily on his frock for the Black and White Ball. And the best hosts were sure to invite a QANTAS steward or two, who, though notoriously 'up themselves' did bring back with them those little surprises that made a party.

But what about the significant moment here to put up against that bloody madelaine? Perhaps it was the time in Perth, attested to by Ron who claims he was there, when those responsible for the first course of a progressive dinner served up Chiko Rolls to the ravenous and already more than a little pissed posse of guests, causing a general queasiness and upchucking that put and end to that dinner and to said rolls place in the annals of queer cuisine. Or perhaps it's the moment, which comes to us through rumour so it must be true, that Mervyn

Horton, himself a dinner giver of much renown, abandoned thoughts of producing a cookbook because all he got when he asked for recipes was 50 ways with avocado prawns. Ron also credits Mervyn with opening up the first cappuccino café in Rowe St, Sydney, a crime whose veracity I am yet to establish, but which is proved may see him dropped from the pantheon.

The Boys in the Band

The six o'clock swill was gone, in New South Wales at least, by 1955, but little it seems changed as we hurtled like Sputnik into the 60's. The way that infamous bon vivant Ian Mc Neil tells it, Sydney fag boys in the 60's basically spent their time boozed to the eyeballs in smoke filled rooms at the kind of dinner parties on which Matt Crowley would later draw for his play. That, or being Maria Callas. Often both at the same time.

This was pre Stonewall, before notions of pride and identity. Nonetheless, gay men, like many others from the emerging Oz intelligentsia and arts communities, were trying to create a world for themselves?. Many left Australia all together, hello Clive, Robert and Germaine, believing it impossible to create new identities at home. Those who stayed did what they could to create spaces in which to manufacture difference. And in the battle against mum, dad, blokedom, mateship, the suburbs, quarter acre blocks, and living on the sheep's back, dinner parties provided the ideal stage for the melodrama of difference, whose ingredients were a hunger for attention, the deployment of as much glamour as the room could take, endless rounds of martinis, Pimms with a slice of green cucumber, or a cocktail that may well have contained any or all of marsala, dry ginger ale, brandy, strawberries and passionfruit. and the smoking of cartons of Peter Stuyvesant - advertised for the young and gay'. Dykes were part of the scene. Some, Ian recalls, smoked Marlboroughs. Single straight women might also be guests, seeking the same refuge from the Australian ugliness.

Food became the actor's medium. It had to be new, richly flavoured, sophisticated or bizarre in its ingredients - preferably both, and showily labour intensive. "I spent too many hours in the 60's taking the skin and feathers off too many chickens", recalls Ian. Robert Carrier's classic Great Dishes of the World was released in 1963 and instantly acquired the kind of cache not seen since Mrs Beeton. For those unable to afford to go out into the world, it brought the world to them. A typical menu might be pate maison, prawns in whisky, Tournedos Rossini, and Tulipe Glace. Ian also recalls carrots in tonic water and roast chicken stuffed with camembert, but I can't find these in Carrier. Nor can I find it in Ted Maloney's 1958 book Oh for A French Wife, again much cited as a reference of the times, but the opening recipes in this book were equally influential – Onion Tart, and Quiche Lorraine.

Ian suggests that the creation of the meal, and I dare say its consumption, had to 'sublimate a lot of erotic energy', to engage in style as a way of avoiding the physical. David Marr, however, more recently pointed out to me that sometimes a sausage is just a sausage' even if it's called a cotechino.

As a side note, Margaret Fulton's much now romanticised first cookbook, while it may have had an immense impact in the domestic kitchens of the suburbs, got nowhere with the Boys in the Band. Well, I suppose you wouldn't want to sublimate your erotic energy cooking mum's traditional roast chook. Then again, perhaps you would.

