

The word "Festivity Food" is rendered in a playful, bubbly font. Each letter is filled with a different vibrant pattern, including polka dots, stripes, and abstract shapes in colors like red, green, blue, and yellow. The text is set against a bright yellow background.

FESTIVITY
FOOD

The text "Fourth Symposium of Australian Gastronomy" is presented in a bold, blocky font. The letters are filled with various colorful patterns, including stripes, polka dots, and abstract designs. The text is set against a bright yellow background.

FOURTH SYMPOSIUM
of AUSTRALIAN
GASTRONOMY.

FOOD IN FESTIVITY

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FOOD IN FESTIVITY

PROCEEDINGS OF THE FOURTH SYMPOSIUM
OF AUSTRALIAN GASTRONOMY

SYDNEY

16-18 OCTOBER 1988

Edited by Anthony Corones, Graham Pont and Barbara Santich
Sydney, 1990

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PROLOGUE

When we made our first faltering steps in Adelaide, six years ago, we hardly dared think that what we were beginning would become an institution.

And yet, the Australian Symposia are now just as firmly established as their antipodean forebears in Oxford. However fleeting the experience, the presence is permanent. Almost without our being aware of it, the Symposia have achieved substance and style.

The Symposium first took shape in Adelaide, moved to Melbourne and subsequently to Sydney, where the Fourth Symposium of Australian Gastronomy - the formal part - was held in the Powerhouse, the flagship of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences. Informal celebrations highlighted the Harbour and favoured Sydney restaurants. The theme: Food in Festivity.

Why 'Food in Festivity'? To begin with, Sydney has the reputation of being a festive city, party-ing, joyous, happy-go-lucky, sensual and celebratory. And this was 1988: the year we had all been invited to join in the 'Celebration of a Nation', marking the brief two centuries of white settlement in this ancient continent.

So we began with a reception at the Australian Museum and festive fare in the form of cakes, either traditional or 'nouveau' - an appropriate description for Anthea Leonard's decorated fantasies. And fireworks! A sparkling, exploding Harbour Bridge fired by Nicholas Bonham, a pyro-culinary replica in miniature of his stunning Australia Day display. Not only the 'new' imported food traditions were represented on the sideboard, but also those of the original Australians - modified, certainly, but real 'bush tucker' all the same. We concluded with Gay Bilson's subtle and subdued interpretation of the banquet. Between these two festivities we were regaled with the diversity of ideas and hypotheses, visions and reminiscences, which have been brought together in the present volume.

The gods clearly approved our festivities, granting us glorious spring weather; but the smooth organisation of the event was the work of mortals. Of the many people who contributed their talents and enthusiasm, we express particular appreciation to:

Des Griffin, Max Dingwell and Betty Meehan, of the Australian Museum

The Director and Staff of the Powerhouse, especially Jai Patterson, Louise Douglas, Ann Stephen, Kimberley Webber, Sandy Jennings

The Mitchell Library of the State Library of New South Wales, the New South Wales Parliamentary Library, and John Walker of Johnny Walker's Bistros, for the loan of items for the exhibition of Australian menus

Alan Saunders, of the ABC Science Unit, for his recordings of the proceedings

Vic Cherikoff, for his memorable feast of native foods

Maggie Beer, for bringing her forbidden kangaroo all the way from South Australia

Sara and Cynthia Adey, Mary Brander and Anita Sibrits, for the Sunday Night catering

Greg Fraser, for his invisible and invaluable contributions throughout

Linda Rosendahl, for the design and production of this volume

Fiona Garlick, for her sharp-eyed proofreading.

Special thanks go to Gay Bilson, who took charge of the meals, cajoling and coordinating chefs: Damien Pignolet, whose harbourside picnic was everything a picnic should be, including superb coffee; Phillip Searle, whose 'informal supper' was a most wonderful Sydney party; Anders Ousback and his staff at The Wharf, who managed, with primitive facilities in a temporary kitchen, to produce a satisfyingly simple lunch, to the accompaniment of music by that much-loved Sydney institution, Dick Hughes, on jazz piano.

Some explanation is needed for 'Landmarks of Australian Gastronomy', listed on Tuesday's agenda. This was the title of an exhibition of gastronomic publications, concurrently mounted at the Senior Common Room Club of the University of New South Wales by Graham Pont, Barbara Santich and Paul Wilkins, who also edited a bibliographical catalogue under the same title. The opening of the exhibition by Don Dunstan, on Friday 14th October, was attended by several symposiasts; and the conveners had hoped that the rest would get to see it. But, after a heavy session in the morning, the Long Lunch of prawns (freshly-cooked prawns, and lots of them), bread, beer, music and the view from The Wharf were more than enough for an afternoon's entertainment.

Anthony Corones, Graham Pont, Barbara Santich

• FOOD IN FESTIVITY •

FOURTH SYMPOSIUM OF AUSTRALIAN GASTRONOMY

at the

POWERHOUSE

SYDNEY. 16-18 OCTOBER 1988

PROGRAMME

Sunday, October 16

Welcoming Reception,

6.00 p.m. The Atrium, The Australian Museum
Enter by main entrance, College Street

Dr. Betty Meehan will give a short talk on Aboriginal festive breads.

Bush Tucker by Vic Cherikoff
Festive Cakes

Monday, October 17

Powerhouse, Coles Theatre. Enter at Level 3.

8.45 a.m. **Guided Tour** of Powerhouse Exhibition: 'Never Done'

9.00 a.m. - 9.30 a.m.: Late registration

9.00 a.m. - 9.30 a.m.: Registration of biscuits with Mary Brander

9.30 a.m. - 12.30 p.m.:

Tradition and Renewal in Australian Gastronomy

Principal Speaker: Don Dunstan

Chair: Dr. Barbara Santich

Supporting Speakers: Vic Cherikoff

Dr. Judy Messer

Anne Marshall

Michael Dowe

Chair: Michael Symons

12.30 p.m.: Bus to the Domain, Fleet Steps.

Picnic lunch, catered by Damien Pignolet

3.30 p.m.: Bus to Powerhouse

4.00 p.m. - 6.30 p.m.:

The Culture of Wine in Australia

Principal Speaker: Dr. Max Lake

Supporting Speakers: Gil Wahlquist

Dr. Tony Jordan

Len Sorbello

Dr. Oliver Mayo

Chair: Dr. Graham Pont

Supper, catered by Philip Searle.

8.30 p.m., Oasis Seros,
495 Oxford Street, Paddington

Convenors: Graham Pont, Anthony Corones, Barbara Santich, Gay Bilson
Correspondence: c/o Anthony Corones, University of N.S.W., P.O. Box 1, Kensington, N.S.W. 2033

Tuesday, October 18

Powerhouse, Coles Theatre. Enter at Level 3.

8.45 a.m. **Guided Tour** of Powerhouse Exhibition: 'Never Done'

9.30 a.m. - 11.00 a.m.:

Food in Festivity I

Anthony Coronos: On the Idea of Festivity

Dr. Barbara Santich: Metamorphoses of the Banquet

Dr. Graham Pont: In Search of the Opera Gastronomica

Chair: Don Dunstan

11.00 a.m. - 11.30 a.m.: Morning coffee

11.30 a.m. - 1.00 p.m.:

Food in Festivity II

Jenny Nevile: The Place of the Musical Banquet in Italian Quattrocento Festivities

Jakelin Troy: A variation certainly on dinners and dining-rooms, and toasts, and

speeches in either England or Ireland: colonists at corroborees in eighteenth and

nineteenth century NSW

Ann Stephen: Nineteenth-Century Party Food: Material Evidence from the

Powerhouse collections

Bernice Vercoe: The Place of Decorated Cakes in Australian Festive Celebrations

Michael Symons: Australian Public Holidays and the Disenchantment of the

Calendar

Chair: Dr. Don Laycock

1.00 p.m.: Bus to Wharf Restaurant

The Long Lunch catered by Anders Ousback

Landmarks of Australian Gastronomy

Exhibition of books at The University of New South Wales 5.00 p.m. - 7.00 p.m.

The Banquet 8.30 p.m., Pier 13, Pyrmont (end of Harris Street)

Party Dress, Catered by Berowra Waters Out

Reception

WELCOME TO THE AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM

Des Griffin (Director)

It's a pleasure for me to welcome to the Australian Museum a group of people somewhat different from those who usually attend our exhibitions, a group of specialists in food.

In Australia, at least until the years of the post-war immigration, we have generally eaten rather dull food, but we must have made some progress - after all, the subtitle of the Food Program on ABC Radio this afternoon was 'Muesli in a Wok'! The dullness of Australian food, until these last twenty or thirty years, has been despite the best efforts of the early Australian explorers. Joseph Banks, for example, comments on the excellence of skate's tripe, bustard and Cape Barren goose.

This conference, I've been led to believe, is no less about politics and power than any other. I understand there are two groups - those who are into pragmatism, the restaurateurs, and those who are into more intellectual aspects, the epicureans. Since I've had my interest in things intellectual sharpened recently by Donald Home's book, *Think or Perish*, I've chosen to side with the epicureans. At the same time, I've come to the conclusion that food, like everything else, is basically determined by who is in power. This is why Australians do not eat skate's tripe, Cape Barren geese and bustards, but instead eat sheep, which made money for the Macarthurs and others who were in power during the early years of colonisation.

However, my real task this evening is to introduce Dr Betty Meehan, one of our most distinguished scholars and the only one to hold two titles; she is both Curator of Anthropology at the Museum and Curator of Lunches. Betty will talk about Aboriginal festive breads and traditions.



Nancy Bandeyama preparing *ngatja* bread for baking by wrapping it in freshly pulled paperbark and securing it with pandanus frond. The photograph was taken near the Ngalidjibama Kunapipi camp in July, 1972. (Meehan-Jones Collection)

NGATJA

ABORIGINAL FESTIVE FOOD

Betty Meehan

Aboriginal people are renowned for the richness of their ceremonial life; perhaps less so for the food preparation that makes it possible for ceremonies to be performed. Today, particularly in northern Australia where European settlement was achieved much later than in the south, ceremonial life is still flourishing. New foods such as flour, tea and sugar; transport (motor vehicles, aeroplanes, boats) and communications (telephones, two-way radios) have been fully integrated into the ceremonial support system.

Kunapipi is one of the most important ceremonies performed in Arnhem Land today; three or four may be organised during one year and visitors from all over Arnhem Land travel to attend them. Some people participate for several months; others come only for a week or so at the very end. At a finale, several hundred men, women and children may congregate at one place. 'Kunapipi' is the name of a mythical female creator. This Fertility Mother is believed by Aboriginal people to have been responsible for creating much that is on land and in the sea, as well as the ancestors of present-day human beings. The ceremony celebrates these achievements.

KUNAPIPI CAMPS

Kunapipi camps always have two parts. The secular part houses all women and children, as well as some men who are permitted by ceremonial law to move between secular and ceremonial areas. Men spend most of each day - and sometimes the night - at the men's ground which is out of bounds to all females and uninitiated males. At the ceremonial ground, men prepare for and perform various sections of the Kunapipi and instruct initiands about their meaning. Women spend their days procuring and preparing food, particularly for the men living and working at the ceremonial camp. Firewood and water for both camps are also collected by women and girls. Late at night, when food preparation is over for the day and children are asleep, women perform their own ceremony associated with the Kunapipi. For women, every day during a Kunapipi ceremony is a long one, beginning at dawn and ending, usually, well after midnight.

KUNAPIPI SITES

In Arnhem Land there is a series of sites used repeatedly for the performance of Kunapipi ceremonies. The location of any particular ceremony is decided upon by the group of people organising it. Visitors to these ceremonies might be compared to early European pilgrims who, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, made their way to the town of Santiago de Compostela in Spain to honour St. James. The scallop shells they wore enabled them to travel through the countryside in safety. All Kunapipi sites in Arnhem Land are imbued with religious significance. All too have access to a source of abundant supplies of bush foods. In some places this is a rich coastal bed of shellfish; at others it is a productive freshwater swamp; and occasionally it is a cycad forest. Thus, particular foods - mussels, geese, cycad bread - have become associated with a particular site and constitute a major part of the food

that visitors to that site eat during the ceremony. All of these foods are, in a sense, 'ceremonial' or 'festive' foods.

CYCAD BREAD

In some parts of Arnhem Land, the bread made from the nuts of the toxic palm, *Cycas armstrongii*, is a staple food and eaten for most of the year. Sometimes it is referred to as 'sacred bread' and can only be eaten by men participating in mortuary ceremonies.

In central Arnhem Land this bread played a major but slightly different dietary role during a Kunapipi ceremony in 1972, which was held at a site near a large forest. This forest was dominated by *Eucalyptus tetradonta* but had an understorey of several smaller species including *Cycas armstrongii*. The Gidjingarli-speaking people who hosted this ceremony, and who owned the land upon which it was performed, call this plant 'ngatja'. Various parts of both the male and female plants are referred to by terms used to describe the human body. The plant belongs to the noun class 'man' - which also includes most plants, many Macassan items and white Australian foods such as flour, bread, sugar and rice. Ngatja is also included in the food category *balidja*, which Gidjingarli people use to refer to all carbohydrate foods. Other food categories - red meat, fish, shellfish - are allotted to different categories.

When the Gidjingarli people hosted a Kunapipi at this ngatja location in 1972, well over 100 people lived in the secular and secret camps for over four months. At least 400 people attended the finale which continued for about two weeks.

NGATJA: COLLECTION, DEHUSKING AND DRYING

Each day, family groups of women and children travelled several kilometres from the secular home base to the edge of the forest where small camps were set up for the day. Babies and small children remained here throughout the day under the watchful eyes of kin; older boys and girls roved the nearby forest looking for the hives of wild stingless bees to collect their honey.

Women and older girls entered the forest to collect the orange nuts from the ngatja palm. After about 15 kg were gathered and stowed in containers made from pandanus fibre or banyan bark string, the gatherers returned to the daytime or processing camp where they removed the cream-coloured kernels from the tough orange husks. They did this by placing the nut on a log of wood and steadying it with the thumb and forefinger of the left hand and giving it a short, hard hit with a small hardwood baton wielded by the right hand. This process is quite difficult but Aboriginal women are skilled in removing the toxic flesh. During the dehusking process, implements and hands became coated with the cycad flesh which gradually turned grey and sticky when exposed to fresh air. Workers removed this substance periodically from their hands and were extremely careful that nobody, especially children, got it on their hands or mouths, or into drinking water. In fact, very little drinking or eating was done during the processing of ngatja. At the end of the day the entire expedition repaired to a waterhole nearby. There, all utensils and hands were thoroughly cleaned.

During a single day, women divided their time between collecting and dehusking. They left home about 9 am and returned about 6 pm, as the sun was setting. In one day each woman made about three trips into the forest collecting altogether about 45 kg of unprocessed nuts.

At the end of the day, all flesh was carried to another site about half way between the daytime camp and home base. Here it was laid out, uncovered, on a pile of freshly picked green leaves and left there to dry in the sun.

LEACHING

Collecting and dehusking continued for about seven consecutive days, after which all the dehusked ngatja was moved to yet another site, this time near the home base. Here the dehusked nuts were lightly crushed with small river pebbles before being placed in large open-weave containers. Wads of green grass were stuffed into the top of each bag to prevent the flesh from falling through the mesh. All the bags were then lowered into a large fresh waterhole which had been excavated, especially for the leaching, by the men. The bags were left in the waterhole for seven days, during which time a layer of foul-smelling froth and bubbles about one metre thick developed. People said that water from this hole could not be used for drinking until after the next wet season.

COOKING

After the ngatja kernels had been removed from the waterhole and allowed to drain, the women crushed them yet again and formed them into loaves some 45 cm long, 13 cm wide and 6.5 cm thick. These were then wrapped in freshly pulled paper bark and secured with strips of pandanus frond.

Each woman cooked the loaves in her own earth oven for about three hours. After two hours the ovens were opened up and the loaves turned over. About 45 kg of ngatja bread were thus produced by each woman from the entire process - seven days of collecting, dehusking and drying; half a day of crushing and bagging for soaking; seven days for soaking and one for baking.

The final product resembled a solid loaf of European sweet and sour bread. It had a bland taste. Most of the bread prepared at this central Arnhem Land site was sent to the men's secret camp for initiands and other ceremonial workers. Some was consumed 40 km away, six weeks later. Still in its paper bark wrapping, the bread remained edible.

This method of preparing cycad, one capable of producing large amounts of bread, was the most important in central Arnhem Land. Other methods were also used. Women often collected old nuts that lay at the base of cycad trees. These had been burnt by frequent fires and had often been soaked by a wet season's rain. Experienced women tested these for toxin by smelling them. Those considered to be toxin-free were crushed and baked as small cakes on a fire. Sometimes large quantities of nuts were collected from beneath cycad trees just before the wet season began and placed in a large waterhole. They were retrieved several months later (four in one case) and eaten without further treatment.

TOXICITY AND NUTRITION

Unprocessed ngatja seed contains a very toxic substance called Cycasin which causes tumours, ulceration and death in experimental animals. The process used by Arnhem Landers evidently removes this toxin. The two samples analysed during my fieldwork contained no trace of the toxin. They were taken from bread prepared by Nancy Bandeiya who was recognised as a

meticulous preparer of food in her own community: she insisted on doing everything in the correct way, no matter how long that took. Not all cooks were so careful and this variation may be reflected in the results of analyses.

Nutritional analyses indicate that ngatja bread is an important source of carbohydrate. Samples of bread collected at Donydji, in north-eastern Arnhem Land, gave values for carbohydrate content of between 44% and 65%. Carbohydrate content of fresh kernels was calculated to be about 44%. Raw cycad seeds are relatively high in protein (approximately 5g/100g) and in energy values (583-1306 KJ/100g). Unfortunately, equivalent information on processed seeds and bread is not available. Leaching may dramatically decrease energy content. One of the advantages of ngatja bread is that it can be prepared in large quantities and stored for many months. This makes it an ideal food for large gatherings of people like those who congregate for a Kunapipi.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CHANGING TRADITIONS

There is no doubt that ngatja bread has special significance for the participants at Kunapipi ceremonies. Older Aboriginal men and women feel that it should be prepared; many younger people who have grown up eating European and well as bush food, are not so keen. Nowadays, flour has become an important commodity for Aboriginal people in Arnhem Land. It is always bought in bulk - preferably in drums holding some 20 kg, or in cartons. Bright red 'Dingo' drums are now a common sight in Aboriginal outstations. From flour, women make dampers - mostly unleavened, but more and more with baking powder, or self-raising flour. These are cooked in earth ovens, camp ovens or in frying pans using oil. Dampers are always an important food at ceremonies, be they initiation, mortuary or religious. Those prepared as gifts on special occasions are expected to be well-made: to be of the correct size, thickness and texture. If they do not meet these standards they will be criticised, perhaps even rejected. In many ways, dampers have replaced ngatja bread. This replacement is understandable in terms of the energy expended as compared with the energy produced in the making of ngatja. Flour can be bought from the supermarket at Maningrida and is ready to be made into dampers. It takes two weeks to reach that stage with cycad nuts. However, despite the enormous economic advantages of flour, ngatja has remained meaningful for older Aboriginal people. Perhaps flour will gradually acquire a similar significance for future generations of Kunapipi participants.

PREHISTORIC USE OF CYCAD

Aborigines and their ancestors have lived in this continent for much longer than the 200 years or so of recorded history. How long have they been exploiting and processing cycad? There are at least eight archaeological sites in Australia which have yielded cycad remains, with finds ranging from Holocene ages, 270 BP to 4,320 BP. One date, from a site in the south-west of Western Australia dated about 13,000 BP, may indicate that this food was being used by people living there in Pleistocene times, though this antiquity has yet to be confirmed.

What this evidence tells us about Aboriginal ceremony and subsistence is not yet clear. However, once Aboriginal people knew how to remove the toxin from cycad nuts they were in a position to produce large quantities of energy-rich food - a prerequisite for any large gathering of people. It seems likely, then, that food and ceremony, or food and festivity have had a long association in Australia, stretching back into remote prehistory.

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MENU

GRUBS AND RIBERRY

A relative of the desert witjuti grub served with riberry from N.S.W.

YORK HAM WITH ILLAWARRA PLUM SAUCE

Wood smoked kangaroo served with the blue Illawarra plum.

SMOKED ROO WITH ROSELLA CHUTNEY

Kangaroo smoked with Eucalyptus leaves and served with wild hibiscus chutney.

PEPPERED WATER BUFFALO

Northern buffalo spiced with the native Dorriggo pepper.

WILD GREEN SALAD

With warrigal greens, water lily stem, macadamia nuts, lemon aspen and assorted salad greens.

SAMPHIRE SALAD

The mangrove saltbush

BURRAWANG BREAD

Made from the treated nut of the prehistoric burrawang served with King Island butter.

STEWED QUANDONG

The native peach from the outback.

WATTLE PAVLOVA

A traditional dish but using seeds from an edible wattle.

WATTLE

A beverage from the second Australian food plant commercialised.

Presented by

THE BUSHFOOD CATERERS

Vic Cherikoff of

BUSH TUCKER SUPPLY PTY LTD

Jean-Paul Bruneteau & Jennie Dowling of
ROWNTREES THE AUSTRALIAN RESTAURANT

THE BUSHFOODS BUFFET

Vic Cherikoff

I'd like to say a few words about tonight's food, which includes, as well as the festive cakes, a range of bushfoods. Betty Meehan has been talking about cycads, and you will now have the opportunity to try burrawang, the southern equivalent of the cycad. The burrawang flour that was used in the bread that you'll try tonight was made by Aboriginal people in Newcastle. As Betty mentioned, the toxins are incredibly toxic, but Aboriginal processing removes them entirely. The product is quality-controlled to such a degree that it contains less than one-thousandth-millionth of a gram, the detection of which is beyond our technology, but not beyond the technology of an Aboriginal nose. An experienced lady would know exactly when the flour was ready to eat.

Tonight we are starting off with two types of kangaroo, one very kindly donated by Maggie Beer, of the Pheasant Farm Restaurant in South Australia. Her fillets of kangaroo have been smoked with eucalyptus leaf, which has imparted a very delicate flavour. The other 'kangaroo ham' has been simply wood-smoked. Those of you who come from New South Wales must realise you are eating at your own risk! New South Wales people are apparently different from South Australians, for example, who are legally allowed to buy and eat kangaroo meat. We, in this state, are thought to suffer dire consequences from eating kangaroo and therefore must have our health regulations to protect us.¹

We have two types of sauce to go with the kangaroo - one a dark-coloured sauce, made from the Illawarra plum, the other made from small, heart-shaped ryeberries. We also have grubs, served in a coolamon. They are best eaten hot: dig in, but remember, one grub per person! Don't worry about which end to start from - just eat the whole lot. Try them with the ryeberry sauce, which gives a nice contrast of taste. And there is also buffalo, peppered with a native pepper, the leaves and stems of a particular rainforest tree.

We have three types of salad - a salad of unusual fresh greens, donated by Sara Adey, and some less conventional salads made from Warrigul greens and samphire, or native saltbush. The dressing is made from lemon aspen, and I think you'll agree it is absolutely superb; for that I thank Jean-Paul Bruneteau, of Rowntrees Restaurant. Try the water lilies, too, from Moore Park swamps, and the burrawang bread. Finally, you will have the opportunity of sampling a beverage made from wattle seed, the second native plant food to be commercialised in all Australia (the first, as I'm sure you're all aware, was the macadamia). The wattle seed is harvested by Aboriginal people, for whom it is a cash crop. I hope that this enterprise is a sign of things to come - that Aborigines will be more involved in the selection and development of our bushfoods.

I also hope you enjoy tonight's offerings.

1. It has since been announced that kangaroo may soon be commercially available for human consumption in New South Wales.

FESTIVE FARE

CONTRIBUTORS

Cynthia Adey

Jane Dahlenburg

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Maria Kelly

Nathalie Leader

Alexandra Michell

Millie Sherman

Penny Smith

BISCUITS

Lebkuchen
Red Wine Biscuits

Almond and Ginger Florentine

Almond Crescents

Melamakarana (Honey Biscuits)

German Honey Biscuits
Ginger Biscuits
(from The Lanhaus)

Coffee Macaroons

Meringue
Biscuit à la Poche

Burnt Butter Biscuits

CAKES AND BREADS

Cynthia Adey

Gâteau des Rois (Twelfth Night Cake)

Sara Adey

American Angel Cake

Doreen Badger &
Jill Stone

Festive Easter Bread
(shaped like a dove)

Mary Brander

Swedish Birthday Cake
(multi-layer hazelnut meringue cake)

Margaret Brown

Rich Fruit Cake

Jean-Paul Bruneteau

Rolled Wattle Pavlova

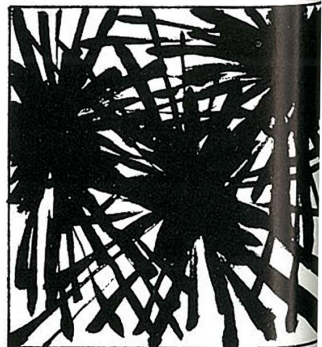
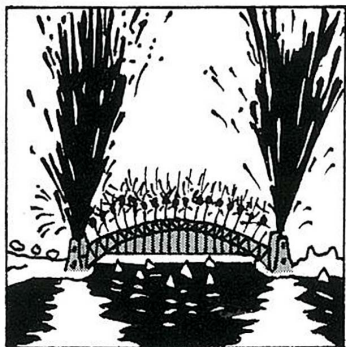
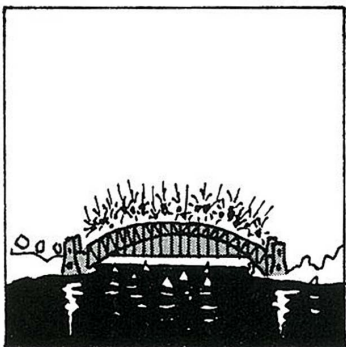
Lois Butt

Gâteau de Pithiviers
(Loire festive cake)

Vic Cherikoff

Burrawang Nut and Kurrajong Seed
Bread with wild Rosella

Ann Creber	The <i>Yes-it-really-is-meant-to-look-like-that!</i> Almond Fudge Dessert Cake
Jill Duplex	The Great Australian Bisultanian Cake (a rich glacé fruit studded cake in the shape of Australia, including <i>Tasmania</i>)
Frances Farmer & Louise Godwin	Caraway Seed Cake (afternoon tea cake) Almond Bread
Tim Harding	Chocolate Sugar Opera House (modelled by Mr Erich Scheli, Executive Chef, Peninsula Hotel, Hong Kong)
Daniel Hasofer & Diana Shaw	Jewish New Year Honey Cake Orange-Sour Cream Poppy Seed Cake
Robin Hindson	Scottish Black Bun
Donald Laycock	Old-fashioned Sugar Cream Pie
Anthea Leonard	Bathurst Island Totem Hot Water Bottle Edna Everage Portrait Sushi Dalmation Rose Heart Chicken Dinner Vegetable Plate Lola's Bedroom Australia Day II Sydney Harbour Bridge Cake
Anne Marshall	Dundee Fruit Cake
Warren Mason	'Remainders' (Nut Tart)
Sheridan Rogers	Greek Easter Breads American Fruit Cake
Barbara Santich	Gâteau des Rois
Millie Sherman	Tarte Alsacienne
Anita Sibrits	Kulich (Russian Easter Cake)



THE SYDNEY HARBOUR BRIDGE CAKE

Nicholas Bonham

Throughout history, significant occasions have been celebrated with ceremonial events at which all of the arts are combined to produce a unified spectacle. In both sacred and secular festivity, the presentation of food has been a powerful symbol, especially in elaborate sculptural creations. Displays of food, as at the Harvest Festivals of the church or the annual agricultural displays at Sydney's Royal Easter Show, continue an ancient tradition, celebrating Nature as the primal deity, with her abundant fruits dedicated as thank-offerings.

The elaborate use of food by the early Romans in sculptural and theatrical fantasies is well documented. In the Renaissance, these classical traditions were revived along with new architectural and theatrical creations in food. The sculptural centrepiece or 'subtlety' now became an elaborate allegorical statement with figures, emblems, heraldic devices and geometrical symbols, enlivened with performers (dancers, dwarfs, musicians, etc.) and special effects including fountains of water, wine and fire.

The Renaissance also revived the pythagorean hermetic philosophy of ideal forms which represented the cosmos in number - in other words, the divine proportion or *analogia*, the harmony connecting the macrocosmic and microcosmic worlds. This neo-classical world-view pervaded all aspects of Renaissance festivity and spectacle, particularly in the scaling of events and also in the ceremonial centrepiece and other embellishments of the table.

This tradition inspired our contribution to the Symposium. It echoed the almost spontaneous popular banquet or 'bouquet' which celebrated Australian Day on Sydney Harbour in January, 1988, when the people brought their traditional festive fare - the barbecue or picnic hamper, beer and wine - to view the water spectacle and the pyrotechnical finale. For this display I chose to focus on the Sydney Harbour Bridge, a structure in perfect scale with all the other elements of this grand occasion. The pyrotechnics created a new image of this world-famous icon of Sydney and Australia, making it a symbolic centrepiece for the entire bicentennial celebrations.

Similarly, Anthea Leonard, working through her business Sweet Art, has developed the culinary centrepiece or festive cake in new Australian directions, following the masters of *pièces montées* like Carême and Dubois. Her amazing creations express the ethos of Sydney in a way that few artists, culinary or otherwise, have achieved.

We hope that our joint creation succeeded in recalling the Grand Tradition of Food in Festivity, providing a microcosmic centrepiece, appropriate in both symbolism and spectacle, to the opening of the Symposium.

Tradition and Renewal in Australian Gastronomy

TRADITION AND RENEWAL IN AUSTRALIAN GASTRONOMY

Don Dunstan

T.S. Eliot wrote: 'There is only the fight to recover what has been lost and found and lost again and again...'; and, while he found the conditions for that unpropitious, the prospect for doing so in gastronomy today seems, on the contrary, propitious indeed.

But first let me talk about the place of elites in society. After Marcuse, 'elite' and 'elitism' became pejorative terms. They should not be. Marcuse's thesis, that one had to demolish the institutions of society in order to release the natural creativity of the masses, was a great piece of nonsense. There is no creativity of the masses. Creativity will always be found in a minority of the population. Social change and improvement are inevitably brought about by ginger-groups whose enthusiasms and creativity work like a yeast upon the masses.

Take an example from another area of the arts - the performing arts. Even before the development of mass entertainment through film and television, the proportion of the population attending live theatre performance was small. It grew smaller, so that in the 1950s in Adelaide, at any concert in the Town Hall or any ballet, play or opera at the Theatre Royal, substantial numbers of the people there knew each other.

However, with the establishment of state-supported performing companies and the building of the Festival Centre, audiences became much larger and more diverse. The elite attending, enjoying and assisting by its reactions the setting of greater standards of excellence, grew many-fold. It was still an elite - a small part of the population. But it had its leavening effect on the rest. While the Centre was building, I was criticised for the expenditure of public monies on the arts, especially when we took that expenditure to the highest per capita in Australia. But when the Centre was opened, criticism ceased. Public opinion polling showed that the arts policy we had pursued, of setting standards of excellence and providing opportunities for audiences to experience a range of performing arts activities at a professional level, had won the support of the mass of the people (most of whom did not actually visit the Centre). The establishment of standards of excellence is a part of the function of elites, and any one claiming to be a gastronome in this country is a part of such an elite.

Interest in food, in its greater variety, in better standards of cooking and presentation has been a feature of many societies since the second World War, but particularly in the English-speaking world. At the end of the war the cookbooks on the shelves of book sellers were few; but, with a rapid growth in the 1950s, they became a phenomenon of publishing. Paul Hamlyn boasts that his greatest profits have been made from cookbooks. At the same time, the growth in restaurants of quality has been enormous. When, in the early 1970s, I set

about changing the licensing laws to provide that one could drink alcoholic beverages and liquors with food, unhampered by ridiculous time and other constrictions, I added restaurants to the list of state-supported industries, and insisted on the creation of a world-standard food school at Regency Park, I was bitterly accused of 'restaurant socialism' by the radical students of the day. Today those students are enthusiastic chardonnay socialists, happily munching away in the enormously increased number of restaurants of quality. These are now a feature of Adelaide which boasts a higher proportion of licensed restaurants to population even than Melbourne, itself now rightly hailed as one of the food capitals of the world.

How has all this ferment at an elite level affected the rest of the people? For it is still a small minority of the population which provides the regular custom for restaurants, a smaller minority which regularly buys magazines devoted to food and wine (unknown here pre-war), though a larger group buys cookbooks. Let us examine the features of the Australian cuisine at the beginning of the war and see what has happened since then.

At that time, much cooking was still done on wood stoves, often with an auxiliary kerosene-burning device - the 'Perfection' stove, for instance, which was quicker to start and capable of adjustments of heat that were very difficult on a wood stove. In the cities, gas and electric stoves were to be found in many kitchens, but the other major labour-saving devices, essential to many cooking techniques today, were unknown. Refrigerators were then just starting to replace ice-chests and Coolgardie safes.

An examination of the commonly-used cookbooks of the day (the 'Green & Gold', the 'Commonsense', the 'Schauer', and that remarkable attempt by Lady Hackett-Moulden Buller-Murphy to emulate Mrs Isabella Beeton) reveals a tradition of cooking which has changed markedly in a few decades.

I should digress here for a moment to recount the career of Lady Hackett. She married, at a young age, the then elderly and very wealthy Mr. Winthrop Hackett, a Western Australian newspaper proprietor. She bore him five children, several of whom were to have remarkable careers of their own. Mr. Hackett was duly knighted; so his wife became, naturally, Lady Hackett. On his death he left considerable endowments to the University of Western Australia, and his relict was awarded an Honorary Doctorate. She then married an Adelaide Lawyer, Mr. Moulden, kept considerable state at her North Adelaide home, Lordello House (now St. Ann's College), and retained by special dispensation, the title and name of Lady Hackett. When her husband, after service as Lord Mayor of Adelaide, was knighted, she added '- Moulden' to her title. When he died, she subsequently married Basil Buller-Murphy, a Melbourne barrister. No further dispensations being available, she then became Dr. Deborah Buller-Murphy. In the dispensation period she published the first edition of *Lady Hackett's Household Guide* (which included salad recipes by Lady Dugan, the wife of South Australia's then Governor). The book was reprinted at the outset of war with the proceeds going to the Red Cross Society.

I have cited this book, which was popular in its day, because it is bigger, and purports to be more comprehensive, than the three more famous books I previously cited. Examining them all, we can see certain features of the Australian cuisine immediately stand out.

Australian cooks evidently used stocks for nothing other than soup. Meat and vegetables were not cooked in stocks but in water. While the books do not give details about the dripping pot,

it was in fact standard practice in Australian households to collect beef dripping (which is frequently referred to in the books). Fat used in cooking meats was occasionally butter but more usually beef dripping, either raw or clarified. Most of us would prefer to suppress the memory of the dark brown and all-pervading smell of cooking in beef dripping which was a feature of Australian cooking in my childhood. Lady Hackett's recipe for steak rolls was:

Take 1 lb. rump steak, 3 ozs. breadcrumbs, 1 small onion, 1 dessert-spoonful mixed herbs, a little dripping, pepper and salt. Cut steak in squares of four inches. Mix breadcrumbs, onions and herbs and a little dripping to bind all, season to taste with pepper and salt. Put a little of the mixture in each piece of steak, and sew in shape of sausage. Put all rolls in a saucepan, which must be big enough for all to lie on the bottom. Put in the dripping and let cook gently for three-quarters of an hour, then pour off the dripping and make a nice gravy. Serve with mashed potatoes.

The culinary sins committed in that little exercise are legion; but the tradition lives on still in parts of Australia. The Australian boarding house, which also celebrated this form of cooking, is largely a thing of the past, but I can confidently aver that in numbers of Australian small town pubs the old tradition is alive and well.

A second feature of the cuisine was its cooking of vegetables. In her preface to *Leaves from a Tuscan Kitchen* (1899), Janet Ross wrote:

The innate love of change in man is visible even in the kitchen. Not so very long ago soup was an exception in English houses - almost a luxury. A dish of vegetables - as a dish and not an adjunct to meat - was still a greater rarity; and even now plain-boiled potatoes, peas, cabbages etc are the rule.

Those words were also largely true of Australia in the 1940s, except that baked onion, potato and pumpkin formed the usual accompaniment to the roast dinner. But it was common then to cook vegetables in large quantities of water. *The Commonsense Cookery Book* (compiled by the Public School Cookery Teachers' Association of New South Wales and first published in 1914) has only one recipe for green peas: to boil 1 lb. of peas in a quart of salted water with mint, soda and sugar, to drain and finish with pepper and butter. Lady Hackett's recipe is the same. The teachers of New South Wales also advocated boiled carrots (a quart of water to a bunch), boiled onions (similarly), boiled pumpkin and marrow. And notoriously, the aroma of boiled cabbage and beef dripping made up the smell of Australian boarding houses.

To be fair, by the time of Lady Hackett's book, there were many recipes for vegetables in wider variety and some of them were good. But Australians, though amongst the world's greatest meat-eaters, undeniably treated meat and its accompaniments but poorly, even in an age where women were for the most part spending their lives about *kinder*, *kirche*, and *küche*, and domestic servants were common. While Michael Symons has rightly pointed to the lack of a peasantry, the industrialisation of food production, and the factory production of everything, from canned fruit and jam to biscuits and yeast extract, as significant characteristics of the Australian cuisine, the causal connection between all that and the poor state of our meat and vegetable cookery I find difficult to make. Perhaps it was because the concentration, attention and care were directed elsewhere.

A brief look at the social habits of the day may provide some clue. Australian society was much concerned as usual with putting on a social face. The houses of the time regularly had expensive facades, the decoration not being repeated on the side walls, and corrugated iron 'lean-to's at the back. In the 1940s the facade was often fashionably 'Spanish'. A verandah, too small to be a living area, sat beside the front stippled facade and was ornamented by stippled arches supported on twisted columns. Australia had a plethora of little bungalows called 'La Hacienda' where the diminutive front gardens were adorned with rockeries containing cacti, succulents and aloes. The verandah gave on to the front parlour which was where, as for houses built (with similar facadism but another passing fashion) in previous decades, one of Australia's important social occasions was celebrated - the afternoon tea.

Apart from the family, afternoon tea gatherings constituted the most significant social interaction for women in Australian society. It was not in shopping. The butcher, the baker, the milkman and the greengrocer all called. Shopping was generally confined to grocery and clothing items.

At afternoon tea the best face was put forward, as in the building of facades. Elaborate cake-making is where the artistry went. In the *Commonsense Cookery Book*, 15 pages are devoted to vegetable cookery and 45 pages to cakes and sweet pastries. Lady Hackett has over 100 pages of cake and pastry recipes. The judging of cooks at the Annual Shows in country and city was on the basis of their cake-making and decoration. If a cook were praised then, it was mostly on the airy lightness of her sponge-cake, the light but moist richness of her date loaf. And very good cake-making it was. While the small farmers of Tuscany were massaging their prosciutto, the small farms in Australia - and there were many, despite the industrialisation of farming - were producing for celebrations luscious scones with home-made blackberry jam and cream, short-breads which melted in your mouth, and brandy snaps which made it water. Cake decoration classes predominated in what adult education classes in cookery there were at the time.

So this then was Australian cooking tradition - meat and vegetable cookery which was not good, cake-making which was excellent. One can add that fish was sparingly eaten; fish cookery was unimaginative and often poor - it was standard to cook fillets of fish in a heavy batter. Much local fish was rejected as being inedible or at best unpalatable. Though fishing was a widely popular pastime, as it still is, the varieties used for the table were restricted. A further feature of the cuisine was the high proportion of sugared products. Home-made jams and home-grown fruits preserved in syrup were common.

Now the traditions have changed markedly. The Australian cuisine of today places much less reliance on sugared products. Its cooking styles for meat and vegetables have changed considerably for the better. Cake-making is in decline, with the almost complete disappearance of the afternoon tea at home as a social institution.

Let us now examine the influences which have contributed to this change.

It is impossible, I believe, to exaggerate the influence of the post-war migration. While the substantial British migration did little to change existing Australian cookery (which had, after all, largely derived from the same traditions), the successive waves of Baltic people, Italians, Greeks, Hungarians, Germans, Dutch and Poles changed Australian food traditions by

introducing the 'multiculturalism' which has been discussed at previous Symposia. This produced both better standards of cooking of meat and vegetables and a greater variety in the resources themselves.

The dripping pot has almost entirely disappeared from Australian kitchens. Cooking fats are now mainly butter and vegetable oils. Australian cooks have learnt that you don't put meat into a cold pan with some dripping and expect a good result. Australians now relish squid which was once only caught for bait, and eat shovel-nosed lobsters which used to be tossed back into the sea. And the scorned yabbie is now in such demand as to be an exported delicacy.

Vegetables are now cooked in a greater variety of ways, often with butter and/or a little stock. No longer are the flavour and goodness always boiled out of them in large quantities of water and poured down the sink.

The convenience of the kitchen has so far improved that householders may now cook dishes which previously would have taken so much preparation that, with today's almost total absence of domestic servants, the task of undertaking them would have been daunting. Stoves and ovens, electric and gas, have almost entirely replaced the fuel stove. Refrigerators are universal and now usually contain a freezer compartment; with these, and the larger domestic freezers which are also common now, the keeping of foods of almost all kinds is simpler and effective. Blenders have become universal, and in the last ten years the food processor, derived from the Cuisinart system, has lessened the labour of chopping, pastry mixing, or pureeing. The domestic cook of today has available techniques previously too troublesome in the domestic round, especially with the great growth of women's participation in the work-force.

The post-war popularity of the pressure-cooker has shortened cooking times and often improved quality of flavour as well; and now the microwave is producing steadily a qualitative change which will eventually mean a whole new era in home-cooking. Microwaves are now almost ubiquitous. It is unfortunate that their manufacturers have rarely employed anyone who knows how to use the things - what they are good for, and what they aren't - to write their books of microwave cookery. Indeed, it was only when Claire Kearney introduced me to *Microwave Gourmet* that I even began to realise the treasure trove that I could mine with my microwave. Eventually this knowledge will reach the community to replace the often sorry results of present domestic (and public) microwave cookery.

With the ferment of interest in food resources has come a steady growth in their variety. In latter years, vastly increased travel by Australians in Asia, together with the growth of Asian migration and the influx of Vietnamese refugees, have brought an appreciation of new foods and flavourings. The technique of stir-frying is now understood and used in a large number of Australian homes. Stir-frying is not mentioned in the pre-war cookbooks I have cited. When I published my cookbook in 1976,¹ that useful technique was still little-known; and when I appeared, later that year, on the Mike Walsh show and demonstrated the technique, no one there had ever seen it before! Today, in my village of Norwood, three of the butchers' shops always have in their windows meat prepared for stir-frying.

1. *Don Dunstan's Cookbook*, Adelaide, 1976.

There were Chinese restaurants in Australia from the 1840s (Lady Hackett included some Chinese recipes for savouries in her compendium); but in the last five years Chinese restaurants have grown in number at a rate exceeding the building of McDonalds or Kentucky Fried Chicken outlets. And now, in small supermarkets in the suburbs, the Asian food supply section usually exceeds in shelf space the area given over to jams and preserves - a situation unimaginable before the war. The demands of Asian migrants have led to the presence in our markets of fruits and vegetables not seen before; and Australians are now realising that, with a country which is second only to Brazil in the size of its tropical land mass, it is foolish to eat as if we lived only in a temperate zone. Ten years ago, apart from pineapples and bananas, it was difficult to find tropical fruit in greengrocers in Cairns. Today, one finds them not only in Cairns, but in Sydney and Melbourne and Adelaide. In the last decade, kiwi-fruit from New Zealand and avocados (mainly from the North, but now grown widely in suburban gardens in the temperate zone) have become common fare.

Restaurants in Australia have grown almost exponentially in number, and many people eat out where much of the pre-war population never did. Of the restaurants which are setting standards, there are two kinds: those which present mainly the cuisine of a particular country or region, and those which are temples of a newly creative cookery. As to the first of these, if you know where to go, you can find better Chinese cookery in Australia than in China or Hong Kong; better Indian cookery than in most of India, and very good European, Middle Eastern, North African, and South-East Asian cookery. So far there has been little influence of Central America or South American cookery, which is perhaps surprising. It is true that so-called Mexican Taco joints abound, but generally speaking, Mexicans would be unimpressed by them.

The second category now boasts some very remarkable establishments. Without producing an exhaustive list, the gastronomes of Australia have reason to bow low before the names of Gay Bilson, Stephanie Alexander, Phillip Searle and Maggie Beer. How far will their work affect general traditions in Australia? All of them have used and do use techniques derived from the great cooking of history; each of them is individually creative in a way which is original within the framework of the best (largely European) traditions. The standards they set will, I believe, have a similar effect to those demanded of South Australian craftspeople in another area, from which I draw this analogy.

When I pursued the development of a crafts industry in South Australia, I found that those engaged in the crafts lacked marketing skills and organisation. I therefore proposed the setting up of an organisation similar to one in Sweden, which acts as a wholesale purchaser and seller and marketer of craft products, and brought out an expert from the British Council to advise on what we proposed. He took a swift look and said:

Hold everything! Your crafts are not of sufficient standard. You really don't have what to sell. You must establish some workshops and import craftsmen of world standard. Then your locals can work with them, and will learn to appreciate the standards which must be achieved.

We took his advice; and that was how the Jam Factory Workshops, the first such major crafts centre in Australia, was set up. Its effect on the standard of craftwork in South Australia was soon obvious. The works of the master cooks, the really creative ones in this country, will in the long run be as important as Escoffier or Boulestin were in England.

But in the use of historic ingredients and techniques and the creative use of them, there are some lacks and omissions in Australia which I find surprising, and I feel bound to mention a few.

Australia is a significant wine-growing country, and produces much in the way of house grapes suitable for table use and cookery. One of the two significant cooking liquors of Roman cookery was *defrutum* - a reduction of fresh grape juice. I find it superb to use. It crops up in some European cookery, particularly Hungarian, and I notice Maggie Beer uses it. But hardly anyone else does; it is a neglected traditional resource. Milk sauce, an almost caramelised reduction of milk, occurs in Indian cookery and was transported to South America. This is an obviously good tradition which has sailed right past Australia. We have, however, an ungood tradition, also derived from India by way of England, which still afflicts us: the constant use of 'curry powder'. Commercial curry powders differ in their use of ingredients and taste different. What is more, they are almost inevitably stale. I boggle at recipes which specify 'one teaspoon of curry powder', because there is little guarantee that what is produced will taste as the recipe-giver intended. But it afflicts some of our most esteemed cooks; it even occurs in Paul Bocuse's book - and he should know better.

Now that all the necessary ingredients for a freshly-ground and precise mix of spices are available, I put in a plea for a renewal of Indian tradition in this country. This can only enhance Australian cooking.

We have little use yet made in this country of the *rempah* of Malay and Nyonya cooking, and are only beginning to add to our Asian influences those of Thailand, though *daun kesum* is beginning to invade our herb gardens under the strange title of 'Thai hot mint'.

To sum up: the restrictive and poor standards of the old Australian tradition in some areas of cookery have been replaced with a tradition providing not only better standards, but infinitely greater variety, and much more creativity. We are only at the beginning of creating a new tradition of excellence in Australian cooking, spiced by that variety which enriches life.

Unspoken Questions That Greet The Bride



SCENE:— Her first at home! Friends come in, all abubble with excitement. Conversation flies. Time, too...at last the clock strikes four. Then she brings in a heavily laden tea tray. A hush! Suddenly she experiences a tumultuous feeling! she is now on trial as a young matron entertaining. Questions unspoken are evident on every face. "How did the scones turn out?" "Did they rise high?" "Are they nice and light?"

BUSHFOODS AND THE TRUE AUSTRALIAN CUISINE

Vic Cherikoff

I would like you to consider what could be four distinguishable Australian cuisines:

Aboriginal
Colonial
Post-war
Contemporary

There were certainly some ingredients that were common to both Aboriginal and Colonial cuisines and obviously more similarities among the latter three. I believe that the present decade will be a landmark in gastronomy, as we experience a concerted move to integrate elements of traditional Aboriginal cuisine into that of contemporary Australia.

I would like to discuss several features of the non-Aboriginal cooking tradition, moving on from those Don Dunstan has mentioned. Some integration of indigenous foods has always occurred, more often perhaps in country cooking. Preserves of native fruits, kangaroo tail soup, mutton-bird stew and the use of a host of animals have been described in Australian cookbooks. However, as the infrastructure of cities and towns developed and the population grew, the wild produce could not compete in terms of harvestable quantities and culinary convenience. Meat and three boiled veges were easily prepared and, while somewhat inappropriate for the climate of the outback, fulfilled the need for no-fuss sustenance as the bush was conquered. The availability of beef and the more constant access to an increasing range of fruits and vegetables were sufficient for the limited sophistication of colonial Australian cuisine. In the cities, wild foods were impossible to find and post-war migration provided enough new ways of blending available ingredients to occupy the chefs of the day. Thus, for two hundred years, we have attempted to force foreign plants and animals to grow where they were never meant to, largely ignoring the indigenous foods and preparative methods of the Aborigines. The results have been environmentally catastrophic and, for Aborigines, socially disastrous. Contemporary Australian cuisine is most often described as consisting of fresh seasonal ingredients, produced locally and used simply. According to this definition, however, some 'Australian' dishes are difficult to distinguish from those of Europe and even Asia. I maintain that only a cuisine utilising indigenous produce can be truly Australian.

Our forebears cannot be blamed for the lack of a true Australian cuisine. Because of racial prejudice, few people thought to ask the Aborigines what they ate. Some of the first settlers experimented with native ingredients, but in the absence of Aboriginal advice, the results were a little discouraging. Toxins in one nut caused would-be gastronomes to suffer intense stomach cramps, vomiting and violent purging; pigs likewise were fatally poisoned. This method of

culinary development might be termed the 'win-or-drop-dead' approach! Fortunately, there are better ways.

After consultation with Aborigines and research into their foods, I estimate that the many regional cuisines of traditional Aborigines were based on a total resource of about 10,000 wild foods. In 1984, I selected a few edible plant foods, approached one restaurant and thus opened a Pandora's box. Bushfoods and some methods of Aboriginal preparation are now becoming established in restaurants, cafes, hotels and with caterers. I would like to acknowledge the foresight and perseverance of the chef, Jean-Paul Bruneteau and co-owner, Jennie Dowling, of Rowntrees The Australian Restaurant, in the Sydney suburb of Hornsby. Together, we have pioneered what may once have been a fad but has now matured to a movement. There has been much to learn; it is another instance of the more we know, the more there is to learn. Affluence has enhanced the ability of Australians to pay for specialty items, and heightened their desire for new and different products. Bushfoods allow a national expression of patriotism; perhaps most importantly, for Aborigines, they are a strong statement of their Aboriginality.

We are now recognising the fact that Aborigines ate more than witjuti grubs and kangaroos, both definitely excellent fare; but there are hundreds of native fruits, nuts, seeds, vegetables, insects and meats also worth the eating. We have more to learn yet of Aboriginal diet and cuisine. By way of example, we could consider the barramundi from our northern rivers. Although it is renowned for its eating quality, we usually throw away the best part. At an outstation in Cape York, an Aborigine once gave me an enormous barramundi he had netted. He having gutted it, I proceeded to prepare the fish, Aboriginal-style, by wrapping it in paperbark and roasting it in hot sand and coals. I fully expected that I had been delegated to cook for us both. Instead, the hunter had simply reserved for himself the choice cut. He had discarded the flesh (to me) and thrown away the fish's digestive organs. The remaining parts - the heart, liver, kidneys, connective and fatty tissues - were used to stuff the inverted swim bladder. This neat package was roasted, then eaten quickly and silently, while I was left nothing more than fish muscle. A little later I tried the same delicacy myself and luckily, I didn't have to share it this time! There is still much we can learn about native ingredients and their food-value from the Aborigines.

The supply of bushfoods is improving and their cultivation is now beginning. I would now like to stress a number of considerations that are very important for the future of a bushfood-based Australian cuisine. Cultivation of native foods could be another agricultural disaster, or a gastronomic and environmental panacea. Conventional farming does not lend itself to bushfood cultivation.

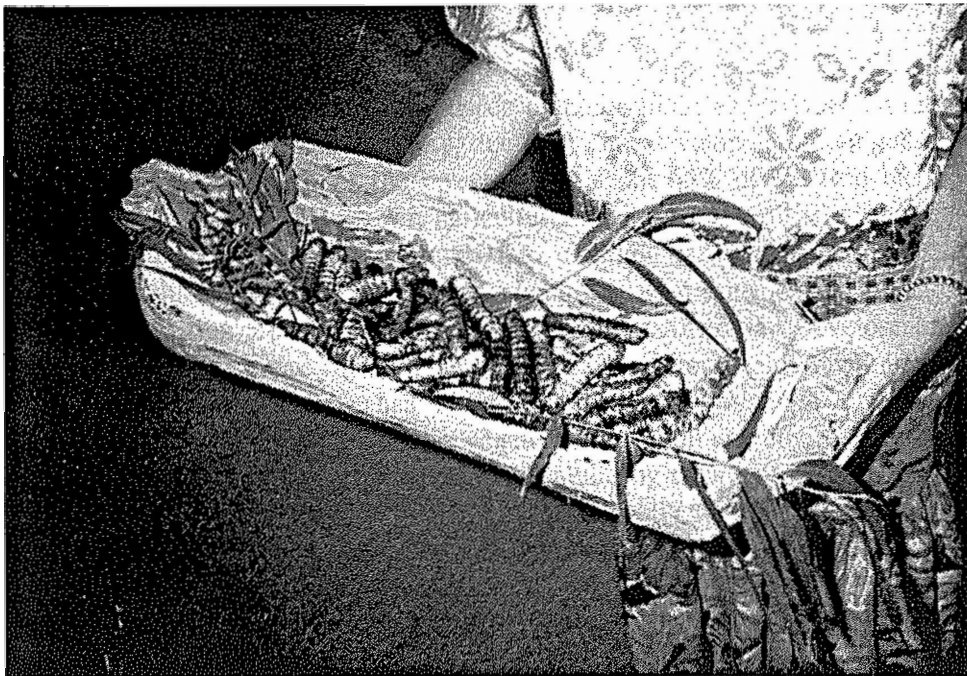
For Aborigines, who still forage for many foods, bushfoods are more than just sustenance. I believe that we must grow only those foods which are acceptable to both cultures. Some native foods are no longer used; rediscovering these has to be done with care. We will need to discover new parallels to established European rules of avoidance (as for stone-fruit kernels, unprocessed cashews, under-ripe potatoes, rhubarb leaves and so on). For comparable guides to bushfood processes, we must consult with Aborigines or resort to some high-tech science.

Wild foods can also pose problems for food technologists. One creamy-textured fruit has frustrated the most determined efforts to prepare a cooked product. Even a low simmer turns

the custard plum to stone; whereas raw, it is one of the best-eating wild foods. Shelling nuts, cleaning seeds, de-seeding fruits and storing vegetables will also challenge the sciences of food-processing.

Another consideration for the future cultivation of bushfoods is the obstacle posed by the 'lunatic fringe'. In terms of appropriateness for Australia's pastoral lands, there can be no denying that soft-footed native animals should be reared in preference to hard-hoofed beasts. It is time for the beef and sheep lobbies of the Eastern States to bite the bullet or, better yet, to use it on their exotic animals and farm native ones instead. I will not go into the nutritional and gastronomic benefits of game meats, but will be content to emphasise that we will soon have little choice in the matter. The kangaroo industry must be restructured from culling to farming, and the feasibility explored of adding emu, goanna, grubs and many other native animals to the Australian table. This is simply a matter of education. If we are to tread softly on this planet, our agriculture must not rely on endlessly exploiting the land; it should sustain it. Furthermore, if we have learnt anything from the interaction of Aborigines and non-Aborigines in the past, the propagation of bushfoods must be done with the support and co-operation of the first discoverers and original users of these foods. I maintain that just as bushfoods contribute significantly to the health and nutrition of Aborigines, so they have much to offer to the cuisine and creativity of all gastronomes.

I am grateful that I have been able to contribute to this Symposium and air my thoughts in public. In the recent past, the media have sensationalised bushfoods, unnecessarily. I hope I have made my views plain and clear, and that you will all add your support to the development of a true Australian cuisine. There is much to do.



Grubs served in a Coolamon



THE POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF AGRICULTURE

Judy Messer

In my presentation, I would like to concentrate on two issues: first, the theme of tradition and renewal that Don Dunstan focused on in his introduction and, secondly, the environmental consequences of food production in Australia. I will discuss the social and ecological implications of what we eat, how we produce it and its impact on ecosystems. In other words, my concern is the nature of European agriculture in Australia in the past, and its directions for the future.

Agriculture can be defined as: the use of solar power, the earth's resources and human energy to produce food, fibre, drugs, energy, essential oils and timber, either for domestic use or for sale in the market. A sustainable agricultural system in Australia will require a great deal of social and agro-technological change. There is no doubt that this is a political problem of large dimensions.

I would like to refer, first of all, to the history and nature of agriculture in Australia from a sociological point of view, in order to explain the socio-economic context within which we can consider the associated ecological problems.¹

After the economic and environmental fiascos of both public and private farming ventures in the early days of European settlement, agricultural land development continued to expand, officially, until about the 1950s. At the present time, about 65% of the land has been given over to agricultural production. However, agricultural land development is still taking place in terms of the transformation of pastoral lands into cropping areas, and the intensification of cropping activities through the introduction of private irrigation schemes. This means that vast areas of native vegetation are still being cleared throughout Australia.² Development has been formally stopped only in areas where trees are dying and crop yields declining because of salinity. In these situations, there has been a tortuously slow move towards protective regulation and restriction in regard to native vegetation retention and environmentally sensitive water usage. In effect, we have developed our agriculture by means of a 'slash and burn' type of economy that now, with hindsight, we would more rightly term 'slash and degrade'. This is an important fact to remember - we have not yet stopped 'developing' and 'improving' the land.