And then there was Jackie. Marie Smith in her 1970 roman a clef disguised as reportage Entertaining in the White House says of the former miss Miss Bouvier that was 'Not since the days of Dolley Madison had the White House been the scene for such brilliant entertaining.....and not since the days of Thomas Jefferson, America's first gourmet of renown, had more serious thought been given to the White House standards of food and drink. Why wouldn't queens looking for someone against whom to measure style and modernity turn to Jackie? Why, within a month and three days of moving in to the White House she'd announced plans to re-furnish all the staterooms with authentic period furniture. She feted painters, dancers, composers. She set up a bar in the State Dining Room and served martinis at receptions for dignitaries from the non-aligned block. And she had a distinct preference for French cooking. Queens in Sydney would compete to produce a menu like Jackie produced for the President of Pakistan: Avocado and crabmeat mimosa; Poulet chasseur; Couronne de riz Clamart; Framboises a la Crème Chantilly, Petit four secs; Demitasse. Most prized of all was the host who could turn out her Bombe Glace Mandarin.

Of course, back here, you had to substitute a lot - where Carrier had turbot, your average queen was probably in the kitchen, like Ian, 'taking an axe to a flathead'. Resonant moments - certainly the first brave queen who took up Carrier and made quiche Lorraine. As for others, so much was drunk and so much smoked before dinner was finally served at midnight that no one cared what in the long-run they were eating, nor could any one taste these flavours of the new world, so nothing can be said with any certainty of their dynastic influence.

Turning the tables – the 70's and 80's

If to date the picture is more one of who did to us than of whom we did it to, two figures in the decades to come changed that. One was Don Dunstan, the other Leo Schofield.

When Don Dunstan died this year, his eulogies were unusual for the breadth of the accomplishment attributed to him. Most surprising in an Australian politician was the constant mention of his position in shaping food and wine culture. When

Dunstan published his cookbook in 1976, fetchingly titled Don Dunstan's Cookbook (okay, so he wasn't so creative in some areas), it caused a sensation, selling into its first reprint within one month. And why not. Here was the Premier of an Australian State, a male, not only putting out a cookbook but beginning it with a chapter titled The Joy of Cooking, and whose opening paragraph asserts "I do believe that if you can't take your love to bed, at least you can be close by providing the sensuous pleasure of the sharing of good food; and if you can take your love to bed then good food is an added delight.' No more sublimating the erotic, thanks, sensuality and sexuality walked out of those pages and into the kitchens and bedrooms of a new Australia.

Dunstan advocated home growing many of the ingredients that went in to his recipes. In his garden he grew among others artichokes – both Jerusalem and globe asparagus, beans, broccoli, capsicums, chicory, eggplant, broad beans, two types of lettuce, almonds, walnuts, lychees, guava, and Chinese gooseberries. He raised chooks, made mayonnaise and taramasalata. He advocated the home use of a wok and stir frying, and 20 years later both have become ubiquitous. Most significantly, in his chapter titled Towards an Australian Cooking Style, he advocated the development of an Australian cuisine which is inevitably derivative, but which will take the best from elsewhere; which will use our resources to the full and adapt to Australian kitchen and social conditions the cooking techniques of our Asian neighbours', for he says 'We are a nation of a multitude of social backgrounds, and we are in the process of fusing these together, while remaining a pluralist society'. And the most significant lesson to be learned from our Asian neighbours he believed was "an insistence of quality and freshness of food....No 'convenience' food for them'.

So there you have it, a manifesto over 20 years ago for the new Australian cuisine as developed first in Dunstan's own state by Chong Liew and Philip Searle, and as now practised by virtually every pretender to the throne of Australian gastronomy.

But Dunstan's influence wasn't only in the theory and practice of private consumption. Dunstan put through legislative change that is acknowledged to have brought about a revolution in South Australia's food and wine culture - from the dismissal of the six 0-clock swill, to the promotion of food and wine based tourism, through to creating the preconditions for the development of a café culture. It is unarguable that under his premiership South Australia began the process of which we all now share the benefit.