The number of persons directly working in agriculture (that is, on the land) peaked at just over 600,000 in 1911. From that time on, even with the continuing expansion of land occupation, there was a very significant decline in the number of people directly engaged in agricultural production, caused by technological innovation and the substitution of capital for labour in on-farm production.

The number of rural holdings declined from a peak of around 250,000 in 1941 to just over 170,000 in 1986. The number of persons working on farms declined to about 360,000 in 1972 but has since risen again to over 400,000 (this last rise is attributed to a combination of changing tax laws and the 'visibilization' of rural women). An interesting fact is that the percentage of employers to the self-employed has remained consistently around 60% in Australia, regardless of variation in the size or number of farms.

I would now like to draw attention to a very important element in the social structure of Australian agriculture, namely the position of women. Clearly, there have always been large numbers of women associated with rural development. Yet, in all areas and sectoral aspects of Australian agriculture, they have been structurally and ideologically invisible. At various times, their work (defined in terms of *masculine* notions of farm work) has been included in statistical records. However, at other times, the Government Statistician would decide quite arbitrarily that farm women should be deleted from the census, and women would thus disappear from the records. As a result, we have periods when there is absolutely no formal evidence of women's contribution to agricultural production in Australia. This happened, for instance, in the 1880s, and again as late as the 1950s. Women reappeared in the records during the 1960s, when the government of the day realised that there was a problem of farm tax-avoidance. As a result of this change, together with the declining productivity of agriculture in the 1970s, many more farm wives were registered as wage earners or active stock partners.

In recent times, there has been an increasing interest in the role of women in agriculture in Australia, in terms of their productivity and their role as consumers of agribusiness products, as well as in issues of farm welfare. You may have heard of the myth of 'the man on the land'. You may not think it is a myth, but that is just what it is - an ideological myth; because, in reality, it has always been the *family* on the land. Nevertheless, 'the man on the land' has certainly been the political reality, because women have had no recognised role in rural decision-making, at least until very recently. Even so, the role of women in agricultural production has been significant, for several reasons.

In the past, males working in agriculture tended to be under-educated. Most farmers left school in their early teens, learnt their skills on the land and frequently inherited the property. In contrast, farm daughters tended to leave the farm, often encouraged by disillusioned mothers. Having seen what farm life did to their mothers, they think 'that's not for me'. Male farmers tend to marry nurses, teachers or other 'town' women.

Historically, therefore, farm wives have been better educated than male farmers; and studies have shown that these women have played an important role in agricultural production. For example, farm wives sift economic and technological information that comes onto the farm and play a key role in the acceptance of technological innovation, as well as contributing to outdoor work. More recently, they have played a significant role in resisting the use of agri-chemicals on farms, because of their concern about the effect of these on their family and the environment. Thus, if one wishes to influence the behaviour of the family farmer, the female half of the partnership would be an important, if not the most important, target.

However, with corporate or syndicate farm-ownership, this model breaks down because the male partnership appears to discourage active female participation. The women appear to retreat to the domestic sphere or to engage in paid occupations off-farm. In many cases, the latter is

preferable for women who do not wish to take orders from farmer-husbands all day!

It is interesting to note that more than 50% of farm income in Australia is actually earned off the farm. There is great diversity in the source of this off-farm income. The farmer may work as a contractor or shire labourer; his wife may work in regional service industries. He may be a 'Pitt Street' farmer or an agribusiness farmer with non-farm sources of investment income. More recently, there has been a significant emergence of rural investment trusts, whereby capital is invested in agricultural land but the actual operations are carried out by either managers or tenant farmers.

It is important to realise, therefore, that the social structure of agriculture in Australia is extremely heterogeneous and hierarchical, and that the distribution of wealth and income is very uneven. Furthermore, there is a significant number of distinct ethnic groups practising specific forms of agriculture in certain states and regions.

So where are we going in the future and what can we foresee for Australian agriculture in the context of global structural change? Well, it is highly probable that there will be fewer farms, more large farms, and fewer farmers. But it should be noted that this prediction relies on official figures of the Australian Bureau of Statistics, whose definition of a farm is made in terms of a specified value of production per annum. Each year, therefore, some farms are deleted from the official records because they produced less than this specified minimum. However, these farms continue to exist, as rural holdings. Thus, a whole sector of the agricultural economy and land-use becomes a statistical non-event. It is not only women but whole farm households that become invisible. This presents problems in terms of economic and land-use planning as well as in rural assistance schemes. For instance, during the last drought and the recent structural crisis in the grain industry, there were probably many farms which did not appear as an official statistic until they went bankrupt, or until the farming family was forced to seek welfare assistance.

It is likely that there will also be an increased number of large-scale capitalist family farms, that is, farms owned by families through some form of company structure, employing labour on a casual part-time or contractual basis. Corporate farming, rural trusts and the involvement of vertically and horizontally integrated agribusiness will also expand. All of these forms of capitalist agriculture rely on hired managerial and wage labour, tenant capitalist farmers, or simple family farmers, as the labour force.

It is also important to remember that the history of modern agriculture has been a history of oscillation of the social structure. In Europe, since the eighteenth century, that there have been recurrent patterns of aggregation and fragmentation of ownership. Farms grew larger and larger and 'land barons' came to control huge tracts of land. Once the price of land became too high, the rate of profit fell, and the whole structure collapsed. With capital flight out of agriculture, large holdings were broken up, fragmentation ensued and so the small family farm re-emerged. Very often this process was exacerbated by war or economic depression or by the political need to pacify significant sectors of the male working class. Similar things have occurred in Australia.

Since this has been the rhythm of capitalist agriculture until the present time, one cannot simply assume that agricultural landholdings will continue to get bigger or more industrialised.

The present tendencies may once again be reversed. However, it does seem that the current form of the reaction is an emergence of part-time farming as a permanent structural feature of industrialised agricultural economies.

I would like to emphasise that the social structure of Australian agriculture is extremely integrated. The process of production cannot be understood simply as consisting of the man on the tractor, or the man on the horse (or rather, on the motor-bike!) chasing cattle and sheep. The real situation is that economic and social integration exists throughout the system, from the bureaucrats, scientists, technologists and consultants who make decisions on research, management, livestock and seed breeding, to the input industries which produce the biocides, fertilisers and machinery, and the finance system that provides the capital. There is also the 'throughput' system which involves transportation, wholesale and retail marketing, and value-added processing activities. Employees in all these sectors, including on-farm work, amount to over 700,000. Finally, there are the people, such as cooks and restaurateurs, who transform agricultural produce to gastronomic delights. All told, it has been estimated that more than one million people are engaged in agriculture-related industries in Australia.

One future possibility could be a fully industrialised agricultural system where the family farm would, in fact, be 'working for the company'. Agriculture in Australia is becoming increasingly dominated by transnational agribusiness, whether the companies be of Australian or foreign origin. In decision-making which affects agriculture, agribusiness will be as important as the family farmer.

I would now like to turn to the second subject of my paper, the ecological impact of the production of food since European settlement. First, two-thirds of Australia's original tree cover have been lost; more native plants have been brought to extinction or are threatened with extinction by agriculture than by any other landuse in Australia. The resulting destruction of habitat has been the single greatest cause of native mammal extinction. Twenty species are presumed extinct and another 43 species are categorised as endangered or vulnerable.² Feral animals and plants further threaten native flora and fauna.

Secondly, land degradation is the single greatest environmental problem facing Australian society, and most of it occurs on agricultural land. More than 50% of the land is now degraded and in need of repair. What forms does land degradation take? The answer is salinity, siltation, sedimentation, erosion, soil compaction, acidity, lack of tree and perennial shrub regeneration, an expansion of woody shrubs and declining soil productivity. The cost of repairing this degradation has been estimated to be more than \$2 billion. But these figures are based on a study done in 1978. What might be the true current costs is not really known.³ It is a regrettable fact that one loaf of bread, from grain grown on the Darling Downs in Queensland, could cause the loss of 12 kilograms of soil. How many loaves of bread, then, do we throw into the streams or allow to blow away? At a federal Senate Inquiry into land degradation a few years ago, a witness from northern Queensland, where rain is measured in metres, talked of 500 tonnes of soil being lost during heavy rainfall, from slopes that had been overcleared.

In addition, there are increasing problems associated with the use of agrichemicals in the production of food. As well as their impact on human health, of particular concern is their impact on natural ecosystems, especially on birds, wetlands, and fish in the inland river

systems. However, there are also other biota which should be taken into account when evaluating the impact of agrichemicals on both agro-ecosystems and natural ecosystems.

In the past, Australia has experienced cycles of declining production due to overgrazing, erosion, the settlement of marginal lands and the ravages of rabbits. Furthermore, unsuitable practices were applied to these lands, and very often people were settled on land without any capital, on small holdings that were uneconomic from the beginning. Such settlers could never survive economically. We should not be overly critical of these people because they really did slave their guts out clearing the land, while working for other bigger farmers, or for contract shearing and fencing teams or, perhaps, the local timber and mining industries, in order to earn the money for their subsistence and to pay for their own fences and stock. They were, in fact, nothing more than a subsistence labour force that formed the backbone of Australian agriculture during those harsh early years of settlement. And it was they who laid the basis of much of our cultural history as well as contributing to the current land degradation.

One must be realistic but not over-critical. The periodic phases of 'necessary' structural and technological adjustment have resulted in a sad social history in many areas. As Michael Williams has written, 'the desertification of the physical landscape is prevented only at the cost of "desertification" of the human and social landscape'.⁴ In past times there has been great social hardship in areas such as the Victorian and South Australian Mallee; such hardship may re-emerge in the future. The key point is that these ecological problems are also economic, social and political problems. What we have to focus on is the need for both the renewal of our land and the way we think about it.

What would proper agricultural land management consist of? First, it would require the political will to acknowledge ecosystem priorities. The solution does not lie merely with technological fixes. I think existing ecological knowledge is adequate to establish the guidelines for satisfactory strategies of land management; but, unless we achieve a change of both political attitudes and agricultural practices, we will persist with what history will record as nothing other than environmental vandalism.

This situation may arise from ignorance, apathy, misguided expertise, economic hardship and/or exploitation of the land beyond its ecological limits, for profit and speculation. If ecological priorities are not acknowledged, the agricultural land management practices, even those carried out by better-educated farmers, can be just as destructive of natural ecosystems as the actions of those who do not know what they are doing. Thus there is a fundamental conflict between natural ecosystem management and present agricultural production. It is a contradiction that every society has to recognise. Every society, therefore, should know what it is doing and where to draw the boundaries.

So what is needed is a new ethic regarding the land. We need new farming practices or better farming practices, more national parks, nature reserves and wildlife corridors to protect the natural values. We have to acknowledge the priority of the *ecosystem* - the natural ecosystem as well as the agricultural ecosystem. Ecosystems are fragile and frequently incapable of replacement once they have gone beyond a certain stage of degradation.

Here I would like to draw attention to another factor, of global scale: the Greenhouse-Ozone crisis. Problems of the global biosphere are going to be closely allied to the future of

agriculture. And the nature of modern agriculture is closely allied to our capacity to resolve the Greenhouse problem. It is predicted that Greenhouse effects will lead to the total cessation of agriculture in some parts of Australia. In other regions, new areas will be opened up for clearing and cropping, leading to further destruction of natural ecosystems as well as habitat loss (in north-western NSW only 0.1% of the land is dedicated as national park or nature reserve).

Another topic at this Symposium has been the commercialisation of native flora or fauna as food products. The objections of conservationists to the farming of native animals are not always understood. However, there is a sound structural reason behind these objections. Wherever a product becomes commercialised (that is, subject to market forces), it is much more difficult and even, at times, impossible, to ensure that ecological priorities come first. In the same way, the harvesting of native foods from natural ecosystems is also ecologically unsound. Such foods should be produced within the agricultural system, subject to the same sustainable landuse guidelines that should obtain in general. Perhaps we could all become vegetarians, or at least, 'modify our diet by eating less meat, but of a higher quality.

Is there any hope after this gloomy story? What can be done in our role as ordinary consumers going into the market place, buying food, cooking it and eating it? We should think about where our food comes from, how it is produced, whether it is pure and wholesome, and how much its production cost in terms of energy, ecosystem degradation and human health.

I would like to appeal to you specifically, as restaurateurs and gastronomes: I would ask you to be discerning in the market place when you buy your ingredients. Wherever possible, buy foods that are produced by sustainable agricultural methods, rather than by exploitative agricultural systems. I do this in full recognition of the need to keep costs down. But it is only when people like you insist that things have gone far enough and must change, that changes will occur. And it is from small beginnings, with every member of society saying 'it is every little bit that counts', that social change will move in a better direction.

Seek out ecologically sound food, foods that are also good for human health. A lot of work is now being done on Aboriginal foods and diet in terms of vitamin and mineral content, but how much do we ourselves really know about the nutritional value and quality of the foods we cook or eat every day? How much goodness is left apart from calories, water and colour? If we concentrated on local and regional foods they would at least be fresh and we could then go back to eating seasonal foods. Remember the exquisite pleasure of eating something that you could only enjoy three months of the year? I would also like to make a plea for 'Grown in Oz'. Notwithstanding the economic obligation to accept imports in return for our exports, it does seem that such a strategy could help maintain a diversified, sustainable agricultural system in Australia.

Finally, I would like to call upon all of you who cook, to be creative. I do not think being a vegetarian should mean a diet of nuts, soybeans and tofu. It would be great to go into a restaurant and find vegetables and complex carbohydrates treated seriously in a culinary sense. Some of the best meals I remember consisted of a plate of vegetables, in restaurants that do not usually serve vegetarian food. 'Them out there' can do it when they want to!

To conclude: as restaurateurs and gastronomes, you are elites. You have special knowledge, drive and commitment. You can change the world - by creating new images about how our food should be consumed. In order to do that, you must create new images of how it should be produced. It is people like you who bring about changes in cultural practices and create new needs, new markets, new products, new commodities and new ways of keeping the system going. But you should do that in the context of reality. Ask yourself - who cooks, who works, who pays the bills in the domestic, commercial, and ecological senses? The three key concepts are *ecology*, *economy* and *equity*. To these, after hearing Don Dunstan, I would like to add *excellence*.



NOTES

1. Judy Messer, 'The Political Ecology of Agriculture: The Case of Australia', PhD Thesis, University of NSW, 1987.
2. Office of Technology Assessment, *Technologies to Maintain Biological Diversity*. Washington, 1987.
3. Piers Blaikie and Harold Brookfield, *Land Degradation and Society*, London, 1987.
4. Michael Williams, 'Desertification and Technological Adjustment in the Murray Mallee of South Australia', *Search* vol 9, no 7, July, 1978, pp 265-268.

THE FOOD OF THE ORDINARY AUSTRALIANS

Anne Marshall

When Barbara Santich asked me to speak on the theme of 'Food of the Ordinary Australians', I felt that I should mention to her that I wasn't really an Australian; on the other hand, I have lived here for twenty-five years. So some of the following observations come from someone once on the outside, looking in: a newly-arrived British observer taking in the 360-degree scene of the 'Food of the Ordinary Australians'. I can't go back to the beginning of the war, like Don Dunstan, because I was only 366 days old on the day World War II started. Not a very nice birthday present for a one-year-old baby!

My life in Australia started in the early 60s when I was twenty-three years old, still relatively fresh from a three-year residential training for the Diploma of Education in Home Economics. I had specialised in Advanced Cookery under a Cordon Bleu lecturer, and in Nutrition under an eccentric but brilliant scientist. I had also had two years' teaching experience in North London; two years of living in a flat in Chelsea, which was an education in itself in those days; and also a very short but full exposure to adult life in Britain and parts of continental Europe. So when I first arrived in Australia I went through tremendous culture-shock, often in relation to the food (and the drink) of the early 60s.

The food of the ordinary Australians has moved on from the roasts, grills, corned beef and meatloaf of that time. Australia's second nutritional awakening, following the acceptance of ethnic influences imported from Europe, Asia and the U.S.A., now includes a wonderful variety of high-quality fresh produce and talented cooks and teachers. On the other hand, we still have many problems to solve.

My paper will be devoted to expanding this overview.

I arrived in Australia as a 'ten pound' immigrant - alone, a little nervous, but keen to travel and learn about this fascinating continent. I disembarked at Port Adelaide and went to my first job, teaching in a country high school at Murray Bridge. Here I came face-to-face with my first Australian wood stove, in the landlady's kitchen. With this, she produced porridge (which I enjoyed) and bacon and eggs for breakfast (which I always refused); roast joints of beef and lamb (never pork); boiled corned beef, meat loaves and good rice puddings. I can also remember the dreadful boiled mayonnaise salad dressing; the awful home-made ice cream concocted from chilled evaporated milk, whipped up on her Sunbeam Mixmaster and accompanied by syrupy canned fruit (never fresh); and mushy mornay mixtures served in those special mornay dishes for weekend suppers! All this, on top of coping with my first and last wood-chip heater for every bath and shower, as well as encounters with savage frill-necked lizards on my walks through the school playing fields, was enough to send me looking for a job in the city of Adelaide, after just one term. But not before I had time to enjoy the thrill of walking through orange orchards irrigated by the River Murray, marvelling at the trees

laden with big juicy fruit; nor to admire the quality of cakes at the bring-a-plate school functions, particularly the cream puffs, eclairs, passionfruit sponges, lamingtons and drop scones.

In Adelaide I found women still cooking roast dinners in wood stoves when the temperature outside was 100 degrees Fahrenheit: roast turkey and Christmas pudding in the heat of high noon on Christmas Day!

I worked at the Institute of Technology for a year, teaching students who were to become Home Economics teachers and deploring the lack of watercress, which was commonplace in England and used as a traditional garnish to a mixed grill. I also taught Adult Education students. I can vividly remember them cooking Sharp Steak casserole, heavily laced with Worcestershire sauce, from the *Green and Gold Cookbook*. But the local interest and curiosity in new cuisines was embryonic then - I well remember the Chinese Cookery course being the most popular course on enrolment day. Continental Cookery, also popular, was just pipped at the post by Cake Decoration. As for food in festivity, I can recall our staff Christmas party in Hardy's vineyard, south of Adelaide, when I was handed a piece of chewy, overcooked steak on a slice of flabby white bread and told to use the bread as a plate!

Before I leave South Australia, I must share some 'Drink of the Ordinary Australian' memories with you! I had been used to walking into an off-licence in England, just as one would walk into a newsagent here; but, in Murray Bridge then, I remember feelings of both embarrassment and bewilderment as I had to walk through a special door for female customers, into an area that was barricaded from the rest of the hotel, in order to buy a bottle of wine. In Adelaide, I recall going to a popular coffee bar in the evenings to consume wine out of coffee cups, in order to beat the police and their archaic licensing laws (the place was frequently, but casually, inspected by the law who were obviously receiving back-handers!). I can also remember those dreadful large jugs of frothing beer served at the banquets of the Australian Hotel in North Adelaide.

My next stop was Sydney, which I found much more cosmopolitan, with good delicatessens selling continental breads, salami and cheese, and a few interesting ethnic restaurants. They were mainly French and northern European, specialising in French onion soup, *filet mignon forestière*, chicken Kiev and beef Stroganoff. There were also Chinese take-aways, which were a regular institution for Sunday night suppers; fish and chip shops and hamburger bars also for take-away food.

I taught at East Sydney Technical College for two years, then for a further two years at the new School of Home Economics at Canberra Technical College. During this time of instructing and inspiring ordinary Australian cooks, I was, I hope, helping them to grow out of their 'ordinariness'. Courses in Entertaining/Hostessing, Continental and International Cookery were the most popular in the mid-60s. Ordinary people were starting to have buffet parties. They invested in sets of *splayds*, with which their guests could eat fork-dishes such as chicken and almonds, beef stroganoff, and sweet and sour veal, accompanied by macaroni noodles tossed with peas or boiled savoury rice. Then packets of risotto suddenly appeared! Popular desserts were pavlovas or richly-layered meringue gateaux. But according to market research, the average housewife, despite cooking classes and her loyalty to *Australian Women's Weekly*, *Women's Day* or *New Idea* magazines with their profiles on expert ethnic cooks, had a

repertoire of only 24 recipes. These were the dishes she regularly served to her family, such as bacon and eggs for breakfast.

That was also the time when smorgasbords became very popular in hotels and restaurants, where ordinary Australians, for a fixed price, could pile their plate as high and as greedily as possible.

After two years back in London, I returned in the early 70s to become the Executive Cookery Editor of Paul Hamlyn's publishing company. During the next three years my assistant and I churned out 26 cookery books, one of the most successful being *The Margaret Fulton Cookbook*. (Paul had decided to promote her as the Margeurite Patten of Australia). These cookbooks obviously had an impact on the cooking and eating habits of ordinary Australians. People learned how to make quiche and lasagne in their own homes, and discovered the advantage of freezing them for future meals. The adventurous cooks went on to make beef Wellington for their dinner parties.

Cookery card clubs were launched by Paul Hamlyn and then copied by the *Australian Women's Weekly*. Premium books were published specially for the Australian Meat Board, and the Egg Corporation. There was also the *Stork Family Cookbook* (promoting that brand of margarine) and the *White Wings Cake Book* (promoting flour), as well as books on specialised culinary topics, such as *The Barbecue Cookbook* and *The Fondue Cookbook*. I'm sure you can all remember dipping into a fondue pot around someone's dining table in the early 70s!

But Kevin Weldon, Paul's Managing Director in Australia, wanted a complete cookbook, as comprehensive as the *Cordon Bleu Cookbook*, which would feature the best of Australian and New Zealand cooks and highlight local ingredients. It thus became my job to co-ordinate and edit the *Australian and New Zealand Complete Book of Cookery* (1970). I think this book at last gave ordinary Australians a focus enabling them to use, explore and develop their own local high-quality produce. At the same time, however, continental cookery and Chinese cookery continued to flourish. Young Australians now travelled overseas; they learnt about French cuisine, and consequently, the Australian/French restaurants became better and better.

The Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise was introduced into Australia at the beginning of the 70s, and soon became very popular with young people and children. The rotisserie chicken arrived in take-away shops in all suburbs and became part of the weekly menu in many homes. Soon after the domestic oven, with its own rotisserie, was installed in every new and renovated domestic kitchen. The decline in the consumption of beef, lamb and pork began as a consequence of chicken's popularity. Pizza Houses opened and then McDonalds, with their appealing message of a fun meal for the ordinary family at a reasonable price.

The battle between butter and polyunsaturated margarine began in the 60s and non-cholesterol margarine was rapidly accepted as a standard item in every family's refrigerator. Ordinary Australians started to realise that the food they ate had something to do with high blood-pressure, heart attacks and strokes. As a result, mothers stopped producing home-made cakes and biscuits, because the family didn't eat them any more, and switched to serving more fresh fruit - often with commercial ice cream.

By the late 60s and early 70s, Italians, Greeks, Lebanese and Spanish people, some of whom had lived here for years, gained the confidence and the finance to open their own restaurants; spaghetti bolognese and marinara, pizza and moussaka, stuffed vine leaves and Greek filo pastries, chick-pea dip and tabouleh salad and paella, soon became popular and well-established in Sydney and Melbourne.

In an age of food fashion, what starts off on the menus of successful restaurants soon shows up in the supermarket shelves. Ordinary Australians today can now buy ready-made pasta sauces in jars, frozen pizzas, canned stuffed vine leaves, tubs of hummous, tahina and dehydrated tabouleh salad on their once-a-week trip to the supermarket.

Another food fashion that ordinary Australians enjoyed in the 70s, in restaurants and in their homes for family meals, was Chinese cooking. When I was Cookery Editor of *New Idea* magazine during the 70s, I had to prepare a special supplement of 30 recipes on Chinese cookery at least twice a year for eight years, because my Chinese cooking supplements pushed the weekly sales figures up by at least 50,000 copies. For Chinese stir-frying, the electric wok was marketed most successfully to non-gas households.

The popularity of Chinese cuisine prepared ordinary Australian's palates for the quick acceptance of Thai, Korean, Indian, Malaysian and now Japanese and Vietnamese restaurants, whose influence is gradually creeping into many family homes where something light, healthy and spicy and more appropriate to our hot summers is required.

So where are we today?

Ordinary Australians (providing they have the money to pay for it!) may now celebrate family, religious or ethnic festivals by enjoying some of the best cuisine in the world, in our leading restaurants. These offer food which tastes delicious, shows original inspiration, uses light, fresh, healthy ingredients, and is often presented superbly, with the colour and design insight of talented artists. They can also enjoy festive food in their own home, choosing from a vast range of high-quality produce to develop any international cuisine dishes they fancy.

But do they? Perhaps 10-20% do! In the Australian cities the educational processes which lead to the appreciation of good food and various food cultures has so far reached only some of the ordinary Australians. If any of you have lived or eaten in country towns or surveyed the outer suburbs of the big cities, you would surely agree with me that the average, ordinary Australian's idea of a good festive night out is to go to their nearest club, usually an R.S.L. club, for a 'prawn night', or to eat an unimaginatively prepared steak. Alternatively, he or she goes to a friend's place for a 'barbie'.

Diet-related diseases are currently costing the Australian nation \$6 billion a year in medical treatment, according to a statement released by the Federal Minister of Health in April, 1989. One in every two deaths in Australia is due to heart disease. The incidence of death by heart disease is currently far higher in the western suburbs of Sydney, where most residents fit the socio-economic categorisation of 'ordinary', than in the more affluent eastern and northern suburbs where most of our business executives with high-pressured, stressful occupations live.

The second killer disease is cancer. It has been forecast that this will exceed heart disease as the major cause of death by the year 2000. Both of these killer diseases are diet-related. The year 2000 has been nominated by the United Nations as 'The Year of Health for All'. This proposal has been adopted by the Australian Government, along with the rest of the world.

Some countries are faced with problems of malnutrition and starvation, but Australia's problem is over-nutrition. As I speak to you, twenty-six children under five years of age are dying every minute, somewhere in the world. UNICEF has identified a silent and invisible emergency in the world today: almost without notice, more than fourteen million children are dying every year. Meanwhile Australia's children, our teenagers in particular, are stuffing themselves with snack foods and confectionery. Regrettably, most of the diseases which kill us are established in the second decade of life.

These are the appalling facts:

48% of Australian men over 35 years are obese!
42% of Australian women over 40 years are obese!

Because of these nutritional problems Australia is currently going through a second nutritional awakening - the first one was just after the war.

The *Dietary Guidelines for Healthy Australians* were established by the Department of Health about five years ago and are now followed by most food economists, chefs and personnel training for the hospitality and food service industries. Thankfully, the *Guidelines* have also influenced the processed-food industry.

A Better Health Task Force was established a couple of years ago by the Department of Health, to assess how we can achieve 'Health for All'. Their recommendations - that we must cut down on fat, sugar, salt and alcohol and double our intake of dietary fibre, to achieve a healthy nation by the Year 2000! - are now government policy. We now see low salt, low sugar and high dietary fibre products being advertised on television and sold in the supermarkets.

But many ordinary Australians are still confused by these nutritional messages. There is more consumer awareness in some homes of the fibre capsules advertised on television, than of the fact that fresh fruit, salads and vegetables and whole-grain cereal products are the richest sources of natural dietary fibre. Ordinary Australians need to get their nutritional information and education from reputable sources.

With all these problems in mind, the Primary Products Promotions Unit commissioned a Market Research Survey, in November 1987, on consumers' attitudes to fresh fruit and vegetables. We looked at four areas - household consumers, teenagers, the food service industry and wholesalers, providers and retailers.

I would like to draw your attention to some of the results concerning teenagers and the food service industry. The teenage results surprised us, in that most Australian youngsters are aware of the importance of fresh fruit and vegetables in relation to a healthy lifestyle but are not

prepared to accept responsibility for their choices, still relying on the mother-figure to make those wise choices for them.

Results from the food service industry show that the nutritional message has not reached the personnel at the top who make the decisions, plan the menus and control the budget.

At present, ordinary Australians eat out two to three times a week and 30% of the food eaten out is fast-food or take-away food, which is often very high in hidden fat. We only require 3 tablespoons, or 12 teaspoons of fat a day. Yet there are:

4½ teaspoons of fat in 1 portion of Kentucky Fried Chicken
4½ teaspoons of fat in 1 portion of Kentucky Fried Chicken nuggets
2½ teaspoons of fat in 1 McDonalds Big Mac.

The reality of the problem is that people do not eat nutrients, they eat food. They like to enjoy their mealtimes as a social event, particularly festive occasions, without worrying too much about food values. A second reality is that people are rarely interested in their health until they lose it. There is a big difference between nutritional knowledge and nutritional action. We should all be aware of the nutritive value of everything we eat!

In conclusion, I want to leave the subject of the 'Food of Ordinary Australians' in order to compliment the people here today who represent the top end of the hospitality and food service industry in this country.

Before I first opened my own Cookery School in Woollahra ten years ago, I went to France and Switzerland to check out six of the great chefs - Guerard, Thuillieur, Vergé, Pic, Bocuse and Chapel and Freddy Girardet of Switzerland. I came back completely inspired and overwhelmed. I returned four years ago to check out Le Nôtre and L'Oasis, and to do some detective work at the cookery schools of La Varenne, Le Nôtre and Marcella Hazan. This time I came back saying to myself, 'But we have restaurants just as good in Australia now and equally good private cookery schools at a third of the price'. Nobody wanted to listen, of course, because Australians are always too anxious to cut down the tall poppies among their compatriots. But the best of us have managed to survive, and we will always survive if we commit ourselves to professionalism and aim at consistently high standards.

At the moment, Australian cuisine is very exciting. On a trip to the U.S.A. in July 1988, to attend the 16th Congress of the International Federation for Home Economists, I was approached by a group of H.E.I.B. (Home Economists in Business) in New York, and later by representatives of the Canadian H.E.I.B., asking me if I could help organise a post-council study tour for them in 1990 (when Melbourne hosts their next meeting). They are so impressed by the food they see in our excellent glossy food magazines, our food photography and food styling, that they want to observe at first hand what we are doing and learn how we are doing it.

So I think this request in itself speaks volumes. Australian gastronomy has arrived on the world stage. Let's all work hard together to keep on improving it, so that it not only stays there but continues to enjoy increasing success.

GROWING UP IN THE CHANGES

ONE RESTAURANT CRITIC'S BEGINNINGS

Michael Dowe

I'm a post-war child, a child of mixed cultures, brought up in the 50s among the changes to which Don Dunstan has referred. But the fact that I am a multicultural Australian doesn't guarantee me an exciting culinary heritage - boring and unimaginative food also exists in foreign parts, as it does in much of Australia. A necessary prerequisite of good food is that those preparing it must care about food. I am fortunate to have been brought up in a culinarily rich tradition, amongst people to whom food was important. It has had considerable impact on this restaurant critic's beginnings.

And I am quite romantic about the Australian culinary tradition in which I grew up.

In my childhood memories of dining out, as opposed to the cuisine I experienced at home (about which I will talk later), the table and food of my paternal grandmother and my aunt (who lived with her) are most prominent. One reason for this must be that children were always included at her table rather than relegated to the verandah with the proverbial plate of sandwiches.

My grandmother was born Olivette Alice Britten, in 1883, the first child of a family of six. Hers was a well-off, white Anglo-Saxon Protestant Australian family, her father being a successful miller and brewer in Tamworth. Entertainment on a lavish scale was very much a part of her upbringing. She was educated at Ascham, then finished abroad with a grand tour of Europe. It's fair to say that this grand tour was to contribute significantly to her Anglophile attitudes and to her attitudes towards fine food - from her family she had already received a thorough education in dressing tables.

She married onto the land. My paternal grandfather was also white, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant. My grandmother bore six children before being widowed at the age of 42. She never re-married.

Grandmother always set an extremely fine table. Into her marriage she took a number of 32-piece settings - not all of them acceptable to her. Those items which she rejected, including a Belleek setting, found their way to the farmyard to pamper difficult layers. She was always pragmatic!

My grandmother ate out frequently, but in private homes rather than in restaurants. Always a keen racegoer, she did, when pressed, eat in the Members' Dining Room at Randwick, Rosehill or Warwick Farm; but this she regarded almost as a necessity - she was of the school which believed that proper food doesn't exist outside the home. So her culinary inspiration, and that of my aunt, came from cookbooks and contact with other people's domestic fare. I believe my aunt augmented this with a number of cooking schools, in particular, one given by Gretta Anna Teplitsky.

But their cuisine was devoid of the horrors with which we identify post-war Australian food. Main courses were often roasts, but always seasoned affairs. The actual cooking of meat was not an insensitive, till-death-us-do-part process but always of a standard that would have done most professional chefs proud. Even Joan Campbell would have approved! Garlic found its way into a leg or shoulder of lamb, beef was always seasoned, and poultry contained a herbed and aromatic stuffing that had nought to do with the commercial 'Tandaco' seasoned stuffings so fashionable in those days. Similarly, gravies, when produced, were mercifully free of Gravox. My grandmother did not approve of additives. There were times when she would publicly accuse my aunt of adding the dreaded Parisienne essence to the gravy; we were always assured that this was a comment on my grandmother's irritability rather than my aunt's culinary *trucs*. My aunt would be similarly accused of touching up the vegetables with bicarbonate, or the rhubarb with a dash of cochineal - such accusations she would ritually and vehemently deny.

Which brings me to vegetables. Vegetables, similarly, were delicately handled. I particularly remember the beans, finely shredded, crisp, and buttered. Seasonality was of paramount importance. Young squash was a real delight, often dressed with butter and dill - the zucchini of today pale poorly beside the squash of yesteryear. Potatoes were not always baked but often merely boiled. Peas were always from the pod. There were delicious tomato and onion pies, and even *al dente* cauliflower, *au gratin* in a rich, but oh-so-unfashionable today, béchamel sauce.

Entreés were often soups - first-class consommés or excellent vegetable soups, rich with cream and butter and even aromatics like nutmeg. In those fiercely hot summers of the 50s and 60s, simple dishes of melon or grapefruit were common starters.

Desserts included the famous rhubarb mentioned above, other stewed fruits, lemon delicious pudding, steamed ginger pudding, simple lemon sago, a velvet pudding of baked meringue on top of a first-class vanilla bean custard, and a wickedly rich pool pudding - a short pastry lined with tart apricot or plum jam and filled with butter and eggs prior to baking.

With the coffee were always served dried muscatels, almonds, glacé fruit and first-class imported chocolates.

My grandmother's famous Pool Pudding occasionally made an appearance at afternoon teas, together with a classic ten-egg sponge with lemon cheese, caraway seed cake, ginger cake, and wonderful short biscuits incorporating almond meal.

In less formal situations, complex and aromatic dishes like jugged hare with forcemeat balls, or a delicious cold spiced beef appeared - spices were a very important part of her kitchen. Bay leaves were used frequently and rosemary always accompanied the bay leaves with which pickled pork was cooked. Curries were not the traditional sweet fruit concoctions, but made up with blends of spices supplied by an Armenian neighbour who had spent time in Malaysia. When that neighbour moved on, my aunt and grandmother changed over to using a highly acceptable imported curry paste, and always added bay leaves or curry leaves, when they could find them. The same neighbour introduced them to the delights of Middle-Eastern cooking. I don't know how the barter system worked but spicy dolmades from next door were a regular treat. Home-made pickled cucumbers, Kosher style, sat in the pantry underneath mouldy vine leaves - a recipe my grandmother acquired from Jewish friends in Tamworth. And in this

Protestant household, there were frequently matzos, the Jewish unleavened bread. My grandmother's preferred breakfast bread was thin slices of mature (at least two days old) rye with caraway seeds.

So that's the Australian side of the culinary tradition in which I grew up. The domestic tradition was a much more complex affair.

My father left Australia for England in 1934. He returned in 1949, with not only a wife and child (myself), but a bible, The International Wine and Food Society's *Encyclopedia of Gastronomy*, compiled by André Simon.

When she arrived in Australia, my mother couldn't cook, but she had certainly been exposed to both fine and varied cuisine. She came from a bourgeois German academic family. There was always a cook and entertainment was very important. My grandfather, yet another Viennese psychologist, had an international circle of friends which included members of the Bloomsbury Set. Family holidays were always spent abroad. In 1936, the family fled Germany for Turkey. From there, in the middle of the war, my mother joined the British Army. She was posted to the Middle East, where she met and married my father.

She approached cooking with enormous energy. She was determined to present a constantly varied cuisine to her family. Her mother sent her many recipes together with Alice Rombauer's *Joy of Cooking* which, in early days, was to be her source for what she thought was traditional Anglo-Saxon fare. The German side of her heritage really shone at Christmas time when she would produce a wonderful assortment of festive cakes and biscuits. Many of these were heavy in their use of spices like cinnamon, nutmeg, pimento and ginger, and I can still remember peers turning up their noses at these foreign offerings.

This was no new experience, for much of my mother's cooking was unacceptable to my peers, especially our school lunches. Swaps for a friend's then attractive simple triangular-cut sandwich of hundreds and thousands or peanut butter were out of the question when all you had to offer was an ugly, vaguely rectangular number, redolent with the garlic of a thick slice of polish salami, which partnered a pickled cucumber, or - my mother's perception of Anglo-fare - an improbable combination of liverwurst and very British chutney; or, an even more improbable Italian salami and curried egg. She did attempt to produce more acceptable lunches as time went by, but her inability to serve simple fare always got in the way. She always had to gild the lily, add another ingredient, so that all her sandwiches were combinations of diverse substances. She also, perversely, refused to make sandwiches freshly - they were prepared well ahead and deep frozen, so one could be saddled with similarly non-negotiable items, like cheddar cheese and apricot jam, or plate fare, which looked terrible in a sandwich, like spicy corned beef and onion sauce.

Her cooking was always remarkable for its strong flavours of herbs and aromatics - she couldn't cook without them. She was no delicate cook, but the robust character compensated for this inability to perceive 'la cuisine juste'. Simple grills were unheard of - at the very least, meat had to be marinated before hitting the griller. Similarly with roasts. More commonly, meats were what we would call pot-roasted, again using handfuls of herbs from her abundant herb garden. She was a voracious purchaser of cookbooks. Middle European fare, like cabbage rolls laced with caraway seeds, gave way to a Middle-East influenced cabbage rolls with

cumin seeds, or capsicum stuffed with meat, rice and dill. Teutonic braised veal shanks reappeared with lemon and oregano seasonings. French-style terrines prepared in pastry-sealed pots opened to reveal all sorts of complex flavours - perhaps a few more than were tested in the recipe. To be honest, her 'quatre épices' had a fair touch of Stamboul. And, of course, we were introduced to the full range of European smallgoods then appearing in the 'continental' delicatessens. There were attempts at Asian fare, but the less said about them, the better!

Even salads were highly seasoned affairs for those days. Tomatoes were always dressed with dill or chives, or, later on, basil. Cold potatoes were rolled in dill and oil. Marjoram often partnered perhaps a few too many other ingredients in the tossed salad. Fetta cheese was always on the table, as were olives.

My father's main passion was fish cookery, his standard reference being *Madame Prunier's Book of Fish Cookery*. And the fish meal was his Saturday night ritual. He had a very special relationship with his fishmonger, a former patient, who ensured that my father frequently tried new varieties. We children were introduced to skate in a fish pie and led on to braver versions such as skate with a caper sauce. Tuna, then an extremely cheap fish, was purchased in fillet form for both the table and the cats. It was promoted to us as the 'chicken of the sea'. It was baked underneath a layer of onions and bay leaves or marinated in lemon and grilled. I wasn't impressed by the title but was, and still am impressed by the fish.

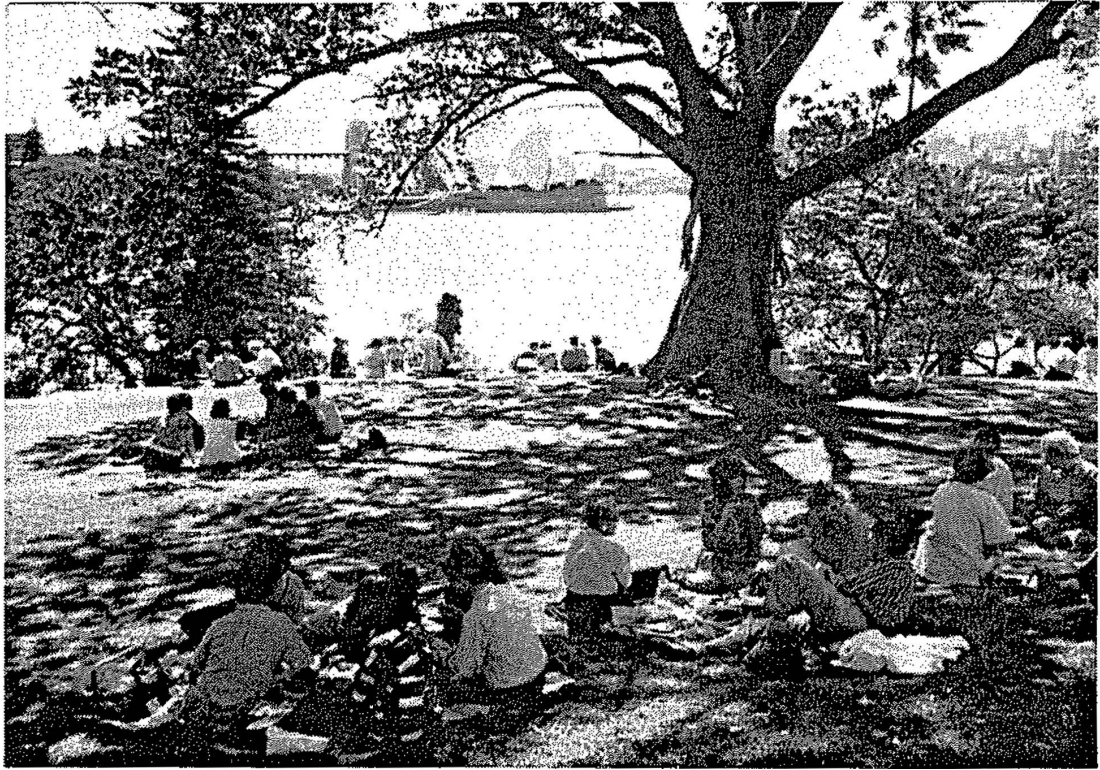
My father's favourite fish was blue-eye cod. He would arrive home, excitedly telling us of the treat that was in store. If he felt like pandering to the younger members of the family, he would prepare a fish pie with a mashed potato topping - I hasten to add that there is such a treat as *great* mashed potato! But he felt that this was so marvellous a fish that he could treat it in any way he chose - poached, grilled, baked or fried in the pan, being deglazed with white wine. Blue-eye cod was also a prime ingredient of his version of bouillabaisse, which always included saffron in the broth.

He would also prepare cold fish dishes, simple plates of poached fish sitting in its own jelly. It was on these occasions that we children were given lessons in making oil and egg mayonnaise, by hand. We were terrified lest our concentration should wane and we would accidentally commit the cardinal sin of stirring anti-clockwise, rather than clockwise.

Anglo-Saxon meat and game cookery was also his preserve. There was much experimentation to produce a spiced beef better than his mother's. My father enlisted medical technology in the form of an anaesthetist's syringe with a wide-bore needle - it certainly got the spices into the centre of the meat, but it also left part of the broken needle buried in the flesh. Much care was taken in the slicing to ensure that the dangerous pieces of steel were extricated.

Rabbit, hare and wild duck were all his territory - I must confess that, valiantly as he strove, he never came up with a satisfactory way of treating wild duck in a drought year. But his food, like my mother's, could never be described as bland and boring.

This was all real food, cooked food, prepared food rather than art-directed ingredients. Life was possible before the days of sun-dried tomatoes, extra-virgin olive oil, and goat's milk cheese! I consider myself fortunate to have grown up amongst people who cared about food.



The Culture of Wine in Australia

INTRODUCTION

Graham Pont

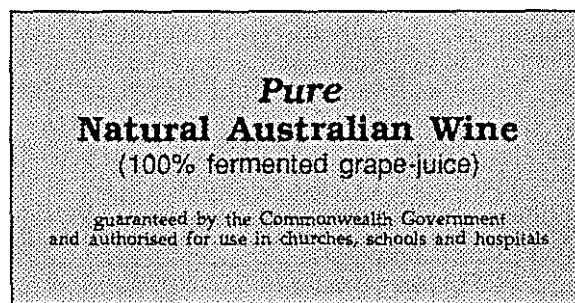
Since ancient times, wine has been an important part of gastronomy. In the *Deipnosophists* of Athenaeus, the references to wine - and its inseparable companion, water - are encyclopaedic. Brillat-Savarin is less comprehensive; he takes good wine for granted, as something essential to the pleasures of the table and the art of living well. How he would have despised the wowsers dietitians and pusillanimous medicos who now talk hypocritically, if not plain ignorantly, about the dangers of drinking three or more 'units' of alcohol a day! Brillat-Savarin, always clear-eyed and level-headed, regarded two *bottles* a day as safe for a normal healthy male. And this limit could, on rare occasions, be waived, as in the hilarious drinking competition in New York and, no doubt, in those leisurely family luncheons like the one so charmingly described in Meditation XIV.

Brillat-Savarin was a well-built and robust man who lived a long life, in a robust age. His dietary guidelines would not suit everyone; and they have been sensibly modified by his modern successors to a litre of wine a day - one half at lunch and the other at dinner.¹ For more sedentary men, it is three quarters of a litre and, for women, unfortunately, only half a litre. These figures, for table wines containing 10% alcohol by volume, would have to be adjusted down for our stronger Australian wines.

In the wine session of this Symposium, we brought together five experts - all key figures in the Australian wine scene - to address the 'Culture of Wine in Australia'. A necessary ruse, perhaps, since we have plenty of wine in Australia but not much in the way of wine culture. It took only a lecture or two to cover that part of the subject in my 'Culture of Wine' course at the University of New South Wales in 1988.

Yet the encounter was worthwhile, if only because not all of the experts present had been acquainted with each other or well known to the audience. They did us proud, even though a few heads were nodding after that fabulous picnic near Lady Macquarie's Chair. But the dozers gradually woke up - gently, as it were, from the second sweetest of slumbers - to hear Oliver Mayo brilliantly round off the day, no less eloquently begun by Don Dunstan.

Introducing a panel that proved to be lively and controversial, I proposed a new appellation of purity for Australian wines:



Limitations of time prevented discussion of this and many other issues that flowed from an overfull but exhilarating Symposium.

1. Dr E.-A. Maury, *Notre vin quotidien; essai de diététique oenologique*, Paris, 1987, pp 26-27.



LAKE'S FOLLY

HUNTER VALLEY

Cabernet Sauvignon

1983

Twenty first year
of the vineyard.

WINE OF AUSTRALIA

BOTTLE NO 02079 Alcohol by volume 12% 750 ml

THE CULTURE OF WINE IN AUSTRALIA

STATE OF THE ART, 1988

Max Lake

In this two hundredth year of white settlement in Australia, the record of its wine is a microcosm of the development of taste, technology and culture in a vast island-continent. To achieve perspective, we have briefly to consider its history, and then review Australian wine in a world context: a current greatness of the wines, a few individuals who have played some part therein, and the background of innovation and high technology in which they have worked.

It is a matter of historical record that several nations examined much of the mainland of Australia long before the formal colonisation by England in 1788. There was nothing stupid about the fact that the Chinese, the Malays, the Dutch (and who knows how many others?), after having a good look at the real estate, sailed on, leaving the land to the Aborigines, the only people with any real idea of living off such a harsh and worn-out old soil. Australia is one of the oldest and flattest land masses on the planet, and many of its goodies have been washed into the sea eons past. Much of the successful agriculture in the country depends on the replacement of these lost minerals almost on a routine basis. More to the point, this essentially inhospitable terrain is the wellspring of much that is admirable in the Australian character, in particular a talent for innovation.

Wine has been made virtually from the earliest settlement of downtown Sydney, from where it moved to what are now outer suburbs. It then shifted, in the 1830s, to the fertile valley of the lower reaches of the Hunter River, to the north of the Sydney basin. This is now a pleasant drive of about two hours, but it was once a difficult voyage of several days by horseback or boat. Since then viticulture has spread to every state of the country, including the central desert at Alice Springs. This expansion reflects the broadening of a cultural ethos that began with sturdy British stock in a remote and alien environment; subsequently a combination of ethnic mix, hard work and lateral thinking tamed a 'wide brown land'. The cosmopolitan lifestyle that has now evolved may well be the most envied existence of this and the next century.

The earliest settlers got off to a bad start. On the voyage from England rum was taken on board in South America, sometimes in sufficient quantities to act as ballast. It was a certain tranquilliser to the wretched colonists, hungry, oppressed, and waiting the best part of a year for an answer to letters written home. Its issue controlled by the military, rum quickly became a realistic currency and a cause of much of the alcoholism and state corruption that still persist. But our discussion today is about wine. Enter James Busby, 'Father of Australian Viticulture' and Australia's first wine-writer. Let him speak for himself directly from his books (my adaptation):

Those who have their taste for more delicate flavours, deadened by the use of rum, or any sort of ardent spirits, will be astonished to find how much a wine, which may taste insipid at first, will improve on their palate by habit, provided they give up the use of spirits.

Comparing wine to beer, he is even more forthright -

Anyone, I say who having both of them at his command, should prefer beer - even the most wholesome beer - to this drink, would, in my opinion, resemble a person who should eat the rind, and throw away the fruit.

Had it been settled by a colony from France (and I don't need to remind you that we missed this event by the accident of a mere fortnight)

we should at this day have seen few cornfields without their neighbouring vineyards; and the poorest settler, aye, his meanest servant would have daily regaled their palates and invigorated bodies with this first of the blessings which nature bestows on the more genial climates of the Earth.

And how we can all relate to

The man who could sit under the shade of his own vine, with his wife and children about him and the ripe clusters hanging within their reach, in such a climate as this, and not feel the highest enjoyment, is incapable of happiness and does not know what the word means.

From Busby's time onwards, Australian wines have been very good, sometimes superlative. The Old World has always had difficulty in accepting that excellent wine could be made elsewhere. A hundred years ago an Australian wine received a top award in an international wine exhibition. The resulting furore was resolved by rejecting the Australian entry on the ground that it must have been a European ring-in. Nothing changes. At a formal tasting in Paris a few years ago, a Californian cabernet sauvignon from Stag's Leap led a field which included the ultimate French comparison of Mouton Rothschild. What a wail that provoked! And how many provisos and excuses! More recently, Australian wines have had a fair share of such exposure, so that even the most culturally cringing of the local wine scribblers have all but given up apologising.

The ordinary winelover has always been well aware of the quality of Australian wines and remains a little bemused by the frequent 'discovery' of their excellence. They have been done no service by export promotions suggesting our wines might be effective cures for anaemia, impotence or whatever. Anyhow, the greatest wines in any country have always been in short supply, and much of the Australian wine that found its way far afield has tended to be of fair-to-average quality. A substantial amount of this wine comes from the irrigated areas of the great river systems. Such wines support the proposition that where great wines are made, they are, in a sense, only *just* made. Where wines are easy to make, they are seldom great. Wines, like people, I guess, have to struggle to achieve their potential. They have to overcome natural checks and balances like frost, water stress, excess heat, and a host of diseases that Nature, in her infinite wisdom, deems as fit to exist as the vine. Furthermore, the grapes of the great wines have often been grown in soil that itself left something to be desired. This has perhaps been less of a factor in the quality of Australian wine than natural insults, of which there have

been plenty. Even so, the comparison may be reasonable when one considers that much Bordeaux claret comes from reclaimed salt marshes, and the mighty Hunter Valley, for example, has been inundated by three seas in geological time.

How, then, do Australian wines fit into a world context? There has recently been a revolution in the quality of the wines of the entire planet that is astounding. It crested in the 70s, largely fuelled by the philosophy emanating from the faculty of the University of California at Davis, driven by men of distinction like Maynard Amerine, Vernon Singleton and many others. Surely I cannot be accused of false chauvinism in pointing out that, even as I write, the head of the faculty, Michael Mullins, and Roger Boulton, an outstanding scientist, both have Australian roots. But let us consider some examples of the changing international wine scene.

Italy is the largest wine producer. Less than a quarter of a century past, it was difficult to enjoy many of its wines more than a stone's throw from the winery, and even then only in great company, with chewy pasta and a song. No longer; they too are getting it right. Again, look at the wines of the Chablis region. The general style has changed from the classical flinty austerity of finish to a softer and more generous fruit flavour, hinting of a junior Meursault. Perhaps growers are leaving their grapes out longer to enhance ripeness, or are using other techniques to enhance the flavour.

Bordeaux itself offers some of the best examples of the change. Please recognise I am not talking about the incredible '82s, product of a prodigious growing season that spanned the European subcontinent. Incidentally, if you want to buy an argument in Bordeaux, where I happen to have a few good friends, try telling them that was the first year since 1961 that they were lucky enough to get their cabernet really ripe - as happens in Australia far more frequently! And if you're looking for a fight, tell them that many of their winemakers had little idea of how to handle such unusual fruit - or so it appeared to one Australian winemaker and his wife visiting Bordeaux during that fabulous autumn.

No, I am referring to the dramatic change in style; for example, in the wines of the great Château Margaux with the '78 vintage and subsequently. These are now often acclaimed as 'the wine of the vintage', a far cry from their earlier position. Looking back before the wines of the 70s, for more than a quarter of a century fewer and fewer wines had been made to justify the first growth classification of Château Margaux. And then the fairy-tale fantasy: the true-life materialisation of a ravishingly beautiful blond widow restoring the fame and fortune of the estate. From a vineyard standpoint, never has so much money been outlaid, to such startling effect, and in so short a time. To taste a run of the 'before' and 'after' wines gives new clarity to the meaning of 'quality control', and emphasises the central role this played in the world revolution in wine flavour. An equally important and similar change has been wrought in the wines of Château Pichon Longueville, Comtesse de Lalande (as compared to Le Baron across the road), now leader of the super-seconds. Pause and reflect that these examples of the pursuit of excellence have both been driven by women.

One can go on. Burgundy persisted in making very sophisticated and rather dirty wines up to the period we are considering: 'Good enough for grandfather, good enough for me.' The German wineland started to overcrop in the years following the second World War, and no amount of Teutonic diligence could effect a parallel increase in the fruit flavour of their wines.

If the major producers were achieving less than their best, so were California and Australia. California often reflected the push to higher alcohol wines that sprang from the ashes of Prohibition. When this was coupled to traditional Italian winemaking, that had been standard practice there, the mature wines of the 50s and earlier often left something to be desired. On my first visit in the 60s tasting wines from Charles Krug, Inglenook, and guru winemakers like Martin Ray, the wines were difficult to understand. Australian wines of that time were very good. If they had any dominant influences, probably the most important were the lack of industry capital, and little demand for quality wines from a predominantly English, Irish and Scottish population; you know what they used to drink, and not always with meals. With the torrent of winewriting that swamps us today, it may be difficult to imagine, but prior to the 'revolution' there were no regular wine-writers or educators in Australia. Our sole inspiration was a literary excursion every few years into the wonders of wine with Walter James.

I wrote a think-piece on cabernet sauvignon in Australia in 1959 and called it *Claret Style in Australia*. This provoked quite a flurry of interest, some of it from unexpected quarters, as I was then at the height of my surgical career. There was a mere handful of Australian wines comparing in quality to those made by Andre Tchelischeff in the Napa Valley, (the time of the emerging influence of Robert Mondavi, making wines in his own right). Wines such as the Hallcrest Cabernets of Frank Bartholomew from Santa Cruz from the 50s, of which I still have a collection, and the Hanzell Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs were also trailblazers.

The Australian superstars of the period were led by the legendary marriage of big fruit flavour and new oak barrels, celebrated by Max Schubert in Grange Hermitage. That wine had several contemporaries, but more than ten years were to pass before there were enough connoisseurs to support the new wave, and before Australian wine in general acquired its present sense of direction. There was a tendency for the high-quality wines to be overshadowed by the production of uneconomic irrigated vineyards, which had been developed by war veterans: political considerations of their survival in marginal conditions came before the pursuit of wine quality by the large majority. Their moment of truth was postponed until demand disappeared for exports of their multipurpose fruit (for wine as well as brandy and dried fruits).

The Australian wine industry has recently become extraordinary in its degree of centralised control, openly encouraged by the Commonwealth government to facilitate taxation - control which has become stultifying and unbearable. Our Prime Minister is now reputedly teetotal, after having been the beerswilling champion of his year at Oxford University. He makes a painful contrast to the members of the previous government who were enjoyers and encouragers of fine wine. Apart from a small number of medium-sized and, mostly, still family-controlled companies, and the 500 or so maverick small winemakers, most of the rest are conglomerate- or foreign-owned, or both. Australians have enthusiastically welcomed the buying back of the farm recently by the managements of two such companies.

There has been a remarkable change since the Australia of my youth, half a century ago. Wine was never seen on the tables of ordinary restaurants - only beer, if anything. Now virtually every table is adorned with wine, a striking social change that has benefited the pleasure and health of all. Now for the obligatory minimum of figures.

In the period before the second World War, the annual consumption of wine of all kinds per head was 2.7 litres. By 1970 it had risen to about 9 litres, and by 1980 exceeded 17. The most recent figure available is over 21 litres per head. White wine exceeded red by a factor of four at one stage, but this trend has now been reversed. The distribution of wine types is interesting. Fortified wine consumption has shown a substantial fall. Everyday drinking wine, 'bag-in-the-box', is down about a quarter, but bottled red is up 17% and bottled-fermented sparkling wines by about 19%. The population of the whole of Australia is about the same as each of the cities of Tokyo, London, or New York, which should give some perspective to the anticipated sales for 1988, approaching 40 million litres, with exports of Australian wine at 4 million litres - the best ever. This overview brings us to a position where it is possible to evaluate the state of the art.