And then came Leo. In his 1980, Leo Schofield's Cookbook (what is it with these guys – is all the imagination restricted to the kitchen?) he has this to say for himself 'It's nice to think that in a modest way one might have contributed to a culinary revolution in Australia, to a state of affairs where Sydney now offers, on a

proportionately smaller scale, finer food than London, and where at least one local restaurant would rate three stars in any European food guide.' No need for such modesty, Leo, your name crops up in most conversations around shapers of the Australian palette.

It was Schofield, Charles Lloyd Jones and Dwayne McHillich (the then Marketing Manager for David Jones) who came up with the solution to lift the flagging fortunes of David Jones in the mid 70's with the complete refurbishment of the DJs food hall, setting in train the boom in gourmet food outlets that has produced Georges, Stephanie Alexander's Richmond Hill Larder, Simon Johnson's and Jones the Grocer's in Sydney, and finally to the gourmet sections in supermarket chains like Cools and Woolworths. What had been the province of small specialist delicatessens was now part of mass marketing. No more did the search for style and social positioning mean having to grub it with the ethnics in suspect deli's in even more suspect suburbs. You could walk into the spacious, clean, tiled elegance of that bastion of Sydney style and track down ever more obscure ingredients to keep up with the latest copy of Gourmet and Vogue.

Leo's other great contribution came through his association with the Sydney Morning Herald. Beginning as an editorial consultant to Fairfax, he went on to be the paper's food critic, reinventing the Sydney restaurant scene as he went. The culmination of this was the publication of the Good Food Guide, first produced in 1984, which gave all of aspiring Sydney a sense that we had indeed made the international scene (we had a publication awarding chef's hats in the grand tradition) and a guide to our own beau monde social scene increasingly focussed on public eating. Restaurants reputations and so their financial viability began to depend on the good grace of food critics. Schofield is also notorious for a court case where a restauranter took exception to what he saw as the damage to his business and reputation through Schofield's critical review. Schofield lost, and the consequences of that is an undercurrent in the ongoing relationship between Sydney food critics and restauraters, of which the reaction of chef/owners to this year's Good Food is one example. But it must be said that Schofield, and Durack and Dupleix after him, was also generous in their support for the emerging chefs. Chris Manfield, of Sydney's Paramount still gives credit to Leo for his support for her, and it was a review of the opening of Paramount which was Leo's last column for the SMH.

So resonant moments - Dunstan wearing his pink shorts in Parliament. It wasn't about food directly, but it was an action that sent a clear signal to conservative Australia that change was here to stay, and part of that change was the way we now see ourselves as a people with a cuisine that is independent of its colonial origins. Mind you, Dunstan also almost gets booted out from the pantheon for the popularisation of pumpkin soup, which even he in the 1998 edition of the cookbook describes as "the most hackneyed soup preparation here (in Australia).

At a more domestic level, I'd love to find the photograph Leigh Raymond recalls printed in *The Australian*, circa 1969 he thinks, of a gay couple in their kitchen, the prominent feature of which is a spice rack.

Food, power and politics – the 90's and beyond

If by the 90's the love that dared not say its name was now shouting it from the rooftops, then equally it was rattling the pans in the public kitchens of Oz. Chris Manfield and Margie Harris, owner/chefs of Paramount, in Sydney, are perhaps the most visible of the current breed of gays and lesbians within Australian food culture. She and her partner (in both senses) Margie Harris began their march across the fallow fields of Oz cuisine in the early 90's opening small dining rooms in Sydney hotels. Manfield recounts that it was on the strength of a wine filled lunch with a gay bank manager that they were able to take out the relatively small loan to set up Paramount, their signature Sydney restaurant, one of a handful of restaurants that would be counted in any list of the significant sites for the development of mod Oz cuisine.

Manfield learned her trade with Phillip Searle, the gay owner/chef of Oasis Serros. Searle is one of the handful of chefs credited with creating the first identifiably distinctive Australian cuisine, a fusion of the diversity of ingredients and cooking styles within the multicultural polity of late 90's Australian society. Searle is also remembered for a desert I'm sure Jackie Kennedy would have died for, checkerboard ice cream. More recently, Searle has been at the forefront of Sydney's re-discovery of sour dough and other breads, first through his Blackheath outlet, and now through Infinity, on the boundary of Paddington and Darlinghurst.