It all starts in the vineyard. It seems too obvious to repeat, but it is sometimes forgotten, that great wine can only be made from the best fruit. The supreme examples of this truism are to be seen in the management of the merlot grapes of Pomerol by Christian Mouieux and in Robert Young's chardonnay from the Alexander Valley in California. There are many such perfectionists in Australia, particularly in the small holdings that lend themselves to precision management. Lake's Folly may claim to be one such. Piper's Brook demonstrates Andrew Pirie's devotion to the fruit quality produced by the vine competition which results from close planting in certain soils.

Other aspects of vine husbandry can be critical, too. Summer pruning and canopy thinning have been part of Hunter Valley vineyards since the earliest days of colonisation. This lessens the green-grass, bell-pepper note of the wines of the red and white sauvignon varieties, claimed to be a virtue by those growers who can't control it. A little is fine; the change to mint in bottle maturation of cabernet sauvignon is discussed at length in my recent book, *Scents and Sensuality* (London, 1989). Cropping levels are better understood now, both by grower and winemaker. It is not difficult to make an informed guess at the levels of fruit production per acre from the volume of fruit flavour and the length of finish in the wine. Each season has its optimum, and greed is always self-defeating in premium vineyards.

There have always been fashions in taste, and varietal preferences in wines are no exception. Semillon in the Hunter Valley remains the favourite of its many devotees, both as a young wine and when it shows the full promise of its maturity. Riesling is in partial eclipse at present, due to the effects of overcropping on flavour and because of the assertive attractions of some of the new stars. Sauvignon blanc is all the go at present, a state of affairs for which I lay partial responsibility on Robert Mondavi's imaginative 'Fumé Blanc'.

The preference for the white wines of the chardonnay grape is now widespread. Smart investors are planting it in nooks and crannies everywhere. Why wouldn't they? Consider the figures. A few years ago you could get a tonne of the good stuff for about \$A600. At the end of the Australian vintage in 1988 earlier this year, some company wineries were offering \$A2,500. There will be an end to this speculation and demand will level out. The reputation of great wines is being harmed by forgeries and greedy winemaking. The problem is not unique. Where does all that columbard in California go, and the aligoté in Burgundy? After the success of my book on cabernet in 1977, there was a request for a companion volume on chardonnay. There was a manageable number of about forty wines when the project began; but, by the time the work seemed to be reaching a definitive stage, there were hundreds! And there

are even more now, some of them unknown to me. No book on chardonnay, so far: there are too many wine books anyhow.

Until recently, the reputation of Australian red wine was based on the shiraz grape which produced quite a range of flavours, depending on where it was grown - leading to the logical absurdity that the same wine gained top awards in both 'claret' and 'burgundy' classes in a major Australian wine show! Such confusion has been ironed out long since, but it does illustrate what an excellent workhorse that variety has been. It reached its zenith in Grange Hermitage, 'hermitage' being an Australian synonym for 'shiraz'.

Cabernet sauvignon expanded with a rush in the 60s with a little help from its friends. The success of Lake's Folly Cabernet was unprecedented. It was the first new family vineyard to make and sell wine on a commercial basis, in all Australia, for much of the present century. It was actually in the vanguard of the Australian wine boom. In the subsequent explosion, its primary importance has tended to become obscured. Pinot noir has had something of a vogue but, with some notable exceptions, has remained a difficult performer. Shiraz is back, with some lovely new characters revealed by the new care in winemaking. But cabernet is *the* red grape, alone or blended with other varieties. I have been judging wine professionally since 1960 - and it was only fifteen years ago that there were sufficient cabernet wines to justify a separate class for the variety, and only five to twenty entries turned up on different occasions. Now, in the better supported state shows, it is common to see a hundred or more young cabernet wines which vary in quality from good to great.

'Clonal selection' became one of the buzzwords of the wine revolution in the 70s. Vines were fostered and propagated for generosity of production, for disease resistance, even for separate flavour qualities. And the final word has not been spoken on the subject. Consider the abysmal half tonne per acre of the pre-phylloxera black pinot berries of Romanée-Conti and its \$150 bottles of red Burgundy wine. They are unquestionably at the core of Burgundy's reputation, and that of the pinot noir grape. A few years ago I was present at an assessment of the wines made from several different clones at our CSIRO viticultural station at Merbein. Although I respected the clarity of the varietal character of some of the carefully selected clones, my preference was for the virus affected no. 127, for its complexity and - dare I say it? - for its *finesse*, of which more anon.

People make wine. Specialists become recognised by their virtuosity in the understanding and management of the infinitely variable biological system that is wine: and further, by their creation and adaptation of technology, in which Australians excel. We have had our artists and eye- and ear-catching superstars. But the solid foundation of the greatness of Australian wine rests on the efforts of men like John Fomachon, the scientist behind the great Australian sherries, among so much else; Chris Sommers, who showed that potassium imbalance in Australian soils generally was responsible for the pH problems that bedevilled many Australian wines; Colin Preece, who made our first great champagne style and who won the battle for quality control inside his company; Gunther Prass, whose mastery of white wine technology has been an inspiration for a quarter of a century; Les Ekert, who showed how easily outstanding Australian wine could be inexpensively and profitably marketed by blending wines of up to four separate districts under monopole labels. There never have been comparable wines for the money, although Wolf Blass has more recently applied similar talents on a grand scale. The names I have singled out are but a token of the large number of outstanding

individuals who would also be mentioned, but for the limitations of time and space.

Australian wine technology has made some impressive contributions. Bag-in-the-box has made good wine available cheaply to an appreciative public. The instant and widespread adoption of 316 stainless steel saw a quantum-jump in winery hygiene, followed by other innovations. Ron Potter released his fermenter, to be met with wide acceptance by Australian and international winemakers. The elegant simplicity of the top closure is a delight in a busy vintage. Brian Croser, a student of Ralph Kunkee at Davis, grafted Australian innovation on to Californian know-how to create a second school of oenology at the Riverina-Murray Institute of Higher Education at Wagga (now part of the new Charles Sturt University - Riverina). He later became a principal in a consultancy much like that of Emile Peynaud in Bordeaux. In much the same way there has been a re-examination of the excellent results that have followed their advice. A certain degree of uniformity is now seen in the wines made under their umbrella, welcome as this has been in the quarters where it was needed.

There has been a big increase in the general quality of Australian bottle-fermented sparkling wines. Following on large-scale plantings of the classic Champagne varieties, yeast technology has been mastered: these two innovations add up to great champagne. Don't tell an Australian it is difficult: or, more of a red rag to a bull, that it can't be done! And we now have a population capable of enjoying superb local sparklers at less than half the price of imported ones.

The most recent examples of Australian innovation come from young men: Stephen Hickenbotham's brilliantly simple carbonic maceration for early-drinking fruity reds, compares with de Bortoli's solution to the problem of terminally diseased semillon at Yenda - a Sauternes-style wine. This has the EEC bureaucracy scratching itself trying to prevent a confrontation with its old-world counterparts. The battle is already over... but that's another story!

Finesse is the most elusive quality in wine, anywhere. It took me ten years to reduce its definition to three words: *infinite complexity, understated*. Something like the descant of harmony and balance in a run of notes on a great harpsichord. I find this the most exciting of all the marvels of wine. A handful of Australian wines now show it. That is the state of the art.





BOTOBOLAR

ORGANICALLY GROWN

Shiraz Wine

PRESERVATIVE FREE

The grapes used in this wine were grown at Botobolar Vineyard near Mudgee, New South Wales, without the use of pesticides, herbicides or chemical fertilisers. No sulphur dioxide or other preservative has been added to the wine. 5,300 bottles.

1988 VINTAGE

9.5% ALC./VOL.

E. G. & V. M. WAHLQUIST
BOTOBOLAR LANE
P.O. BOX 212,
MUDGEE, N.S.W. 2850.

750 ml

BOTOBOLAR
VINEYARD,
PRODUCT
OF AUSTRALIA

ORGANIC GROWING

The grapes used in this wine were grown without the use of pesticides, herbicides or chemical fertilisers. The vines are not irrigated. The wine represents the character of the vineyard and the year.

—GIL WAHLQUIST, wine-maker,
Botobolar Vineyard,
Botobolar Lane, Mudgee,
New South Wales,
Australia.

CERTIFIED
ORGANIC
BY NASAA

THE AUSTRALIAN WINE STYLE

Gil Wahlquist

Australian wine is made from grapes harvested from vines imported to this country. How has it become distinctively Australian? This paper discusses the character of wine in this country, the problem of indigenous wine, mimicry of overseas wine styles, and legislation which discourages the making of distinctive regional wines in Australia.

There is no commercial wine made from native fruit. This situation could change if the public would accept wine made from fruit to which cane sugar had been added before fermentation. Most fruits other than grapes do not have sufficient natural sugar to provide adequate alcohol for wines. Lillypilly (*Eugenia spp.*) and sweet quandong (*Santalum acuminatum*) fruit wines are two of many possibilities of native fruits with flavours suitable for tasteful wines.

Premium wine in Australia is made from *Vitis vinifera* grapes, the original vines having been collected in Spain, Italy, France, Germany and Capetown and brought here in the early nineteenth century as a part of white settlement. *Vitis vinifera* is native to Asia Minor. The major wine grape is sultana.

Australian wine is aged in casks made from imported oak - usually *Quercus alba* from North America and Europe. (There is no commercial planting of this species in Australia). An Adelaide cooper is drying a log from a 100-year-old Australian grown tree of white oak found in a suburban garden. There will be enough oak for a few 30- to 40-litre casks.

The following Australian timbers have been tried for the maturation of wine: Australian oak (*Eucalyptus obliqua*, *E. refnans*, *E. gigantea*) usually from Tasmania; jarrah (*E. marginata*, a dense red timber from Western Australia); karri (*E. diversicolor*, similar to jarrah in appearance); Tasmanian myrtle (*Nothofagus cunninghami*); river red gum (*E. rostrata*); Tasmanian blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*). The conservatism of consumers prevented these

timbers being adopted in the past. Perhaps they should be tried again.

At Botobolar Vineyard we once matured shiraz and cabernet sauvignon in a 4000-litre jarrah vat which was heavily waxed inside. The wine sold as an Australian wood-matured product, but we discontinued the line when the vat split. The jarrah gave the wine a firm finish - the vat had been used by a pharmacist for the storage of tonic wine for about fifty years before we bought it. We did not buy another jarrah vat: there are no medals awarded for pioneering in the Australian wine business.

Wine-marketers assume that Australian wine-consumers are interested only in styles which follow those set in Europe. The sales force looks at the market and sees something in the shape of a pyramid with the connoisseur at the peak, the confident experimenter and enjoyer as the next layer, then the pseudo-buff, followed by the popular wine-seeker, the uninitiated and the largest section at the bottom, the non-users.

It was once thought that an education campaign would enlarge the sections at the top of the pyramid, encouraging consumers to experiment more and consume more. I still believe that wine education is needed in Australia in an era of declining beer culture.

The current wisdom is that the wine-maker's responsibility is not to educate the consumer but to concentrate on taking a bigger share of the market. The current broadcasting and television advertising policy which instructs wine marketers not to encourage new consumers supports this philosophy of the trading market share.

Business sense tells the wine-maker to aim for the top of the pyramid and forget the rest. Those at the top are interested in French styles. The connoisseurs are the only ones who can afford them. Lesser palates follow their example.

Many of the high-priced wines (price, it must not be forgotten, is an important parameter for the perception of quality in European wines), mimic imported wines in every way in which it is possible to do so. Externally, the package looks the part, with an imported capsule covering a French-length cork, the bottle being either imported or made in Australia in the 'French green' glass which the glass moulders have in their product lists. The styling of the label is often a recollection of a French design. More recently, as American wines have intruded, we see labels in the pastel colours made popular by the Californians.

The winemakers seek grapes to use in blends which duplicate those in imported wines. For example, the current use of merlot in red blends is an attempt to make Australian wines taste more like those of Bordeaux. The use of sauvignon blanc aged in oak is an imitation of American 'Fumé Blanc'.

We cannot resist the temptation to borrow.

'Champagne' is the most obvious: the name is used on almost everything with a bubble in it. More recently, there has been the copying of Beaujolais. A group of winemakers from Beaujolais visited Australia a few years back and, with the help of a market consultant, established a demand for their product. This has been followed by the release of numerous Australia wines called 'Beaujolais'. There is hardly a wine company in Australia which does

not use the name. The amazing thing is that this is not regarded as piracy, stealing or anything slightly immoral. The wine industry is so accustomed to copying styles and names that those who object are regarded as spoilsports.

How can we develop our own wine styles when a large part of the wine industry is in the business of import substitution? I don't believe that it started in that way, just under two hundred years ago. Didn't Macarthur and Blaxland, our earliest recorded winemakers, seek to make their own wine? Just as the Australian merino sheep developed into an animal of particular quality and distinction, although starting as a European wool producer, so grapes and wine have changed with the local climate and conditions.

One of the important differences between the Australian vines and those in Europe is that the Australian vines are descended from pre-phylloxera stock. The phylloxera insect wiped out the vines of Europe which had grown on their own roots since the time of the Romans. The grape varieties were saved by grafting them on to vigorous rootstocks of American vines, which resisted the insect.

Phylloxera in Australia was limited to a few areas. The majority of our vines survived. In many cases, they are the only examples of the classic vines of Europe still living on their own roots. This fact has been considered to be of great interest by French ampelographers but the wine has been of interest only at the academic level, it seems.

What is the difference in the composition of juice from a vine in balance with its own root system and one which is being forced by a grafted root system? This question appears to be too subtle for us to answer.

Australian grape-producers are busily grafting their unique vines on the American rootstocks to increase production. Despite all of this, many of Australia's three hundred or more wineries still do their own thing on their own piece of land. They plant vines to make varietal wine or a winery blend. Big winery or small, it doesn't matter: there are makers and growers who know that on certain areas of land they can produce something above the ordinary in grapes and wines, and they fight to keep those special wines as distinct entities.

They do so at their commercial peril.

As we get close to a truly Australian wine which reflects the climate, soil and philosophy of a particular area, we find out about the labelling laws. In labelling a wine by grape variety, the wine legally need contain only 80% of that variety. The other variety or varieties in the bottle do not have to be disclosed. If a wine is described as coming from a particular region, the same rule applies. There can be 20% of wine from another region in the bottle, with no legally required disclosure. In labelling a wine with a particular vintage year, only 95% of the wine needs to be from that year. Winemakers have always claimed that this sort of flexibility enables them to produce wines which go better in the market - but an anonymous 20% addition is really enormous!

The wine from the good area may be used to lift, in additions of 20%, the wine from other areas. There is an excellent fleet of wine-tankers operating by road in Australia, which can move wine from one area to another overnight.

There is a myth that Australia has a superb climate which ensures optimum development of wine grapes every year. Did any wine region in Australia ever have a bad vintage? The vintage reports issued from the wine-makers after each harvest in Australia are seen by most wine consumers for what they are - nonsense, which will have nothing to do with the resultant wine. A 20% addition can make a huge contribution to salvaging a reputation threatened by mildew, poor soil nutrition and lack of sunshine.

Surprisingly, a large number of growers still refuse to blend their wines. They stay with them as they come, year by year. Their wines can be used as the true basis for evaluating a region. Area societies for verifying the origin and quality of wines now give the independent wine-maker encouragement. The system at Mudgee, New South Wales, begun in 1979 and still surviving, has earned the Mudgee producers the loyalty of a large number of consumers. The Mudgee wineries, which produce 0.4% of the country's wine, hold a solid segment of the top of the market pyramid, with wines which are essentially Australian. The wines, white and red, have qualities of ripeness, deep colour, and soft tannins. By catering to a loyal group of consumers, they tend not to stray from the style which the Mudgee district's ripe fruit makes possible.

From one side of Australia to the other, there are wine producers who share this fierce determination to show what their piece of soil can produce. Some are supported by appellation or verification societies, others are not. Their belief in what they are doing provides the consumer with a wine which is not shaped each year by the market, but by the soil and the climate. They often use special pruning and trellising techniques to produce the best fruit from their area.

In my own case, I have followed a policy since 1971 of not using pesticides, herbicides or soluble fertilisers. This is an organic-growing programme which has been tested and given a Grade One classification by the Australian group which administers organically grown food the National Association for Sustainable Agriculture in Australia (NASAA). Some winemakers are better than others but the vineyard is fundamental. It is the origin of wine, and it is the confidence of the consumer in its origin which gives the wine its reputation, its provenance.

I believe we should analyse the soils of Australia's wine regions, to determine differences which could show up in the wines. In this way we will learn more about the particular values of wine in Australia.

How is the worth of this wine to be assessed? Not in wine shows! The tasting of wines in an anonymous line-up is of limited technical interest to those with the ability to interpret the results. The use of wine show results in wine-marketing has degraded the shows. There's a feeling that if a wine company wants to win, it will. There is only one place to evaluate a wine, and that is at the table. Fortunately, the majority of consumers understands this. To the dismay of wine-marketers, the results of wine shows have less and less influence on sales; many of the best-selling Australian wines do not appear on show tables or else do not advertise their show awards. Now that premium wines are being exported from Australia, the recipient countries are insisting on a more accurate definition of variety and region - an improvement which will be to our benefit in helping us get to know the regions as they are.

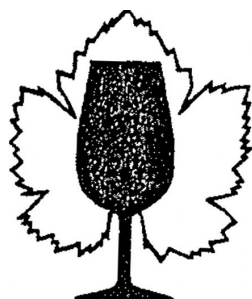
In the future, I believe that the great wine-producing areas of Griffith and the Riverland will market under their own names, without permitting their product to be used anonymously by other regions. More attention needs to be given to the growing of grapes without potentially harmful chemicals. Most grape-growing areas of Australia are not beset by problems which cannot be handled by an organic growing programme. This would provide a more wholesome and acceptable product for a market which is now reacting against the use of chemicals in agriculture.

We should do something about that oak flavour in our wines. For the maturation of our wines, we should be planting our own white oak forests so that forty to eighty years down the track we would have our own oak staves - and not only staves. We should plant *Quercus suber* for our own corks too.

When I look at my vines, which climb a gentle north-easterly slope of Australia's Great Dividing Range, I say to myself, 'I planted those vines; I built this winery from rocks gathered from the fields. My concern is to make wine from grapes grown on this soil and to share it with you.'

When a winemaker from another part of the world visits my winery and tastes a glass of my wine, I do not want him to tell me that it tastes like his wine. It is the difference, the Australian difference, which is important to me.





WINEWISE

THE CONSUMER'S WINE GUIDE
FREE HALF SIZE PREVIEW ISSUE

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Welcome to this preview issue of **WINEWISE**. **WINEWISE** is aimed at the wine enthusiast who seeks quality for his or her wine dollar. For some time now, Australia has been in need of a wine publication written by wine consumers for wine consumers, and we have taken the step to satisfy that need.

This editorial column will often deal with contentious issues, and may at times deliver some solid blows to the establishment. This initial foray with typewriter sets the tempo for future issues, and, as you've supported us by obtaining our preview copy, you're entitled to be made aware of our aims, standards and methodology.

Most importantly, **WINEWISE** will neither be accepting any advertising nor soliciting free samples of wine from wine-makers, wholesalers or merchants. This means that we are under no pressure from advertisers and need not fear the cutting off of supply when we dare to criticise. Most wine publications owe their existence to ads and free bottles so they are often compelled to tread warily - to say the least. Of course, the cost of purchasing wines for tasting means that **WINEWISE** cannot be sold at giveaway prices, but it allows us to candidly review ALL wines tasted.

We will not be changing our tasting panels like so many pairs of socks, because we believe in delivering **CONSISTENT HONEST OPINION**. There will be no trendy winemakers or consultants who may be seen to have vested interests in wines under review. Our panels will comprise the small group of knowledgeable enthusiasts responsible for this publication. Each panel will represent many years of tasting experience and all members are well skilled in the sensory evaluation of wine.

Our blind tastings will be designed to eliminate as many variables as possible. For example, we won't be lumping together different styles or going through the farcical exercise of comparing wines of different countries. Nor will we be employing a points rating scale. ALL wines tasted by the panel will be listed in order of preference, and our comments will provide the information you require.

Apart from panel tastings some young unbottled wines will be sampled at their place of origin (see 1983 Bordeaux this issue). As these examples cannot be tasted blind, and final blends may not have been assembled, such articles are intended to be meaningful previews rather than appraisals of a finished product.

WINE APPRAISAL THE *WINEWISE* APPROACH

Len Sorbello

May I begin by reading the following letter to the Editor of *Wine & Spirit*, published in its September 1988 issue?

Each month's new release tasting is accompanied by a list of all wines tasted together with *Wine & Spirit's* evaluation for each... an excellent idea.

To put the results of feature tastings in context, a similar list should be published. Until that happens, readers interested in your evaluation of a particular wine eligible for the feature tasting live in doubt. Did the wine fail to meet *Wine & Spirit's* 'review' standard, or was it simply not submitted for tasting? Each possibility has a vastly different implication from the other.

While acknowledging that the magazine has space limitations, it is nonetheless 'a buyers' guide' and this sort of information forms an integral part of it.¹

The need to know and the right to know! The *Winewise* partners heard that plea as far back as February 1985 when, frustrated at the lack of real information available to consumers, we took the plunge and launched a free, half-sized preview-issue.

To help you understand the origins of *Winewise*, I'd like to examine the culture of wine criticism prevailing in Australia at that time. In the early 80s, we had two national wine magazines, a number of newspaper columns and some trade magazines devoted to the discussion and evaluation of wine.

Many of the newspaper columns were devoted to industry promotion, with comments amounting to no more than such and such a wine was a 'delicious drop'. Wines were evaluated in isolation, without a proper frame of reference; and much label-drinking took place. (Fortunately, we now have persons of the calibre of James Halliday and Huon Hooke writing the best columns). The prevailing philosophy was 'if a wine doesn't measure up, don't write about it'. There was, in our view, a conspiracy of silence.

This same philosophy pervaded the national magazines. In the case of *Winestate*, which began in the late 70s, we felt that it initially devoted too much attention to South Australian wines. Later it introduced area tastings from all parts of Australia with winemaker panels drawn from (where else!) the area under review. Very generous ratings resulted. Frustrating also were the constantly changing winemaker panels. From issue to issue, there was (and still is) no consistency of approach. Pity the consumer!

The only rays of sunshine then were the occasional articles by Lester Jesberg and some of the other *Winewise* partners, on topics such as a comparative tasting of Redmans and Brands reds, or a comprehensive evaluation of 1978 chardonnays (there weren't too many chardonnays

in those days, but I don't recall any other evaluations of this kind at the time). All was well - until we became too critical.

Wine & Spirit, which started in October 1975, was an excellent publication in its early years, when Len Evans played a prominent role. (I note that more recent issues seem to be returning to the standard of old.) Unfortunately, by the early 80s, it had lost its way. With its reliance on free samples and advertising, it lacked, in our opinion, a genuine consumer orientation. Time and time again, we would read 'Cabernet Sauvignon: 27 tasted, 19 reviewed' with comments such as 'I'm amazed at the number of these cabernets with sulphide problems... One's always tempted to say "leathery" or "vegetable" to sound nice, but there are a lot where that's impossible.'² Great stuff! But which wines were they talking about? We had no idea, as there was no list of *wines tasted but not reviewed*.

For a time, *Wine & Spirit* published a companion newsheet called *Wineguide* which provided 'the hard tacks on the wines we do not review.'³ However, only new releases were included in this service (not their feature tastings) and you had to pay a hefty price for the privilege (\$35.00 in 1984).

There was little or no coverage in any publication of small winemakers, or of the newly emerging 'boutique' wineries which were charging an arm and a leg for wines of unknown and, in a number of cases, dubious quality. Who could the consumer turn to for an objective assessment of these wines without paying \$200 a case beforehand? Why, you may ask, did this situation exist at all? In every other sensory field, products and works had long been subjected to free and open criticism. The problem, in our view, lay fairly and squarely with the wine industry itself and its supersensitivity to *any* criticism.

Speaking at the Sixth Australian Wine Industry Technical Conference, in 1986, James Halliday is reported as saying:

Overall the relationship between the industry and the press has been too incestuous. The industry has been too sensitive to the relatively mild criticism that has emanated from wine writers.

I honestly believe that both *Wine & Spirit* and *Winestate* have effectively been neutered over the years by the wine industry. I have never in my mind - though I admire many things that Penfolds do - ever forgiven them for boycotting *Wine & Spirit* in Sydney for something like five years for refusing to submit wines for judgment. In turn this led the publishers of those journals, because they had to rely on advertising material, to progressively soften and downgrade their judgments to get people on panels who [gave] the industry a fair run.⁴

James went on to say that this situation 'created a gap, a vacuum' in which *Winewise* emerged. (Actually, he used the rather uncomplimentary term, 'hatchet magazine', to describe us, though he also went on to say he was a supporter of *Winewise*).

So, that's why and how we began. Right from the start we decided not to accept advertisements so that our editorial independence would never be compromised. Our sources of inspiration were many. We looked to the British publication *Decanter*, with its open and forthright reviews of European wines, its frank vintage assessments and its vertical tastings. It offered good informative reading then; but lately - I'm not so sure.

In the homeland of consumerism, we had two possible models; first, Robert Parker's *The Wine Advocate* with its unique 100-point rating system but totally independent reporting. The buying decisions of many American merchants and importers, as well as consumers, are based solely on his recommendations because he is seen to be unbiased.

There was also the *Underground Wine Newsletter* (not *The Underground Wine Journal*) edited by John Tilson, which provided a panel approach to consumer wine evaluation. Every wine tasted was reviewed and given quite open and frank assessments, according to the 20-point system. We preferred their approach to Parker's: it is unlikely that one person alone can dispense consistently accurate opinions. We all have palate biases and 'off days'; a panel tends to even things out.

Closer to home, we took a leaf out of Len Evans' newsletter *The Wine Buyer*, particularly in its later years. *The Wine Buyer* began in April 1968 and ended (unfortunately) some 96 issues later, in January 1979. Len finally settled on a rating scale which included five graded categories: 'Outstanding', 'High Quality', 'Good', 'Above Average' and 'Average'. He also included a category of 'Also Tasted'. I'm going to read to you a few snippets from his reviews:

Very good wines hard to find, whatever the industry says... (1973)

Apart from a few wines these issues can only be described as 'straight forward, pleasant and clean' - words that I use every third sentence, it seems. Please, Mr Winemaker, provide me with something about which I can rhapsodise... (1975)

In 1977:

1977 HUNGERFORD HILL COONAWARRA RHINE RIESLING SPAETLESE
Sulphur character and slightly dirty nose. Palate marred by sulphur and same dirty character. Palate dominated by off flavours.

Or in 1979:

1978 AUGUSTINE SEMILLON
Thin and baggy without any character.

1978 MOONDAH BROOK ESTATE VERDELHO
Fat, hard, oxidised wine.

1978 RICHMOND GROVE RHINE RIESLING
Volatile, soapy, flabby, bad fermentation.

These are honest, forthright views from a person who, with his fundamental love of wine, has continually strived to improve the quality of the Australian product.

The first full issue of *Winewise* was published in April, 1985. Together with the preview issue, it created quite a storm in industry circles, and indeed in the wine press. In addition to categories of 'Outstanding', 'Very Good', 'Commended' and 'Acceptable', we decided to follow *Choice* in adding a 'Not Recommended' category. We adopted a 'tell-it-like-is' approach!

Depending on the quality of the wine, our comments ranged from 'a fine wine with the potential to improve...' to 'Blue vein cheesy nose... reminiscent of a sulphidey German Kabinett'. The producer of the latter wine did not take too kindly to our comments, pointing out that the wine had won a Gold Medal a year earlier in a State show. (We wrote back pointing out that our review of that same wine was consistent with the exceptionally low points it received at the National Wine Show held in Canberra at about the same time we had conducted our tasting).

One letter we received a couple of years ago said:

It's fine to have a punchy, hard-hitting style but remember you are writing about wine, which is a product that can be debated 'til the cows come home.'

The implication was that we shouldn't write any derogatory comments about wine as it is not a subject susceptible to objective critical analysis.

Perhaps our most vehement public critic has been that doyen of wine writers, Mark Shield, who in March 1986 wrote:

This is a document devoid of humanity, humour and journalistic skill. It is bumptious, pompous and pretentious... I would detest the company of the publisher⁵

About a year later he labelled us 'the wine haters'. This particular attack provoked one of our supporters to write:

... you'll need to wear that guy down a bit and being consistent will be your best asset... You're a great asset to us in the industry who seriously want to attain... international greatness.

Coming from a winemaker, that was most heartening. In fact, right from the start we had a small core of winemaker/producers (representing almost every region of Australia) who supported us. One of these wrote:

If the wine industry wishes to be taken seriously, it must learn to expect, and respect, constructive criticism. Respected film journalists, theatre critics, restaurant reviewers and motoring writers are free to indulge in 'honest opinion'... Wine should be no different, even if our delicate sensibilities are slightly bruised occasionally.

And we have enjoyed strong consumer support:

Congratulations on a well presented... publication. Thank God there's at least one impartial magazine available.

However, it would be wrong of me to leave you with the impression that most of the people in the industry are against us. Indeed, I can now say that the opposite is the case. About eighteen months ago, we found an increasing number of producers approaching us to review their wine - they welcomed our frank, independent assessments. No doubt we helped break down the barriers with our extensive visits to vineyards, exchanging views with numerous winemakers around the country.

A measure of the support we now enjoy is that virtually every major producer (including Penfolds) is happy to provide *Winewise* with wines for assessment - on our terms. We believe that we have earned their respect through our consistent and knowledgeable approach. They may not like everything we write but they accept that we know what we're talking about.

In an article about food critics ('There's a pen in my soup', *Epicurean*, November-December, 1987), Jenny Ferguson asked the question, 'Who's entitled to criticise?' She maintained that an essential balance of knowledge and wisdom is vital to a position which wields tremendous power. She went on to say:

If in the practice of my discipline I research every magazine and book on food that I can lay my hands on, and spend a month of every year travelling to many places, in Europe, and most specifically France, to broaden my horizons, then I expect that anyone who is going to criticise me publicly will put in similar spade work. Eating out every Saturday night simply does not qualify one to sit in the seat of judgement.⁶

Similarly, drinking lots of wine doesn't necessarily qualify one to write about wine. I suspect that part of the reason why we were not received well by some people, when we first started out, was our anonymity. We had all the qualifications Jenny Ferguson referred to, but these were known only to some of the inner 'wine mafia'. We wanted to be judged solely by the quality of our output, rather than by who we were. We still want to.

Nevertheless, for the record, I will give a brief account of ourselves. We are a group of wine enthusiasts who, for many years, have tasted wine together, travelled the wine lands of the world and involved ourselves in all sorts of wine activities, such as show-judging, writing (I wrote my first article in 1972), winemaking, wine-marketing, wine options championships (doing battle with Len Evans and the like), and teaching wine appreciation. The last activity, for me at least, is very important; and indeed is an essential part of *Winewise*. Look at our current issue (October, 1988) and judge for yourself. This educational role is one that people like Mark Shield have failed to recognise. We pride ourselves on imparting knowledge to consumers, increasing their level of appreciation and enabling them to discover new sensations they might not otherwise have experienced.

Our motivation is not to bring winemakers to heel or to show how smart we are. Our objective has always been to bring honesty and a measure of objectivity to wine appraisal and to call a spade, a spade. We judge Australian wine in its world context and make no apology if our views are somewhat forthright and occasionally controversial. Our basis of comparison in 'quality' terms (though not necessarily in 'style' terms) are the wines of Domaine de la Romanée-Conti (see, for example, our October '88 issue, page 15), the top wines of Bordeaux, the newly emerging first growths of Australia (such as Wynns John Riddoch Cabernet or de Bortoli Botrytis Sauternes) or Australian classics like the Lindeman Hunter Semillons of the 60s.

Our job is to ensure that issues of concern to consumers are aired and debated. For example, in all the hype that surrounded Australian chardonnay a few years ago, we spoke out against the overwooded, stinky, non-varietal examples. Now look at the chardonnays you can purchase off the shelves today! Some of these may live up to the claims of yesteryear. There appears to be a tendency in some circles to accept any sort of wine as legitimate. Why? Is every

painting a work of art? Of course not! Similarly, we at *Winewise* refuse to accept as legitimate some of those thinly-flavoured products, coming from so-called cooler areas, masquerading as quality wine - notwithstanding what Robin Bradley may say.

Let's look now at how *Winewise* approaches its task.

Winewise is a buying guide for consumers; it is about the consumer's hard-earned dollar and how to spend it wisely. Some of the more generous assessments of *Wine & Spirit* and *Winestate* have not been in the consumer's best interests. A casual assessment of a wine might lead you to think it's acceptable, that you could go out and buy it with confidence. But wait - before spending \$300 a case: could there be better wines available for less cost? There really is only one way to find out.

In his excellent 1988 edition of the *Australian Wine Guide*, James Halliday discusses the factors that impinge on wine assessment:

I have absolutely no doubt that the comparative tasting is the most reliable method of tasting wines, and of putting them into perspective... Another factor worth looking at... is the question of whether the taster knows anything of the origin of the wine. An English wine writer once observed that a quick glance at the label is worth 20 years in the wine trade... even the most skilled taster cannot help but be influenced by knowledge of the label. It is for this reason that whenever practicable (and for logistical reasons it is not always possible) I conduct 'blind' comparative tastings.⁷

James is absolutely right; and we conduct our tastings by that same method.

If the *Winewise* approach to wine evaluation sometimes appears too clinical, too critical, or to disregard the sheer enjoyment of drinking, then think about this: the economic decision involved in the act of buying wine cannot and must not be ignored (only millionaires can afford to do that!). Few individuals could afford to taste the range of wines we do, in order to make proper buying decisions. Accordingly, our role is to guide consumers to the best wines and the best-value wines, without regard to labels, reputations or vested interests.

In his consumer column in *Decanter* (February, 1984), Robin Young published a Draft Code of Practice for blind tastings. Among other things, he laid down certain requirements, from which I quote the following extracts:

3. Minimum requirements for tasting conditions must include natural light, white table covering and clean glasses.
4. No conferring. This is, in fact, an extremely hard rule to enforce...
6. All tasters to be told clearly how to and on what criteria they are to mark...
7. The report to include a complete disclosure of what tasters were told in advance; how they were instructed to mark; how results were calculated: to note cases of dissent and differences of opinion; to make clear the source of samples; and to declare the interests of any trade representatives participating, and their connections with any of the wines that may be involved...
8. The report should also mention all wines involved in the tasting. If winners are to be announced, it is imperative that there should be a list of losers also, for a fair indication of how strong the competition was.

Robin went on to say:

These points may seem pretty elementary, but with more and more newspapers and magazines running blind tastings, I am afraid you would be surprised how seldom they are all observed. Bear points (7) and (8) above in mind as a check-list when next you are reading a blind-tasting report; and if you cannot see all are properly covered, my advice would be to treat the results with circumspection.

Very rarely are all these guidelines observed in Australian wine-writing. How often are the judging criteria published along with the assessments, so that readers can actually understand how the wines were assessed? We make it a point of *Winewise* to discuss, before each tasting, what we are looking for in the wines under evaluation and then to publish these criteria at the beginning of each report.

Most of our wines are purchased at normal retail outlets. As I mentioned earlier, more producers are now supplying their wines for assessment, but we guard against the possibility of encountering special 'show samples', by regularly swapping samples sent for similarly labelled bottles from the retail shelves. All wines are judged together, regardless of price. Our practice is in marked contrast to some publications which rate wines according to such categories as 'under \$10.00'. In our view, price should not enter the equation until after the quality-rating has been determined. In this way one avoids making excuses for poorly made wine or, indeed, for wine of only average quality. Again, I draw an analogy with the art world: should a painting be judged solely by its price?

We judge wines by the claims made on the label. If the wine is labelled as a varietal, we expect to find distinct varietal characteristics; wines lacking such attributes are marked down, even if the wine is sound in all other respects. Take semillon, for example. Many wines carrying such a label smell and taste like sauvignon blanc. (A few years ago, even some rieslings and chardonnays could also have been mistaken for sauvignon blanc!) We're told that this confusion is the natural outcome of cool-climate fruit. Assuming that to be true (we believe changes in viticultural practices can avoid this problem), then the winemaker has two choices: either to adjust his or her winemaking techniques to eliminate the sauvignon characteristics, or to label the wine differently. Why not label it 'Classic Dry White', for instance? Then we could enjoy the wine for what it is, rather than for what it pretends to be. Of course, there is another plausible explanation. It may be that semillon is not well suited to cooler regions; we are yet to see the 15-20 year-old classics from the new regions. Will they match the old Hunter classics? Time will tell; but we suspect they won't.

Another unique feature of *Winewise* is that we judge like with like. As far as possible, only wines of the same variety and of the same year are assessed together. As James Halliday says: 'Once wines of differing parentage, age and weight are placed together the picture becomes... confused'.⁸ We try to eliminate as many variables as possible. We seem to be the only publication which can make statements about the performance of different varieties according to vintage. For example, after having conducted a fairly comprehensive tasting of '87 rieslings, it became clear that they are no match for the excellent '86 wines from the same variety. On the other hand, it appears to us that the '87 chardonnays were more successful. Consumers who wish to cellar wines need this kind of information. Why doesn't anyone else comment on vintage variation? Is it because of the myth that we don't have substantial vintage variation in Australia?

Both consumer and winemaker alike want to know which wine is the best. We try to tell them. *Winewise* ranks wines in order of preference: in this way, the good-value wines really stand out and, because we review every wine we taste, everyone is able to see the competition each wine faced. That brings me back to where I started - with the letter to the editor of *Wine & Spirit* from P. R. Prentice, calling for publication of the names of all wines tasted, so that the validity of the results themselves may be properly assessed.

May I conclude, then, by summarising our achievements?

I believe *Winewise* has legitimised the right of wine journalists and judges to criticise: our publication has created a climate in which matters relating to wine may be frankly and openly debated. I also believe we have influenced a number of winemakers to change some of their practices, for the benefit of consumers. We have increased consumer awareness of wine and taken some of the mystique out of wine appreciation, with our innovative background articles, our publication and analysis of show results, and our vertical tastings (where we look at different vintages of a single wine - a feature of almost every issue).

We are particularly proud of our coverage of small makers and our promotion of new areas and up-and-coming winemakers. Our feature-tasting of the wines of Mornington Peninsula was another feather in our cap (*Winewise* vol 3, no 5, December 1987, and no 6, February 1988).

Perhaps the greatest pleasure we derive from our involvement in *Winewise* is the knowledge that we are satisfying a need in the community and appear to be doing that well. As one of our overseas subscribers in New York told us:

As a result of your reviews, I've purchased, and enjoyed, a number of good Australian wines - wish more were available here.

NOTES

1. *Wine & Spirit*, September 1988, p 12.
2. *Wine & Spirit Monthly*, July 1984, p 45.
3. *Ibid* p 55.
4. *Tech Talk* (The daily journal of the 6th Australian Wine Industry Technical Conference), Thursday, July 17, 1986.
5. *Epicure* 7, *The Age*, Tuesday 11 March, 1986.
6. Jenny Ferguson, 'There's a pen in my soup', *Epicurean*, November-December 1987, pp 60-61.
7. James Halliday, *Australian Wine Guide* (1988 Edition, North Ryde NSW), p xvii.
8. *Ibid*.

THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN WINEMAKING

Tony Jordan

My talk will be brief. I hope there will be time for questions, so that I can elaborate on matters of interest to you.

I assume the organisers of this panel want me to talk about 'Technology in Winemaking', as its value is sometimes misunderstood by the general public, which sees 'hightech' wines as simple, uncomplicated and too much alike. Perhaps they chose me to talk about this dry-sounding topic because in some quarters I am regarded as one of those white-coated technocrat 'consultants' who charge around the Australian industry steering wineries large and small along the path of organised, disciplined and quality winemaking.

Until the end of last year, such an image of me (not the white-coated bit!) had some credibility, as I was then the Managing Director of Oenotec Pty Ltd, a company which during the last eleven years has offered technical consulting services to over fifty Australian and New Zealand wineries. Recently I left consulting and I am now establishing Domaine Chandon Australia, which is Moet et Chandon of France's new vineyard and production facility in the Yarra Valley near Melbourne.

How has technology in the last twenty years improved the wines we drink?

Winemaking is an ancient process that comprises a series of steps: grape growing, picking, juice handling, fermentation, bulk wine clarification, maturation and bottling. The process is one in which the varietal flavours intrinsic to the grapes should be favourably modified by the fermentation process and by the many handling options that the winemaker can choose. These handling options include juice oxidation, malolactic fermentation, choice of primary fermentation yeasts, skin contact, cap extraction, use of various oaks, barrel ferment, fermentation with grape solids, yeast lees contact and so on.

Until the late 60s in Australia, more often than not, it was nature who chose the options - in other words, microbiological and chemical events were somewhat out of the hands of the winemakers, because they did not have enough knowledge or equipment to control them.

This situation meant that from first-quality grapes some good wines were made; many that could have been good were mediocre and, as a result, were culled at blending time and sold as bulk - an economically unacceptable result these days.

Many of the techniques used in modern wine-making did not have to be invented, because they were already used in other fermentation industries where the products are far less forgiving than wine of random microbiological or chemical processes. What the introduction of modern technology has done is greatly improve the ability of the winemaker to produce first-quality wine from first-quality grapes, and to produce a wider range of styles from a particular batch of fruit.

In other words, modern technology allows the winemaker to control the biological and chemical nature of each event in the winemaking sequence, while giving him a large number of alternative style directions along which he can steer the wine. That is, he can produce a wider range of styles - far more than they could have produced in earlier times. These alternatives include, of course, the traditional styles.

The final result still depends on the winemaker's knowledge of style and his ability to steer a wine towards a particular style objective. It is a weakness of some winemakers that they do not have a good grasp of world wine styles, and so they tend to apply modern methods in a recipe-like way, thus obtaining results that are consistent though often too simple. Don't blame technology for that! Blame the winemaker for his lack of education in wine styles: without the experience and judgement that come from extensive tasting, the winemaker will lack flair or art in his approach. He might have the full range of techniques available but yet lack the skill to apply them in a way that produces the best result.

To illustrate how modern technology is used to produce a wine of complex style, I will describe the main steps in the making of a 1988 chardonnay.

1. The vineyard supplying the fruit was in the Yarra Valley of Victoria, where vineyard practice had yielded a crop of four tonnes to the acre, with good fruit/leaf balance, good light exposure to the fruit.
2. By flavour testing the vineyard on a regular basis, picking time was chosen when the varietal characters were obvious and the acid to pH ratio of the grapes was within an acceptable range.
3. The flavours were assessed as good and full and an adequate basis for adding complexity by using skin contact, malolactic fermentation and lees contact and barrel fermentation.
4. So one portion of the grapes was processed without sulphur dioxide, oxidatively crushed and pressed, clarified, fermented at about 15 degrees centigrade in stainless steel and inoculated for malolactic fermentation. Another portion was crushed, sulphurdioxide added and left in contact with the skins for six hours before pressing at about 15 degrees. The juice was clarified, fermentation started and at about 9 degrees Baumé, the must was transferred to new barrels (heavy toast and medium toast) and fermented to dryness. The barrels were then topped and left tomature on yeast lees. A third batch of grapes was chilled as whole fruit to 5 degrees Centigrade and crushed with sulphur dioxide and vitamin C to protect against oxidation. The juice was then clarified and fermented at controlled temperatures in stainless steel then barrels to produce a wine with a maximum of varietal fruit retention.
5. After six months' maturation in a range of oaks (Nevers, Tronçais and Voges) as individual batches, the wines were assessed at the tasting bench and a final blend assembled that did not use all components - that blend is now back in oak again and now looks very promising.

By using this approach, a wine was made that had good fruit character yet plenty of complexity - characteristics that resulted from wise choices among the various alternatives available. If only one approach had been used, the wine may well have been too simple.

TECHNIQUES

What are some of the methods that have been introduced into Australian winemaking in the last 20-25 years?

1. **Viticultural Technique**
There has been a vast improvement in viticultural practice that aims to optimise fruit flavour. This is particularly important for premium wines. Viticulture for mid-market and lower-priced wines has to concern itself, first of all, with high yield. One of the significant changes in viticulture has been the establishment of new cooler viticultural areas. The grapes from hotter areas are limited in varietal character by their fast ripening.
2. **Picking Criteria**
Another improvement is picking for fruit flavour and not simply for sugar level or sugar/acid ratio.
3. **Hygiene**
The establishment and maintenance of a high level of hygiene in the winery have reduced the chances of bacterial or yeast spoilage.
4. **Use of Refrigeration**
The extensive use of refrigeration in wineries is of vast importance in enabling the winemaker to control microbiological and oxidative activity at all stages of the process.
5. **Use of Pure Yeast Cultures**
Pure yeasts are chosen for their vigour and their production of desirable fermentation characters, neutral or otherwise.
6. **Control of Oxidation**
Oxidisation is now controlled chemically, by use of vitamin C and sulphur dioxide, by using inert gassing procedures, and by use of refrigeration. I must emphasise that control of oxidation simply means that the winemaker can choose the amount of oxidation required - it doesn't mean they make only wines without oxidation. Certainly the anaerobic handling of finished wine has greatly improved the freshness of the final product.

In addition to my argument that modern technology has given the maker of premium wines the ability to make a greater range of styles than ever before, it should be said that one of its other remarkable achievements is the high quality of 75% of all wines made in Australia: and these are the wines which cost \$6.00 a bottle. Such wine is produced by industrial techniques from hot climate grapes of modest fruit flavour, and yet it is amongst the best 'vin ordinaire' in the world.



THE WINES OF
AUSTRALIA

BY OLIVER MAYO

THE AUSTRALIAN WINE INDUSTRY

A PERSONAL VIEW

Oliver Mayo

When I was a child, the Australian Wine Industry had a simple timelessness and certainty about it. To me it was just *there*: not very interesting, and everybody knew it was there. At school, there were Hamiltons, Hardys, Kays, Seppelts, Tolleys. At home, if we walked about a mile from our back yard through what was still paddocks and a small golf course soon to be cut up, we came to Stonyfell; next to it was Penfolds Grange, and next to it Wynns Romalo. At the weekend, if I had been any good at games, I would have played footy and cricket with the same names, as it was I went to Sunday School with Burings and Hardys.

That was a time when most Australians thought that wine was something that deros got shickered on in the park or in Victoria Square (that wine tasted sweet and therefore attractive to one as a small boy; but, while it slipped down easily, there was every chance of a less attractive return journey). Or wine was something you had very expensively at weddings with a lot of bubbles, and it was called Great Western Champagne. (I write of a time before the invention of Barossa Pearl). But of course I am talking of South Australia, where in fact there were a lot of people who did drink table wine, and quite a few who drank it without feeling ashamed or needing to do it in private with other consenting adults, or even needing to go on inordinately about it. Wine could be bought by a telephone call or by a tedious visit to a winery which always reduced one's hours at the beach. When the trip to the beach took the whole day anyway, why was there a need to take three-quarters of it up by standing around in a tin shed with some people one didn't see very often, while they discussed the season? Curiously, my own children exhibit the same Anglo-Saxon attitudes.

Naturally, that picture is coloured by three things: a child's eternity, imperfectly remembered; the fact that Adelaide was rather a backwater, a kind of enormous Redheap; and the real state of the industry. It was just waking up then from the long era of Imperial Preference, and it was still dominated by a few family firms. It was still dominated by South Australian firms, and it was still an industry whose customers formed a tiny minority of the population as a whole. And it really was a set of sub-industries, some of them quite unaware of the others' existence. Despite the fact that at the time of which I speak, thirty to forty years ago, there were less than a hundred producers with their own names on bottles of their own wines, the industry was much less vertically integrated than it is today, when there are over five hundred such entities, making a bottle shop a nightmare for the uninitiated or the person in a hurry.

At that time, there were half a dozen companies marketing their products nationally and internationally, about fifty smaller winemakers who bottled a little and sold the rest in bulk, mainly for export, and an enormous mass of atomistically competing grapegrowers, protected, in South Australia at least, from the worst of atomistic competition by minimum price and other legislation. (They were thereby protected too from thinking about fruit quality, because legislated minimum prices have a way of becoming maxima).

But below the surface, the wine industry was changing fast at that time. Slowly, assisted by

the arrival of immigrants from countries where wine was a part of everyone's daily life, assisted partly also by overseas fashions, and partly driven by the overseas markets, these changes suddenly started to become apparent. People were beginning to buy table wines, and soon the export markets for fortified wine disappeared completely. Cold fermentation of wines, small oak storage for reds and whites, different packaging for convenience, improved filtration for brightness (indeed, generally improved quality control), changes in licensing laws: all of these worked their separate magic on the industry. So it was actually changing very rapidly. The well-established wine families, however, were still in charge: marketing men and accountants had yet to take over, and farmers, or even gardeners as we call them up at Clare, were running many of the major companies, as if they had infinite time-horizons. But most of the families were in their fourth or fifth generation, about the time when family shareholdings became too diffuse for ownership and control to remain linked - phenomena seen everywhere from car-making to banking. It doesn't matter whether your name is Ford, Rothschild, Seppelt or Reynell, it'll happen to you - the managerial revolution will get you eventually!

So the industry was ending its first 150 years looking very traditional, and yet those traditional families were the survivors of 150 years of almost continuous change.

In South Australia, they had seen their workforce disappear to the gold-fields; the dominant eastern state industries stricken by the devastating phylloxera as it spread almost throughout their winegrowing areas; the disappearance of the table wine trade, and its replacement by the fortified wine trade (which happened to suit South Australia, with its more reliable climate in certain areas, hence higher yields, higher Baumé, higher alcohol, better storage properties - never mind the flavour!); the disruptions of two world wars and the great depression; the appearance of Imperial Preference and the decline of the table wine market; and then, after the Second World War, the slow, hesitant re-emergence of the table wine market. So the big companies were, in a way, quite well prepared for the changes brought by the wine boom of the 60s. Not that they all survived that boom successfully - far from it! Many of them were taken over or merged, some of them have disappeared, many of them have now become unrecognisable.

That's a very personal, biased, selective sketch of 150 years. But there is a continuity throughout these years to the wine industry of today. It is not just that we have learnt where many of the good places to grow grapes are, nor just what varieties to grow where, in the European manner; the industry has inherited the experience of the past but we still have an almost infinite amount to learn about these things. It is rather that the same names, faces, places, traditions of education and so on have kept going through the enormous changes of the last thirty years. So the continuity is unavoidable. I want to look at the industry today, by comparing the three publicly listed 'pure' (or specialist) wine companies which together can give you some idea of the shape of the industry; that is, when companies have to write things down in a form acceptable to the law. And when I have done that I will talk a little about wine.

These companies are not the only possible investments in wine via the sharemarket: there are also the Adelaide Steamship Company in its various incarnations, the South Australian Brewing Company, M.S. McLeod, and a few other mixed investments, and of course there is Coldstream. But, whatever its performance to date and its prospects, Coldstream does not have

much of an investment history. The three pure wine companies which do are Mildara, Wolf Blass and Wyndham Estate. I shall say a little bit about them in order to highlight how things have changed recently and how they are still changing. Mildara has an extraordinary history. This is its centenary year, even though it became insolvent in 1893, 1908 and 1918; and, although it still kept going, it has really only prospered substantially over the last forty years, more particularly the last five or ten years, when it has changed dramatically. For most of the recent period, it was associated with one family, the Haselgroves. It now has a Scotch whisky company as its only substantial shareholder, though the management has not changed much. Symbolically, it has recently moved its head office, once again, away from Mildura to a capital city, Melbourne.

Mildara's sales and profits have more than doubled in the last five years, reflecting both the buoyancy in the wine industry and a major change in direction for the company. In a farsighted move, from being based solely on irrigated fruit, it acquired good dry land (well, almost dry land) vineyards at Coonawarra in 1954. But it is only in the last ten years, with the successive takeovers of Hamiltons' Ewell, Fesq & Company, Yellowglen, Balgownie, Krondorf and Mark Swan, that Mildara has moved to the forefront of the industry. These changes have meant that the company now has half a dozen brand names, most of them associated with the upper end of the market in terms of price and quality, and can attempt to reach every section of the market. Most recently, it has started a major export push into Japan, as a joint venture; and, presumably to use some of its 20,000 tonnes of river fruit, has bought Island Cooler.

I interrupt the progression of my thought here to make the comment that coolers seem to have become mature products extraordinarily fast; and, while I do not expect them to fade away rapidly, I am sure they will no longer provide the outlet for all that spare sugar and water (and passion fruit concentrate) that everyone had hoped.

In Mildara we have seen a thoughtful, quality-orientated family company, most notable for its sherries, change rapidly to an aggressive marketing company basing its strategy on high-quality brand recognition. Even when the next wine slump comes, I expect Mildara to weather it successfully.

Wolf Blass Wines represents the other current strand of the industry: what one might call, in Victorian parlance, the 'Brownlow Medal' syndrome. This company, which has also more than doubled its sales and profits in the last five years, is based on the vision, drive, ability, ego - call it what you will - of one man, Wolf Blass, who came to Australia almost thirty years ago to help a big cooperative make its sparkling wine. What he did first was to change the thinking of the general run of the industry about red wine. A brilliant blender, he took wine from everywhere to win enormous numbers of prizes, using early softness and more than a touch of new oak to attract the judges' attention. The remarkable thing about these wines is that, though appealing so young, they nevertheless continue to keep for a decade or so. In white wines, he has not been so much of a leader - surprisingly, perhaps, since he is German by origin and training.

Since its public listing about four years ago, Wolf Blass Wines has become a 50% owner with the French Remy Company in a large wholesaler and distributor, has taken control of Enterprise, now named, for 'Brownlow Medal' reasons, Tim Knappstein. More recently he has

bought Quelltaler Estate from the French. The brand names of Quelltaler and Buring and Sobels, which have been around since about 1865, have disappeared, because as Blass said in his inimitable way, 'It's no use flogging a dead horse round the traps'. But *Eaglehawk Estate*: there's a place in Victoria called Eaglehawk, and one in Tasmania called Eaglehawk Neck: has somebody blundered?

Wolf Blass Wines is all about expansion, just like the modern Mildara. It's all about promoting particular people and their genius, and yet it's still all about making the best wine possible. If it's not all made like a Rolls Royce, that is, up to a standard regardless of cost, at least it's not made like an old Ford, that is, down to a price regardless of quality.

The third publicly-listed company¹ is Wyndham Estate Wines, now associated very strongly with Brian McGuigan, but boasting an extraordinarily long history, back to 1828, when the pioneer George Wyndham first planted at Branxton. Later these vineyards became Penfold's Dalwood, and later still, when the family management was at the end of its tether, Penfold sold it. The group associated with McGuigan has also bought a large number of other vineyards, some founded a long time ago, like Elliot, others during more recent booms, like Hollydene, Hermitage, Saxonvale and Richmond Grove. Most recently, Wyndham Estate has moved strongly into the Mudgee area with the purchase of Montrose, Craigmoores and Amberton.

The history of Wyndham Estate as a public company¹ is even shorter than that of Wolf Blass, but it has also more than doubled its sales and profits in the last few years. Like the other two companies I've looked at, it is strongly oriented towards winning prizes in shows, towards promoting 'upmarket' brand names, and towards developing exports.

What then are the characteristics of these companies as a group? Strong management, strong brand names, strong marketing (including the use of bizarre and derivative labels, unfortunately), a strong push towards exports. This is the face of the industry today - or so it seems: *get big or get out!* Yet, the continuity of which I spoke earlier is present in all of these companies: all of the people running them have been associated with the industry and have worked for long-standing companies before making the major changes which they have carried out so successfully in recent times. And all of the companies have either a long history of their own or have acquired other companies with long histories. There is no substitute for buying vineyards in the area where vineyards are known to be successful. Indeed, the future success of the industry will largely be based on the traditional areas, despite the very high quality available from the newer areas. In fact, I predict that we will see these successful companies moving into the newer areas to buy fruit, to grow grapes, to crush grapes, to make wine. The small pioneering makers will in some cases succeed and persist, until they run into problems of dynastic succession in the future. But wine companies spread over a large number of areas with a large number of brand names will continue to be the core of the industry.

So far, I have really said very little, except in passing, about wine. This has been deliberate; the recent changes in the industry have, as I have said, reflected the so-called managerial revolution almost as much as they reflected anything else. There have been enormous improvements in wine technology, the same kinds of improvements in average quality, and there are far more wines right at the top end of the quality range than ever before.

1. Since these words were written, Wyndham Estate has been taken over by Orlando Wines Pty Ltd.

And yet one has reservations. Recently, we had a comparative look at about twenty of the most expensive (and hence, in Australian terms, the best?) local sparkling wines. In almost all cases, they lacked the distinctive nutty, toasty, call-it-what-you-will character on nose and mouth that one associates with the autolysis over a long period of yeast cells. The reason for this deficiency is *time*. What vintages are the French champagne winemakers selling at the moment? And how old are their non-vintage wines? I would suggest that they are, when they become available from the vintners, about three years older than what Australian makers are selling. The reasons for this relate to cash-flow, rather than to Australian makers having discovered some great secret of producing early-maturing sparkling wines. Similarly, there are far too many early-maturing red wines being made with extraordinary care from exceptionally fine fruit. Some of them will develop increased character and interest over time, but most cannot, as they do not have the initial depth of flavour and quantity of acid.

Admittedly, I am being broad and general: there are plenty of red wine makers who are not making these mistakes, including Petaluma, Wendouree, Mount Mary, Yarra Yering, to name four not quite at random. It's hard to see how this particular trend will be reversed, overall; but I would predict that the winemakers who continue to make wines which will develop for a long period will be regarded with great gratitude and pride in years to come.