When in 1996 the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs sent four chefs to India under a cultural exchange program, three were queer - Searle, Manfield, and David Thompson of Darley St Thai and more recently Sailor's Thai. (Tony Bilson was the other.) Thompson's influence in the introduction and refinement of Asian flavours and ingredients, particularly Thai, in the new Australian cuisine is widely acknowledged. Thompson is the most publicly prominent example in a gay context of the particular strand in the development that flows from Australians' interactions and liaisons with South East Asia. Within our gay and lesbians communities, this plays itself out in a number of restaurants whose owner/chefs are openly Asian gays and lesbians - Kim Chau at Angkor Wat, a Cambodian restaurant in Oxford St, with a mainly Asian gay staff and clientele; Anne Sanpasiri at Nina's Ploy Thai and Ploy Thai 2, both in Bondi. Prasit Prateeprasen first set up shop downstairs on the corner of Oxford and Crown Streets, but is now owner/chef of a trio of highly considered Thai restaurants spread through inner east and north Sydney. In Melbourne Beh Kim Un At has taken it into the mainstream of Chinatown with Madame Fang's, where the fag presence starts

with Asian drag queen waiters and continues into the menu, offering treats like Passionate Oysters, A Rice Queen - 'risotto with no boundaries', and Prawns in Dialogue featuring 'succulent whole queen prawns'.

When I first asked Chris Manfield whether gays and lesbians had much of a place in the development of Oz cuisines, her response was 'where are they, they are so thin on the ground'. And yet, as we talked, and as I talked to others, so we identified more and more players. Tony Tan in Melbourne, co-host with Joanna Saville and Maeve O'Meara of the SBS Food Lovers Guide to Australia, a program which in its up coming series has gay men or lesbians as 5 out of 11 of its featured chefs. Reg Livermore and his partner Gary Edwards with La Sala, and Danny Chouet with Cleopatra's taking the new city cuisine over the Great Divide. La Sala is closed, but Phillip Searle has opened Vulcan. Marieke Brugman and her partner Sara, owner/chefs of Howqua Dale, a gourmet retreat in Mansfield, Victoria, and gourmet tour guides of Asia and India. (Manfield, too, on the strength of her latest book Spice, has been signed up as gourmet guide for a more upmarket tour of Indian palaces.) Scott Minnervini of Lebrina in Tasmania. Manfield, and Brugman are all key players in the Australian Symposium of Gastronomy.

What characterises many of these emergent gays and lesbians in the Australian food scene is the openness with which their sexuality is acknowledged and played with within their place in food culture, and their engagement with their communities. Jean Duruz, lecturer in cultural studies at University of South Adelaide, is mapping out very interesting territory on food, landscape and memory. An early paper as yet unpublished, contains an exploration of these through the eyes of Nushet, a lesbian in Clovelly, Sydney. Birdie Hickson runs Servitude in Sydney, a catering company that plays on the language of S& M and has AIDS and gay/lesbian organisations as significant clients. The AIDS Trust has developed the food fair associated with Counter AID in New South Wales into a signature event of Sydney's Good Food Month, one that attracted 80,000 people in 1998. Clair de Lune is the premier, nay the only, drag queen chef to have had a regular spot on Channel 9's Mid-Day Show with Kerrie Ann Kennely, where the mostly middle-aged housewife studio audience happily troop down on set to lick thick creamy desserts of the muscled chest of Clair's equivalent of the blonde bimbo.