Dr Pont has asked me to make some predictions, and in a sense I have been doing that all through as I have looked at the history and said what it tells us about the present; but perhaps I should make a few specific prognostications.

First, the current boom will come to an end. A truism? Yes, but it's always worth reminding ourselves of the truth. There are four aspects of the boom which are worth mentioning: the dramatic increases in exports; the shortage of good fruit; the increase in bottle prices on the local market; and the proliferation of 'special' brands.

For one thing, increases in wine exports of 20, 30 or 40% a year cannot continue indefinitely, though another couple of years of very strongly increasing exports seems highly probable, unless there is a world depression or the Australian dollar recovers its former excessive and inappropriate strength. There are huge markets which are largely untapped, such as Japan and much of the United States; and if we continue to supply good wine at good prices, we should obtain our fair share of these markets. But most people in the world are much too poor to buy wine; so, even in newly capitalist China, I would expect their domestic brands, such as Longwall and Dynasty, to take at least 99% of the market.

A second problem with exports is that we have so little really good wine to sell. Some of the top Bordeaux chateaux crush many hundreds of tonnes, just for one top wine. Almost none of our small premium makers can supply a significant quantity of their top wines. Poor old Murray Robson could have sold more of each of two wines than his whole crush of all varieties to a single merchant in the United States, for example. As long as premium winemakers want to have the fun of making lots of different kinds of wines, this problem will remain insoluble.

This year, my wife and I sold all of our modest harvest of grenache, for the first time for several years. In a good season, it's wonderful Clare fruit; 14 degrees, 7 grams of acid, pH under 3.5. For three years, no-one has been interested in it, but the effect of the wine boom and the vine pull is that there is no established grenache available. A good thing, you might say - ignoring 1500 years' experience in the South Rhone! But the fact that we could sell it

illustrates the shortage of good quality fruit. Even if the wine boom continues, the shortage will go away in three or four years time, as major new plantings come on stream. The other day, a friend who has some wonderful irrigated land - deep sand over deep sand, with excellent water, only 1400 parts per million of salts - asked me whether he should be planting ten hectares and, if so, what varieties. Naturally, I referred him to Di Davidson, as she knows what she is talking about. But this bloke is a very successful, aware, well-educated farmer, who wants to diversify his risks, in an area where nobody has ever grown any grapes for winemaking. He will not be the only farmer who is doing this. If the wine boom continues, there may not be a fruit glut, but there will certainly not be a shortage for very long.

Thirdly, many makers are taking advantage of current conditions to try to get their prices well up above the long-term trend in retail price inflation. Is a 1987 Jasper Hill Friends Shiraz really worth *twice* as much as a 1985 Penfolds Bin 389? When one can ship in a 1985 Château Canteloupe (Bordeaux Supérieur) for about \$8 a bottle, landed on the back verandah, is one going to be happy at Cape Mentelle, Vasse Felix or Heemskerk 1986 Cabernet Sauvignon for \$10 or \$11 a bottle more, discounted? That the Australian wines, in this point of comparison, are better, that's indisputable. But are they more than *twice* as good? Remember that more than 50% of the landed price of that French wine is shipping and Australian tax; and reflect that there must be very large margins in the Australian prices at the moment. It is good to see Australian primary producers making an honest profit, but it might leave them wide open to fierce discounting and to consumer resistance.

With the overpricing of Australian wine on the Australian market goes the proliferation of evanescent 'up-market' brand names: Sally's Paddock, Peppertree Paddock, Alexanders, Jamieson's Run, St Cedd's, Bart Cummings, Limestone Ridge, Friends... Will all of these be instantly recognisable in ten years time as is, say, Chambertin Clos-de-Bèze? I doubt it. When one sees a one-year old cabernet from a new label, Howard Estate at Denman, hit the market at almost \$30 a bottle, one is reminded of Hugh Johnson's comment on Opus One:

The joint venture of Robert Mondavi and Baron Philippe de Rothschild. So far, in effect, a Mondavi Reserve of Reserves at a far fetched price, however good.

Is Howard Estate really worth nearly as much as Grange Hermitage (as discounted)? If once more we lift our sights and look internationally, we can see that Grange Hermitage at less than \$40 a bottle is indeed good value, when we find a more recent vintage Hermitage 'La Chapelle' from Jaboulet selling for at least 50% more. But for most of our wines there are no really direct international comparisons, and we are protected by *ad valorem* import taxes and sales taxes from getting other comparisons right. All of these expensive brand names will only confuse importers in other countries, quite apart from the labelling difficulties created by many of them.

So the wine boom will come to an end and the wine export boom will come to an end. It would be nice if they ended on a plateau, but booms usually end in busts. What else will happen?

Well, I don't expect to see a significant revival of the fortified wine market, sad though this might be. Climate and lifestyle are against it. In most cases we no longer make large enough quantities of our very fine fortified wines, such as the Muscats from north-eastern Victoria, for them to be more than just impulse purchases in specialist wine stores in other countries.

As I said before, the quality of Australian wine will continue to rise. We are very fortunate in our wine technology, in the enthusiasm of our young winemakers and in the experience of our old winemakers. If the young ones continue to listen to the old ones while trying new things, wines can only get better - provided that the obsession with early-maturing wines is not allowed to sweep the field.

I expect to see more and more of the very best wines coming from Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia, but shall be most surprised if the quantities produced are significant. As I've also implied, I expect other new areas to be opened up. In this context, let me quote:

The man who first transplanted the grape of Burgundy to the Cape of Good Hope (observe he was a Dutchman) never dreamt of drinking the same wine at the Cape, that the same grape produced upon the French mountains - he was too phlegmatic for that - but undoubtedly he expected to drink some sort of vinous liquor; but whether good, bad, or indifferent - he knew enough of this world to know, that it did not depend upon his choice, but that which is generally called 'chance' was to decide his success: however, he hoped for the best; and in these hopes, by an intemperate confidence in the fortitude of his head, and the depth of his discretion, Mynheer might possibly overset both in his new vineyard; and by discovering his nakedness, become a laughing-stock to his people.

That was Lawrence Sterne, writing 220 years ago.

Consumer protection legislation, wowsers and doctors will all influence the industry - one hopes for the better, one fears for the worst. There is no question that drinking too much alcohol damages one's health, reduces the productivity of the workforce, destroys families, contributes to the appalling carnage on our roads, and otherwise helps to fill our hospitals. There is some evidence, however, that drinking just the right amount of alcohol, preferably as wine, enhances one's health and well-being. But how much is too much, and how much is just right? Much more work needs to be done to answer this question on which too many are already inclined to pontificate. Raising the drinking age, tightening the drunken-driving laws, increasing vigilance about drinking problems in the workplace: we may see all of these come about, and there are many good arguments why they should. But they also should not damage a successful, far-sighted, intelligent wine industry which is prepared to tackle these problems. How about the wine industry establishing a chair in preventive medicine in some go-ahead medical school and funding research into low alcohol wines? What about putting more emphasis still on quality rather than quantity in both production and consumption? If people drink no more than they are now, but drink better wine, surely this can only help. As my last word on wine and health, let me quote from the late Syd Hamilton, who said to me in his mid-eighties: 'Of course wine will kill you. It's going to kill me pretty soon, but I can't think of a better way to die.'

And as a final comment, let me quote another old master, Anthony Powell: 'One of the basic human rights is to make fun of people. That now seems threatened on all sides.' I agree with him.²

2. I thank Michael Detmold and Trevor Hancock for helpful comments and corrections.

STOCK EXCHANGE INFORMATION SERVICE

Appendix I

Mildara Wines Ltd. Major Events

1888	Château Mildura (Chaffey Brothers)
1893	closed
1908	closed
1918	closed
1954	Coonawarra, public company, Haselgrove family
1979	Hamilton's Ewell, Fesq & Co./William Grant 14.7% shareholder
1984	Yellowglen
1985	Balgownie
1986	Krondorf
1987	Mark Swann exports/William Grant 20% AIDC 10% shareholder
1988	Joint venture into Japan with Sanraku, Island Cooler

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988 (1st half)
Sales (\$M)	21.5	23.3	33.9	40.5	28.7
Profits (\$M)	1.300	1.709	2.244	3.109	2.858
EPS* (¢)	16.1	16.0	16.0	20.6	14.9

DOMINANT INFLUENCE: HASELGROVE FAMILY

Appendix II

Wolf Blass Wines Ltd. Major Events

1960	started
1966	first bottlings of Wolf Blass
1969	first land bought
1973	winery opened
1980	Sevenhill Vineyard
1983	Australian Bottling Company
1984	publicly listed
1986	50% Remy Blass: distribution/Tim Knappstein
1987	Quelltaler Estate \$6.6M.

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Sales (\$M)	7.34	12.950	17.272	22.433	30.00
Profits (\$M)	1.60	2.600	3.312	3.492	4.400
EPS (¢)	0.5	8.3	9.1	10.4	11.3

DOMINANT INFLUENCE: WOLF BLASS

* Earnings per share

Appendix III

Wyndham Estate Wines Ltd. Major events

- 1828 George Wyndham
later Penfold's Dalwood
- 1960s Brian McGuigan's Wyndham Estate
- 1967 Hollydene founded
- 1984 Saxonvale Elliot's
- 1985 public float
- 1987 Casuarina (Hunter) Richmond Grove/Quadrax Inv. Ltd.
62.5% now part of Wyndham Estate Wines
- 1988 Montrose, Craigmoor & Amberton (Mudgee)

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Sales (\$M)		14.067	21.678	27.211	
Profits (\$M)		1.439	2.944	3.948	
EPS (¢)		5.7	10.1	12.9	

DOMINANT INFLUENCE: BRIAN MCGUIGAN

**Aussie wine is
the top vintage**

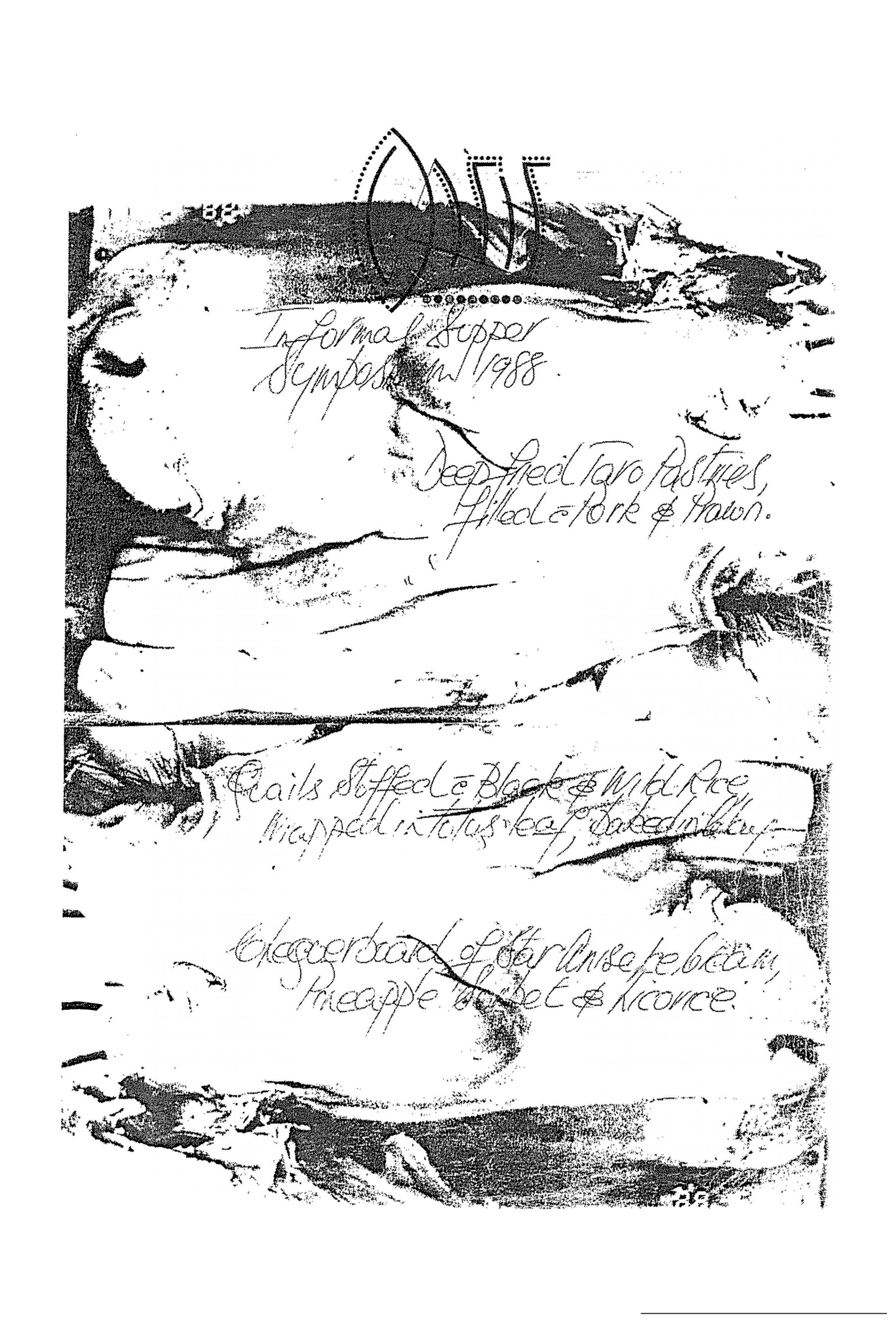
WINE makers Wyndham Estate are savoring the sweet taste of success today after taking out the world's No 1 ranking at the Intervin International Wine Judging in Toronto, Canada. The Australian wine giants stole the show with a 26 medal haul beating famous French wineries.

With seven gold medals under its belt, Wyndham Estate secured an impressive 14 per cent of the 51 gold medals awarded at the judging. It is the first time an Australian company has dominated the medal count in a world class competition.

Intervin International president Andrew Sharp confirmed Wyndham Estate received "the greatest number of medals of any winery in the world" at the judging. Wines were assessed by a panel of high ranking judges.

Intervin is clearly one of the world's largest and most prestigious wine judging events," elated Wyndham Estate winemaker, Brian McGuigan said. "To achieve what we have in a judging of this standing is truly remarkable."

The Daily Mirror, 6th June, 1988



Informal Supper
Symposium 1988

Deep fried Taro pastries,
Filled with Pork & Prawn.

Quails Stuffed with Black & Wild Rice,
Wrapped in taro leaf, baked in clay.

Overboard of Star Anise, Peppercorn,
Pineapple, Shrimp & Nance.



SUPPER AT OASIS SEROS

Michael Dowe

Phillip Searle's 'informal supper' on Monday evening, a relatively simple stand-up affair, nonetheless had its touches of theatre while also displaying his unique culinary style. A punch bowl full of red chilli-and-tomato sauce sat flanked by two giant, wizard-hat-like cones of what appeared to be orange and green noodles draped vertically from the apex. In fact, they were two very Asian salads, one of carrot with sesame oil and fish sauce, the other of cucumber seasoned with lime. This trio accompanied deep-fried taro pastries with a rich minced pork and prawn filling.

Searle used 150 kg of clay for his main course, a dish inspired by the Chinese beggar's chicken. Quails were stuffed with an aromatic, thyme-flavoured mixture of minced giblets and unctuous, stock-impregnated black and wild rice, wrapped in lotus leaf, then encased in clay and baked. The fragrant aroma pervaded the dining room as 120 guests cracked clay casings and unwrapped steaming lotus leaves to reveal the succulent contents. It was not long before the banquet table resembled a demolition site.

All was soon cleared to make way for Searle's *pièce de résistance*, the dessert. It arrived, borne high by eight bearers, a large marble slab with a one-metre-square version of his justly famous chequerboard ice-cream. Squares of a sorbet of pineapple and ice-creams of vanilla and star anise sat amongst fine grids of an intense liquorice-flavoured ice-cream - an ingenious combination of flavours. With coffee came giant slabs of cardamom-scented honeycomb. Frankly, no other cook in Australia has Searle's ability to successfully blend diverse flavours.

Food in Festivity

ON THE IDEA OF FESTIVITY

Anthony Coronas

I want to begin my talk with a little story. A desperate philosophy student once went to see the British philosopher G E Moore in his study. The student burst in and asked, 'What is philosophy?'. Moore turned toward the shelves behind him and replied, 'It's what all these books are about'. The books, of course, were what drove the unfortunate student to ask the question in the first place.

My problem is similar. I want to ask, 'What is festivity?', but am confronted instead by this or that particular festival. After all, there are many festivals, both sacred and profane. And there is no end to describing them, no end to a history, to an anthropology of festivals. Is there, once all the differences have been taken into account, something shared which enables us to call them all festivals?

The question is not trivial. Festivity is one of the great recurring themes of human history and culture. Yet our need for festivals, so apparent in the fact that there have been no cultures without them, is not explained by their pervasiveness. Rather, it is their pervasiveness which stands in need of explanation. I make no apologies, then, for asking the question. I only hope that it is possible to throw some light on the subject.

A little over a hundred years ago the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote: 'The trick is not to arrange a festival, but to find people who can enjoy it'.¹ We might imagine that, given the great diversity of festivals, any arrangements will do - that festivity is independent of the arrangements, but resides in the capacity for enjoyment. This cannot be right, for it makes enjoyment the sole point of the festival - those with the capacity for enjoyment have no need of festivals, and neither do those who cannot enjoy them. In either case, Nietzsche's claim would entail the elimination of festivals. Alternatively, the claim could be construed in such a way that any 'enjoyed arrangements' would constitute a festival; but such a definition is hopelessly broad. Nevertheless, Nietzsche's insight serves to focus the question. I propose to deal with festivity in terms of the two factors indicated: that is, the arrangements on the one hand, and the human response on the other.

What sort of arrangements then make a festival? We could catalogue a great many different traditional arrangements, but a more fruitful line of attack would be to look for failed arrangements, to look at attempts to create festivals which proved fiascos. Fortunately, history provides some startling examples.

The French Revolution saw the overthrow of the old festivals. In their place radical new festivals were proposed and enacted. Priests, the traditional overseers of the old religious festivals, were excluded from the new festivals, which were boldly conceived as a means of giving birth to a new culture and establishing new rites and traditions. They were not mere entertainment, then, but serious and high-minded efforts. The famous 'Festival of Reason' celebrated the highest ideals of the Enlightenment, proclaiming liberty and equality. Citizens were instructed as follows: 'When the bells ring, all will leave their houses, which will be entrusted to the protection of the law and Republican virtue. The populace will fill the streets and public squares, aflame with joy and fraternity...'² For the 'Festival of the Supreme Being'

(that is, God without Christianity), newspapers published this notice: 'Friends, brothers, spouses, old people are to embrace one another. Mothers will carry bouquets of roses in their hands. Fathers will lead their sword-bearing sons, each holding an oak branch'.³ The festival ended with the cry, 'Long live the Republic'. This is festivity by decree; the element of coercion and implied threats for disobedience produced, instead of occasions of joy, occasions of fear and terror. It is not that the ideals were amiss. Rather, the endeavour to command and organise spontaneous outpourings of virtue, love and patriotism proved self-defeating. Despite all the right trimmings and the most ingenious arrangements, these occasions were counterfeit: pseudo-festivals. The people make the festival real.

A useful lesson may also be learnt from the efforts of the Bolshevik regime to turn the labour holiday into a festival of voluntary work - that is, unpaid labour. As Leon Trotsky wrote, 'This holiday is one of general work'.⁴ Talk about a contradiction in terms! But an instructive contradiction nonetheless. The idea of festivity is incompatible with that of work. Festivals are holidays, despite the work put into them. Indeed, festivals are occasions of prodigious waste, of the sacrifice of the fruits of labour. The political purposes of the Bolsheviks rendered them deaf to such considerations. The proletariat were to be dragged, kicking and screaming, into the new festival of Communism, and 'the most progressive ranks of the proletariat will use force in order finally to eliminate... the passive resistance'⁵ of 'labour deserters'.⁶ How could one refuse such a compulsory dance? But the effort proved too great, and the festival unsustainable. It fell along with other pseudo-festivals, only to be replaced with something more sinister - May 1st became the day when the Soviet Union displays its awesome military power. The threat became absolute.

Despite the apparent promise of the new, the elimination of traditional festivals has always proved surprisingly difficult (as even the early Christians found to their dismay - they ended by incorporating them, Easter and Christmas being the most startling examples). Thus, while political coercion fails to institute new festivals, it also fails to stamp out old ones (Catholic festivals returned to France, despite the best efforts of the Revolution; and the Bolsheviks could not subdue Orthodox festivals in Russia). Such failure throws further light on the matter. For it turns out that festivals either serve to define and give meaning to the social order, in which case the political institution of new festivals is a direct threat to the established order, and is thus most unwelcome; or else, festivals represent a temporary inversion of order, periods of misrule and lawlessness; in which case they are important release-valves, and hence allow the further continuation of the normal order.⁷ In either case, such political designs and 'arrangements' leave the people unmoved.

It might be thought that, if the arrangements for a festival include the arts, then the people can be persuaded by the power of art. But art has always been a part of festivity. Plato himself said that the Muses, patronesses of art and the inspiration of artists, were given as 'festival companions'.⁸ Indeed, art finds a more meaningful place as part of festivity than it does shut up in museums. And art reaches the people, loses its elitism, in the medium of the festival. But art alone cannot engineer the festival. The French Revolutionaries drew on the considerable talents of the painter Jacques Louis David as stage manager for almost all their festivals, but did not succeed in establishing a new calendar of festivals. There is pseudo-art as much as there is pseudo-festivity. We can commission art, but have no guarantee of getting art unless artists find the task personally meaningful, put something of themselves into the work. Art is as intractable as festivity. But art is not festivity itself.

If we cannot easily engineer or suppress festivals, is it possible to undermine them? Here the answer must be, 'Yes'. The greatest threats to festivals, and the reasons for the virtual disappearance of true festivity in our age, are: first, the trivialisation of festivals, where the potent symbols and rites of festivals lose their meaning and significance, lose their emotional power; and secondly, the commercialisation of festivals, their reduction to the profit motive. These are both anathema to festivals, and augur badly for our capacity to sustain the true spirit of festivity. The traditional festivals, tied as they were to the agricultural seasons and the liturgical calendar, to the rites of passage and maintenance of social order, are failing to survive the transitions wrought by the technical and commercial upheavals of the modern age. We can declare public holidays, but though a festival must needs be a holiday, a holiday does not make a festival.

The consideration of present conditions brings me to a rather interesting dimension of Nietzsche's claim: that is, that it is increasingly difficult to find people who can enjoy festivals; that festive arrangements are beside the point if people have been somehow deprived of the capacity for joy. If there is a 'modern' festival, it is a festival of anxiety, an orgy of self-destruction. War, argued Roger Caillois, is the modern festival *par excellence*. For in war we see the attributes of festival: 'the most drastic conversion and consumption of energies, the eruption of stored force, the merging of the individual in the totality, the squandering of resources ordinarily carefully husbanded, the wild breaking down of inhibitions - and so on'.⁹

Shocking as this is, it is deeply inspired. Nietzsche himself revelled in the idea of the pleasure of destruction, and called himself a destroyer. The gangs of youths who now deface our buildings with graffiti are the unwelcome creators of festivals for our time; and they have indicated the disregard for life and pleasure in violence which, even more than the drug problem (another great modern ritual of release), gives credence to the prophetic insights of Nietzsche.

The dominant technicism, scientism and commercialism of the present leave no room for festivity, even while they produce a tremendous need for it. And no promise of increased leisure can take the place of festivity. Leisure in itself is not a positive something, but empty time, to be filled by individual craving. Leisure produces boredom and frustration, and gives us occasion for doubt. The ritual of leisure tends to produce, not joy, but disenchantment with existence. It is summed up in the suicidal tendency so common among us now.

I must confess my own sense of surprise at such thoughts. I had no idea that the subject of festivals would lead to such morbidity. It is a clear sign, however, of the depth of the subject. Festivity is about life, and must consequently embrace death also. Indeed, according to Greek myth, festivals had their origin in funeral rites.¹⁰ And the great festivals of classical Greece were in fact the celebrations of the tragedy. Joy is not a mindless grinning. Festivity equips us to deal with life, and cannot be reduced to escapist entertainment.

I want to conclude my consideration of the idea of festivity by looking at the place of food in festivity. Certainly, there are festive foods, symbolic foods, sacrificial foods, that belong quite clearly in festivals. Feasting, gross consumption, is also quite common. In detail, there is much to be said about food in festivity, and even about fasting from food as a preparation for festivity. We could go on to describe this or that particular food, the symbolism of wine as blood, harvest festival foods and so on. Such research is important. But it is not my object

here. Rather, I want to look at food *as* festivity.

There is something fundamentally celebratory about food. In contrast to the destruction and violence of what we might call the 'anti-festival', food is the vehicle of sustenance. Food taking says 'Yes' to life, much as the anorexic says 'No'. The sharing of food is really the basic form of human social behaviour and lies behind all the sustenance we derive from human relations, beginning with the mother as feeder and nurturer. Food is sacrifice, giving; it is the principle of a truer politics of humanity. It is also, I feel, a fundamental principle of festivity. Just as food sustains the individual, festivals sustain the culture. Festivals, then, can be seen as the food of culture.

This Symposium, devoted as it is to food in festivity, is an attempt to come to grips with the sources of culture. To the extent that all of us yield to the spirit of the occasion, to the pleasures of sharing, of communion, we will be entering into the realm of festivity ourselves.



NOTES

1. I owe this quote, and not a little inspiration, to a remarkable book on festivity by the Franciscan theologian Josef Pieper (*In Tune with the World*, trans. by R & C Winston, Chicago, Franciscan Herald Press, 1973 p 10). While the books understandably skewed to a Christian analysis of festivity (where the Mass becomes *the* Festival), it contains a great deal of interesting material.
2. Quoted in Pieper, op cit, p 48.
3. Ibid, p 51.
4. Ibid, pp 57-58.
5. Ibid, p 58.
6. Loc cit.
7. See, for example, Lech S Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1986; and also Umberto Eco's fascinating paper on the festival of 'carnivale', 'The Frames of Comic "Freedom"', in T A Sebeok (ed), *Carnival!*, Berlin, Mouton Publishers, 1984, pp 1-9.
8. Plato, *Laws* 653d.
9. Pieper, op cit, p 60.
10. Ibid, p 22.

METAMORPHOSES OF THE BANQUET

Barbara Santich

It has become traditional at the Symposia of Australian Gastronomy to conclude with a banquet. Everyone who attended the first Symposium will long remember Phillip Searle's spectacular banquet at Carclew: rose-petal-strewn tables, a seascape captured behind glass, mute and impassive Pierrots, strains of music from a corner alcove. This was a feast for all the senses, which brought new meaning to the word 'banquet'.

This brief paper cannot hope to provide a complete history of the banquet, but it will aim to show how the concept of the banquet changed over the past five centuries. Why this period? Because the banquet, as we understand that form of festivity, is not very old: the term was born only in the fifteenth century, and the origins of the modern banquet are in early Renaissance Italy. It began as a specifically secular celebration; the 'feast' was more closely associated with religious celebrations, as the special meal of the *jour de fête* or non-working day, the Sunday dinner and the particular meals which commemorated certain days of the Church calendar - Easter, Christmas, saints' days. The new banquet observed no such regularity; it was not ritualised. The banquet developed more as an individual celebration, often as a demonstration of wealth and power through conspicuous consumption. It was on a large scale, and lavish, and apparently differed from other festive meals - why else would a new word be necessary?

In Italy, the banquet seems to have begun as a feast presented in a different style. The various dishes were set out on a long table, as would be a buffet today. The Italian word, 'banchetto', is a derivative of 'banco', a long bench or table. The French 'banquet' and Spanish 'banquete' were both borrowed from the Italian, and the French term was subsequently adopted by the English early in the sixteenth century. It is significant that the banquet originated at about the same time as the Italian Humanists were rediscovering the treasures of Classical Greece - especially after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. The books of Athenaeus began to be read in northern Italy in the second half of the fifteenth century, and Athenaeus may well have been a source of inspiration to Platina who, in his *De Honesta Voluptate*, espoused a new code of morals legitimising the pleasures of the table - as Brillat-Savarin was to do some centuries later. This period was also an era of culinary innovation, and a characteristic of the banquet was the display of the cook's skill, art and imagination.

In France, too, the banquet was set out on long tables, and the dishes were chosen as to have great visual appeal. In France, however, the banquet seems to have been adopted as a supplementary meal, offered late in the evening after the two standard meals of *dîner*, around midday, and *souper* in the early evening. The three meals are personified in a northern French morality play written in the late fifteenth century, *La Condamnation de Banquet*.¹ After dining and supping, the happy group of revellers - rejoicing in such names as 'Gourmandise', 'Friandise', 'Bonne Compagnie' (Good Company), 'Passe-Temps' (Leisure) - are led on, by 'Banquet', to a table where the foods are arranged for the guests to help themselves, without

servants. Banquet, however, and to a lesser extent, Souper, are accused of corrupting the guests and provoking such maladies as gout and apoplexy and, after being tried before Dame Experience, are both found guilty. Banquet is abolished - executed, in fact - and Souper is ordered to keep a respectable distance from Dîner. It is clear that the banquet was seen as introducing a new, and undesirable, system of values which were at odds with those promoted by the Church authorities.