Manfield and Harris themselves are highly visible in their engagement with the communities. Manfield was on the first AIDS Trust Committee to establish Counter AID. She is renowned for her cheeky desert takes on gay and lesbian symbols – the Freedom Sorbet Slice, an upright triangular ice slice described in her widely praised and well-sold book Paramount Deserts as '(drawing) on the freedom flag, a symbol that has come to represent gay and lesbian pride in our community', and the equally out-of-the-closet Slice of Pride, which appears on the

menu during Mardi Gras each year and whose 'tropical flavours are formed to capture the symbol of gay pride, the pink triangle... It becomes a visual and edible feast of celebration'. Perhaps her strongest and most playful engagement with sexuality and politics was the banquet she and Harris produced for the 1996 Symposium of Australian Gastronomy on the theme of Food and Power. Here's her description of it:

'The intention was to focus on different aspects and expressions of power throughout each course of the dinner. Guests were herded onto steps opposite the Opera House forecourt for drinks and canapés (sparkling burgundy, the blood of Christ, baked figs and prosciutto with blue cheese) Waiters were driven to the base of steps in 50's stretch Cadillac, dressed in full military style uniforms, hats and all (4 boys, 4 girls....the presence of strong military power. The waiters proceed to wrap the guests in red ribbon and lead/drag them across forecourt to Opera House, upstairs to the east wing function room.

First course, a take on the holy communion. Waiters dressed as priests and altar boys; guests led to centre of room to accept food - thin wafers with caviar; opera singers performs an aria.

Second course, display of female power. Waiters (girls only) dressed as Muslim women, all in black, faces covered; belly dancers perform during course; braised mussels on black moss with chilli black bean sauce.

Third course, the power of creation. Small chickens stuffed with lightly poached whole egg that spills open when the chicken is cut.

Fourth course, power of the body. Big strapping muscle Marys in sailors costumes, no shirts, all carrying huge platters of spinach with garlic sauce.

Fifth course, dessert - power of sexuality. Prelude to serving - a re-enactment of Adam and Eve and the serpent in the garden of Eden, three performers, all naked except for body paint; leads into a full B&D scene, leather mistresses lead in their boy slaves, lots of loud drums, pistol whipping, whips, you name it, drag queen bound and gagged etc etc.

Desert served by boy waiters as drag queens, prance to Madonna's Vogueing; creaming cocks (a fine tuile biscuit in phallic shape stuffed with toffee apples - Garden of Eden - and cream spurting from the top; waiters encourage diners to go down on desert, no cutlery.'

Conclusion

So there you have it, a few mouthfuls of a feast I now return to explore. But still so many questions left unanswered. Was the most resonant moment of the 70's

really the split between gay men and lesbians on the beef versus lentil burger? Did Frank Watters partner really enter his pickles in the Easter Show and did he win anything if he did? Was it for the food or the cravats that Bernard King will most be remembered?

I think Marcel would have like Manfield and her cohort. I think he would have liked the theatre of their food, the allusiveness of it. I think Gert and Alice would have enjoyed the company of Searle, of Thompson, or Prasit, people who can talk, think and cook cleverly and with a real relish for the act of production and for the produce itself.

But I think they would have liked even more the creators of what I think of as the most durable of iconic queer food in the Australian cuisine cannon. The first is

whoever it was first wrapped a blob of damper dough around a stick, held it over a fire till nicely browned, drizzled honey down the tunnel so formed, and first went down on what has come to be known as the 'doughboy'. I like to think it was Captain Moonlight, or Thunderbolt or some other hunky bushranger, hot for it on the Western Plains, a very long way from the nearest beat.

The second, and perhaps the greatest, is the queen I imagine waking up one morning with a shocker of a hang-over and an even more shocking last night's trick, stumbling to what passed for a kitchen in the dump hired from that shady landlord with the gold fillings, looking down at a slice of blindingly white bread, and who, failing to find anything substantial to spread on it other than some warm half-melted butter because that bitch Shirl hadn't gone to the shops again, reached for those fateful sprinkles, and created the first slice of fairy bread.

A last word, the title of this paper I owe to David Marr, who tells me that Mrs White's boy Patrick on two or three occasions in his works speaks of the dining table as the table of love. This paper, then, is fondly dedicated to all of those gays and lesbians who have come to that table and/or have ended up under it.