Like the new culinary fashions, also borrowed from Italy, the banquet became modified during the course of its dissemination. As an innovation, it was adopted with enthusiasm, indeed with over-enthusiasm. Olivier de la Marche described how the fad spread through northern France in the mid-fifteenth century, and how this novel form of feasting, at first relatively simple, developed into a much grander celebration, more ostentatious and more costly, as each nobleman who offered a banquet tried to outdo the previous host.²

One characteristic of banquet food in Italy was the skilful use of sugar often for ornamental and decorative purposes. At this time sugar was still an expensive ingredient, loaded with prestige, and thus perfectly appropriate to any festivity. In northern France and England cooks were less skilled in the use of sugar, but nevertheless adopted it as emblematic of banquet foods. A French banquet menu of 1495 shows a reckless and extravagant use of sugar in such dishes as 'chickens with sugar', 'quails with sugar', 'pigeons with sugar and vinegar'.³ In England, too, sugar featured strongly in banquet foods, although here the banquet was not so much a separate and differentiated meal as an elaboration of what had previously been the final course of a formal dinner, the dessert. The English banquet was separate to the other courses of a dinner, served in a different setting; according to Anne Wilson, the gentry often built banqueting houses in their parks, or the guests would withdraw to another room of the mansion or to an outside arbor or summerhouse.⁴ Again, the foods were on display and highly decorative - fruit tarts, marmalades, preserves, marzipan and jelly, all accompanied by sweet wines. Gervase Markham, in his cookery book of 1615, includes a chapter on 'Banqueting and made dishes with other conceits and secrets' where he gives recipes for these very dishes.⁵

This development was several steps removed from Italian banquets which, by the early sixteenth century, had become spectacular events, staged with great pomp and ceremony. The banquet was the special and celebratory meal which marked the arrival or departure of a prince (when it was often associated with the dramatic ritual of a procession), or a marriage which united two noble and/or wealthy families. In his manual of banquet-giving, entitled *Banchetti compositione di vivande, et apparecchio generale*, Christoforo di Messisbugo describes, in unparalleled detail, the management and staging of lavish, formal, ceremonial feasts, from the setting of the tables with several tablecloths and ornamental figures of sugar or marzipan to the accompanying music and the dances performed during the course of the meal.⁶ For example, at a dinner in 1529 for Don Ercole, son of the Duke of Ferrara, Messisbugo commissioned a sugar model of Hercules and the lion, coloured and gilded, to decorate the table; with the final course of 'confetti' came more sugar models representing Hercules defeating the bull, Venus, Cupid, Eve and other mythical figures. Messisbugo also details the musical and vocal entertainments for each course, and the performance of the clowns later in the meal. At another dinner, this time in a garden setting, the table was graced by fifteen large sugar figures, all gilded and painted, representing Venus, Bacchus and Cupid.

Superficially, Messisbugo's examples might be seen as representing nothing more than a refinement of earlier mediaeval practices. In noble and aristocratic circles, mediaeval feasts similarly featured music and dance in the *entremets*, and the food could be equally elaborate and prestigious. At a spectacular and lavish feast offered to Pope Clement VI at Avignon by Cardinal Hannibal Ceccano in the mid-fourteenth century, the nine courses were punctuated by several *entremets*, all products of the kitchen but, like margarine sculptures today, not necessarily made to be eaten. There was an enormous *château* made of deers, wild boars, hares and rabbits, all cooked but looking very much alive, according to a contemporary observer; there was a fountain from which flowed three different kinds of wine, surrounded by birds such as pheasants, peacocks and swans, again cooked but redressed in all their plumage.⁷ All these were paraded around the room, to the accompaniment of music. The final service consisted of two 'trees', one apparently of silver, both laden with all kinds of fruits representing the pinnacle of the confectioner's art. The presentation of these 'trees' was followed by an apparently impromptu dance by the cook and all his assistants, some carrying torches, others their pots and pans and bells; the observer who noted all the details of this reception remarked that this dance was an ancient Roman custom.

Such *entremets*, the between-courses *divertissements*, were visually and theatrically spectacular, incorporating elements of surprise and trickery to amaze and impress the guests. Almost invariably, music was an integral part of the *entremets*, which were the product of the kitchen, elaborated under the charge of the head cook. Maistre Chiquart, cook to the count of Savoy, gave 'recipes' for the preparation and construction of such *entremets* in his cookery book of 1420.⁸ For the banquets of the sixteenth century, however, the *entremets* had undergone a transformation, the culinary and the theatrical elements separated. The *entremets* as spectacle became almost purely theatrical (music, mime, dance, and acrobatics can all be subsumed under the heading of theatre), leaving the cooks free to devote all their skills to the culinary art, the visual display. Gervase Markham is explicit; 'banqueting stuffe' is 'not of general use, yet in their true times they are so needful for adoration'.⁹

This separation happened to coincide with a period of great progress in cuisine and culinary techniques, particularly in Italy. By the mid-fifteenth century, for example, the technique of clarifying jellies with egg whites had been mastered; the art of marzipan and of sugar confectionary had been learnt from the Arabs; and the emphasis on the visual effect, on the culinary ornamentation, was a natural corollary. Italian cuisine and culinary influence spread northwards in the sixteenth century, partly through Platina's book which had borrowed extensively from an earlier book of recipes by Maestro Martino; similarly, the banquet took a northern path, accepting some modifications along the way.

The banquet was a phenomenon of the Renaissance, yet it also represented the revival of a classical tradition, the symposium, which the Humanists discovered in the works of Plato, Xenophon, Athenaeus, Plutarch. Just as the symposium gave rise to a literary genre in earlier times, so did the banquet, whether as the appropriate setting for a discourse or as a model for the content. The table can bring together an audience to hear a story: Rabelais uses this device to introduce a narrative, setting his scene around a table where his characters are eating, drinking and talking and where, quite naturally, stories are told. He was clearly influenced by the symposium model where the after-dinner drinking party served as the milieu for philosophic discussions, and particularly by Plato's *Symposium*. Erasmus also found inspiration in the symposium tradition: six of his dialogues take place around a meal, where

a group of friends gather together to eat and to talk; in one instance they elaborate, during the course of the meal, a code of manners, a refined art of living, which they simultaneously demonstrate. The banquet model permitted and encouraged a far-ranging variety of discussion themes, and the banqueters, under the influence of Dionysos, could move easily from the scholarly to the anecdotal, from lofty philosophical musings to bawdy verse. It was this very lack of form, however, which caused the demise of the genre by the seventeenth century; it became encyclopaedic, a mere accumulation of knowledge, its link with the banquet tenuous.¹⁰

Although the sixteenth-century banquet was, in many respects, analogous to the ancient symposium, it was an occasion for both eating and drinking, whereas the symposium was traditionally an after-dinner drinking party, sometimes with music and entertainment as well as table talk. The Renaissance banquet was a far more lavish and sumptuous affair, conceived by the Humanists as appealing to all the senses: the banquet room would be scented with herbs or flowers, the table attractively set, the setting in harmony with the season, the musical accompaniment totally planned, the foods designed to impress and excite. As a total art-form, the banquet probably reached its apogee in the seventeenth century, when Louis XIV entertained at Versailles, and when Inigo Jones designed the Banqueting House in Whitehall, one immense room, with ceilings by Rubens, for use as a ceremonial hall and *salle des fêtes* (although it was more important as a theatrical setting for court masques than for feasts.)

Another new style of banquet arose after the French Revolution, the *banquet civique* or public banquet, a communal meal intended to celebrate a famous anniversary, a great political or military victory. Like the Renaissance banquet, the public banquet was designed on a large scale and accompanied by music, dance and visual spectacle, but these forms of expression were no longer to be restricted to the noble elite. A few days after the taking of the Bastille, on July 18, 1789, the Marquis de la Villette wrote:

I would like to see established a *fête nationale* to mark the date of our uprising - July 14. Our revolution had no precedents, and we have no example to follow; we need a new form of celebration. I would like all the citizens of Paris to set up their tables outside, in front of their houses, and eat in the street. Rich would mix with poor, all the social classes would be united. The streets would be hung with carpets, garlanded with flowers; no one would be allowed to traverse the streets, either on horseback or in a carriage. From one end of the capital to the other we would be one immense family; there would be a million people at the one table; toasts would be drunk, to the peal of bells from all the churches, to the sound of a volley of canons and muskets, orchestrated simultaneously in all parts of the city; on that day, the nation will have its 'grand couvert'.¹¹

These *banquets civiques* were quite popular in France in the eighteenth century, although they disappeared during the Restoration. Brillat-Savarin seems to have found in the *banquet civique* the inspiration for his celebration of Gastérea's special day, which similarly included a mass, open-air feast followed by music and dancing; like the Revolutionaries, he, too, was seeking to establish a new form of festivity for a new society.¹² A large-scale, public, open-air banquet was held for the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1878. Some villages in France still have a *repas communal* on July 14. I attended one in the little village of Claret, just north of Montpellier, where an enormous fire of 'sarments' was lit and merguez grilled. Everyone was offered an apéritif of pastis, the manager of the local 'Cave Cooperative' adding the water from a large watering-can transported in an ancient wheelbarrow; a band playing traditional Occitan instruments provided the music, and everyone joined in the dancing. It was the

epitome of the popular banquet.

The public banquet, it was soon realised, could also be used for political purposes, and the French *banquets réformistes* of the mid-nineteenth century did just that; propaganda replaced celebration, oratory replaced music. In England, and also in Australia, the banquet developed as an official state celebration, as many of the menus exhibited for this Symposium demonstrate. Curiously, in these English-inspired menus the desserts, once again, are often the high point of the menu - or, as they were usually described in the menus, the 'entremets'. Indeed, the tarts, jellies, creams and blancmanges listed in the menu for the Australian Anniversary dinner of January 1858 are a clear echo of the sixteenth-century banquet (see p 136).

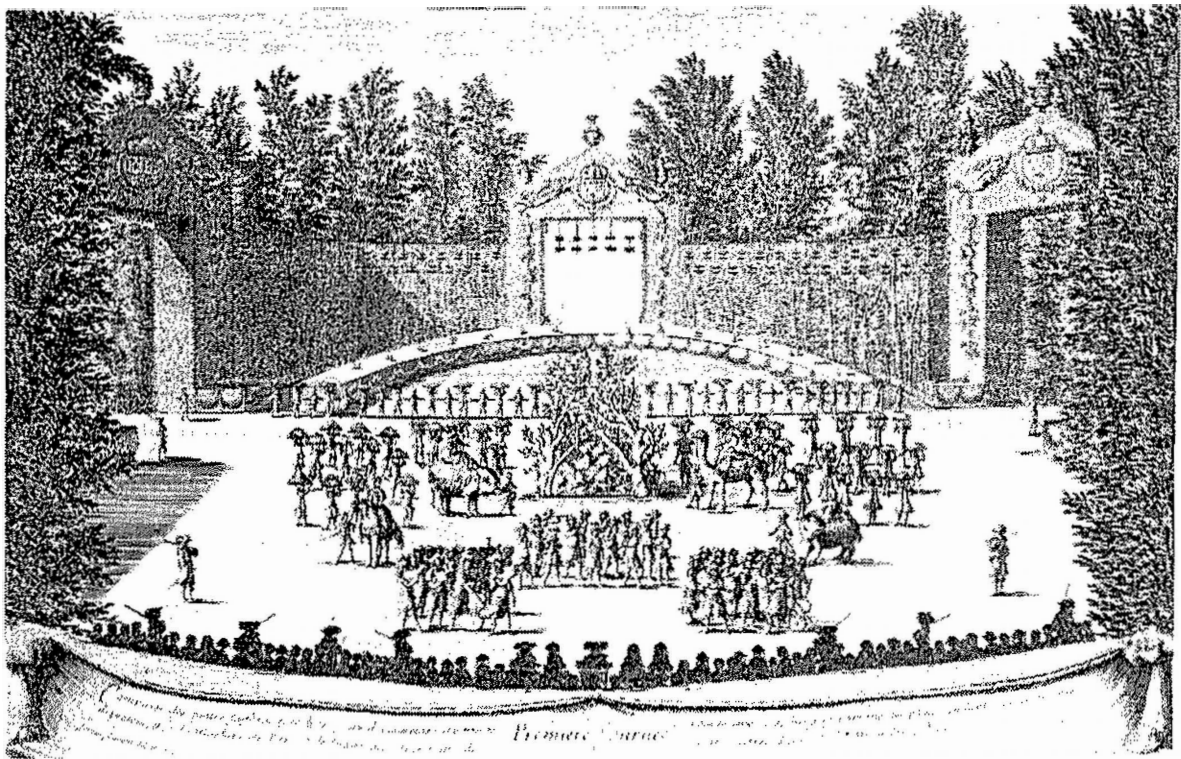
Official banquets, with their toasts and speeches and state-ordained protocol, are a long way from the Renaissance spectaculars which engaged both intellect and senses in a thoroughly gastronomic celebration. The banquet at the First Symposium of Australian Gastronomy showed how this form of festivity could be revived and renewed. Just as the prototypic banquets of the sixteenth century furnished the occasion for the display of the imagination and expertise of the cook, so, too, did the dishes served at this Australian banquet - not set out on a table, but paraded around the room so that their magnificence could be properly appreciated as culinary and artistic triumphs.

For a gastronomic celebration, the banquet is the form of festivity *par excellence*, and these Symposia of Gastronomy are perhaps contributing to the development of a new tradition in Australia.

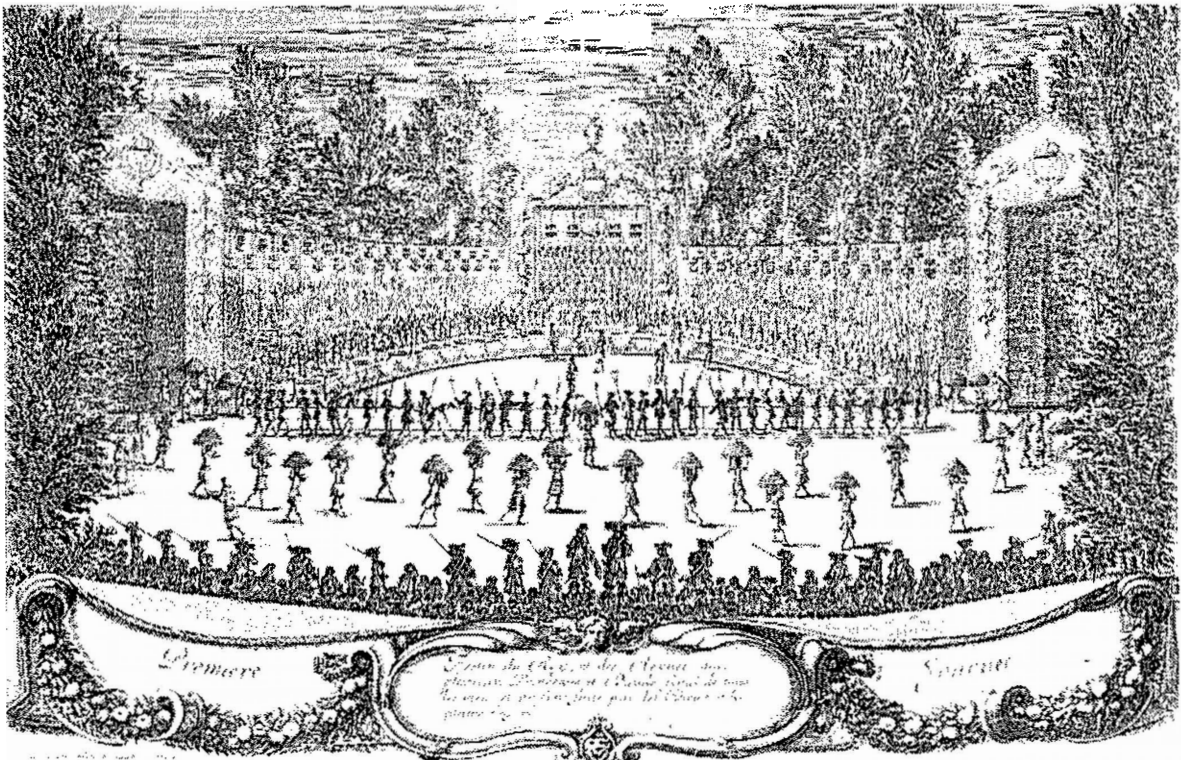


NOTES

1. This play is described by Jeanne Wathelet-Willem, 'Repression des excès de table et de vin à la fin du XVe siècle: La Condamnation des Bancquets a la louange de diepte et sobriété', in *Manger et Boire au Moyen Age*, vol II, Les Belles Lettres, Nice, 1984, pp 307-12.
2. *Memoires de Messire Olivier de la Marche: Suite du livre premier*, ed M Petitot, Foucault, Paris, 1920, p 157.
3. *Le Viandier de Guillaume Tirel dit Taillevent*, ed Baron Jérôme Pichon & Georges Vicaire, Paris, 1892 (reprinted by Slatkine Reprints, Geneva, 1967).
4. C Anne Wilson, *Food and Drink in Britain, from the Stone Age to recent times*, Constable, London, 1973, p 106.
5. Gervase Markham, *Countrey Contentments... The English Huswife*, J B for J R Jackson, London, 1615.
6. Christoforo di Messisbugo, *Banchetti compositione di vivande, et apparecchio generale*, G de Bugthat et A Hucher, Ferrara, 1549.
7. Georges de Loÿe, 'Reception du pape Clement VI par les cardinaux Hannibal Ceccano et pedro Gomez à Gentilly et Montfavet', in *Actes du Congrès International Francesco Petrarca*, Aubanel, Avignon, 1975, pp 31-53.
8. *Du fait de cuisine, par Maistre Chiquart, 1420*, ed Terence Scully, in *Vallesia*, vol 40, 1985, pp 103-221.
9. Gervase Markham, op cit.
10. Michel Jeanneret, *Des mets et des mots: banquets et propos de table à la Renaissance*, José Corti, Paris, 1987.
11. 'Banquet', in A Berthelet ed, *La Grande Encyclopédie: inventaire raisonné des sciences... arts*, Société Anonyme de la Grande Encyclopédie, Paris, 1886/1902.
12. Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, *Physiologie du goût*, A Sautelet, Paris, 1825, Meditation XXX.



Illus. 1: Silvestre's engraving of the 'Comparsé de quatre saisons, avec leur suite de concertans, et porteurs de presens...'
 The scene shows the theatrical presentation of Nature's gifts to the guests, with Vigarani's *pièce de résistance* centre-stage



Illus 2: Silvestre's engraving of the 'Festin du Roy, et des Reynes...'
 The guests are now seated at the table and the collation proceeds with music and choreographed service
 Reproductions by courtesy of The British Library

IN SEARCH OF THE OPERA GASTRONOMICA

Graham Pont

Tous les arts ont concouru à l'ornement de ces tables solonnelles

Brillat-Savarin

The association between food and festivity is found the world over: all human societies engage in ritual eating or drinking on the occasions of celebration;¹ and these observances, whether sacred or secular, usually include music. Throughout the history of civilisation, feasts and festivities have been accompanied by singing, dancing, the playing of instruments and the recitation of poetry - performing arts which all fall within the old Greek definition of 'music'. In the earliest civilisations of Mesopotamia and Egypt, the musical banquet already appears as a formal institution, and there can be little doubt that precedents for ceremonial eating go back to remote prehistory. The Australian corroboree is a musical feast of high antiquity, still preserving festive traditions and modes of celebration that might once have been typical of pre-urban societies. In tribal society, music is closely associated with medicine and magic, and all three with the rites of passage, a nexus which indicates that the musical arts contributed more to the ancient feast than pure entertainment. Indeed, the association is still so strong that many societies (including our own) could hardly envisage a *feast* without music: without the magical ingredient of music, such an occasion would inevitably be regarded as a mere meal, having little or no political, moral or religious significance.

The musico-magical feast is prominent throughout the history of religion. In the dionysiac rites of primitive Greece, the celebrants were intoxicated by music and wine to the point of 'enthusiasm', the climax of the sacred orgy when the god became one with his worshippers who then tore apart and consumed animal - at one time, possibly, human - victims. Though the Christian Eucharist celebrates the more civilised diet of bread and wine, the ritual of the sacred banquet still echoes the distant shrieks of cannibalism: 'take, eat; this is my body!' Maddening Dionysos was civilised through the musical arts; and they continue to enchant the communion as well as that other dionysiac institution, the drama. Since music is much older than wine, the advent of the powerful new intoxicant must have caused a social crisis (as it has among the Australian Aborigines) and a profound reformation of the festive arts. The legends of Dionysos occasionally recall the serious disruption caused by the introduction of wine into Greek society, and the slow acceptance of the wine god into the Olympian religion.

The moral problem of creating a civilised use of wine (in Greek terms, one acceptable to Apollo) was solved in the formation of the symposium, which was not necessarily a Greek invention but certainly a crucial development in the festive arts of the West. In the classical Greek version of the drinking party, the consumption of wine was controlled by an ethic of temperance; that is, by a musical canon of health and decorum. The temperate man was conceived as harmonious or well-adjusted, like Apollo's lyre; whereas the intemperate man was out of tune with himself and the standards of good society. Music was the instrument and the emblem of the balanced soul, and wine its creative spirit. Thus, through the powers of Orpheus, Apollo and Dionysos were reconciled in an harmonious celebration, marred only by

the absence of good food and respectable women. For the classical Greeks, wine was strictly a post-prandial affair for men.

The Romans remedied this defect by amalgamating the symposium with the meal that originally preceded it, thus creating in effect the modern form of the dinner party. In the *Deipnosophists* of Athenaeus (c230 AD), the convivial party purports to imitate the old symposium (the participants are all well-educated males); but, despite the elaborate gestures towards the Greek model, the occasion is really an extended dinner party, with wine and conversation enjoyed throughout. Modern also is the debased role of music - no longer the active enjoyment of an edifying art, but merely another topic for the display of sterile erudition. Fortunately, that display preserved valuable evidence on the classical association of food, wine and music.² Athenaeus further reveals how the post-classical symposium was extended to include many kinds of public festivities and spectacles, usually involving the celebration of wine and sometimes on a scale of grandeur and elaboration unequalled in modern times.³ Symposia were even held aboard luxurious, purpose-built vessels, the ancestors of today's floating restaurants and holiday cruisers.⁴ From the details recorded by Athenaeus, it appears that some of these extraordinary festivals were mounted regardless of expense and with every available resource; but whether they were conceived as totally integrated works of art remains an open question.

The cult of Dionysos continued to evolve from its original rustic simplicity into a variety of festive forms, both public and private, that are still characteristic of western society. Some of these retained the formality of the symposium in a strong ritual structure: for example, the communion, the drama and the dinner party. Others developed freer, more inventive scenarios based on another dionysiac celebration, the triumphal procession.⁵ Athenaeus's descriptions of these large-scale 'symposia' and dionysiac processions often bring to mind the extravaganzas of the Renaissance and the Baroque.

The similarities are not accidental. Though by no means the only source of evidence on ancient festivities, the accounts preserved by Athenaeus certainly influenced the attempts by modern patrons and artists to equal the pomps and spectacles of antiquity, in such diverse forms as the *intermedio*,⁶ the *ballet de cour*, the masque, the *opera in musica*, the *festa teatrale*, the *tragédie lyrique*, the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, and, of course, the musical banquet.⁷ The autumnal celebration of *Gastérea*, envisaged in Brillat-Savarin's 'Gastronomical Mythology'⁸ renovates these Classical and Christian traditions in a post-revolutionary synthesis, bringing together the intimate scale of the symposium/dinner-party (in the communion of the gastronomical priesthood) and the total art-work of the *città festeggiante*, the rejoicing of the urban populace as a whole. Brillat-Savarin's festive fantasy is typical in assigning an important but imperfectly documented role to music. In all such celebrations, music (including dance) has been usually considered indispensable; but, apart from sacred song, it is rarely recorded in any detail for posterity - the same is often true of the food and drink served. The ephemeral nature of the performing arts is only one of the reasons why there is no adequate history of the musical banquet.

'La città festeggiante' does not translate comfortably into English; its appositeness here arises from the fact modern secular traditions of public celebration go back largely to the Italian Renaissance.⁹ Italy itself, however, has older and still vital traditions of urban festivity. Here the memories of ancient Rome - the glorious triumphs of the returning armies and the gory

spectacles of the Colosseum - were never entirely lost. The pagan love of spectacle and pageantry soon found expression in the ceremony of the Christian Church. Later, with the revival of classical learning, there came a new desire to emulate, and finally a passion to exceed the ancients in all the arts and sciences, including gastronomy. The success of the moderns in the constructive arts of architecture, sculpture and painting was soon all but complete; but, in the musical arts - other than poetry itself - the incompleteness or total lack of surviving records made exact emulation almost impossible and comparison with the Antique little more than speculative. This did not prevent, however, an endless series of neo-classical experiments in the performing arts: in modern spectacle and festivity, the influence of Greece and Rome is all-pervasive.

By the end of the sixteenth century, the Italians had made an intense study of ancient musical sources and were inspired to attempt a recreation of the Greek tragedy, in the hope of rediscovering the legendary powers of music. Out of these experiments came modern opera, a renewed synthesis of the arts which revolutionised not only the private and commercial theatre (and, later, the ceremony of the Church), but also brought in a new era of public festivity. *La città festeggiante* in Italy today resounds with the choruses of Verdi, just as similar occasions in England or Australia call for Handel's 'Fireworks Music', 'Water Music', 'Coronation Anthems' or the 'Dead March' from *Saul*. More recently, the festive city has acquired a new embellishment in the form of 'baroque muzak', now almost *de rigueur* for superior shopping arcades like the Queen Victoria Building in Sydney.

The traditions of high festivity in modern Europe are mostly religious or operatic, although some forms, like the military Tattoo, still distantly recall the age and ethos of chivalry.¹⁰ Modern operatic traditions do not suddenly begin at Florence in 1600. Music historians have detected a long series of pre-operatic experiments in musical theatre, going back mainly to the dining hall, but also the ballroom, the riding school, the courtyard, the city square, the garden and other spaces temporarily adapted as theatres before there were any such regular structures available. The beginnings of opera are usually placed in the second half of the fifteenth century, for example, in works like the *Fabula di Orfeo*, a pastoral play with music, produced by the poet and humanist Angelo Poliziano in about 1480. But, during this time, neo-classical experiments in the performing arts also included the elaboration of the musical banquet which, Jenny Nevile has suggested,¹¹ had already reached a state of complete or 'operatic' composition by the late fifteenth century. The dining hall, it seems, was one of the first scenes of modern musical theatre.¹²

Since the Renaissance Italians were the main pioneers of modern gastronomy, table manners and the polite arts in general, it would not be surprising to find them experimenting with the ritual and ceremony of public dining - especially when the model of the sacred banquet, and its musical elaboration in the sung mass, was always before them. But the existence of artistically planned and fully composed musical banquets, particularly those with music performed throughout the dining, raises some interesting questions: was there a distinct renaissance in the musical banquet? If so, was there an identifiable genre of dinner music which has eluded historians? If music was specifically created for a well-planned feast, or at least performed throughout the proceedings, are we not then justified in hypothesising a Renaissance concept or equivalent of 'opera gastronomica'?¹³ And, if so, is it possible that the fully composed *opera gastronomica* could have preceded the creation of the theatrical *opera in musica*, by a century or more?

On the evidence now available, I would be prepared to risk answering all of these questions in the affirmative, even while recognising the serious obstacles that face a full inquiry into this neglected part of social history. An adequate answer would require a considerable interdisciplinary effort spanning the history of music, manners, ceremony and etiquette, as well as Renaissance gastronomy, iconography, diplomacy, theatrical practice, biography and, as Jenny Nevile has shown, contemporary dance. Dance was not only an essential part of aristocratic education and courtly behaviour; it also provided a code of social emblems and a language of cosmic metaphors which were part of the Renaissance world-view. To the Renaissance mind, nurtured on Plato,¹⁴ a well-conducted life was essentially a noble dance; from which it follows that noble dining would have its proper gestures and choreography - and, therefore, its appropriate music. But, having progressed thus far with the advice of colleagues who specialise in historic dance,¹⁵ I leave the investigation of the Renaissance feast to those better acquainted with the period.

I have continued the search, however, in a period more familiar to me, the age of Louis XIV; and I will complete this paper with a case study of an important musical banquet, which has claims to be considered as an archetype of the *opera gastronomica* in modern Europe.

A great patron of the arts, Louis was devoted to music and dance, in which he was both a connoisseur and a skilled practitioner. He made Versailles into a musical capital, rivalling and sometimes excelling the best of Italy; and he maintained an establishment of composers and performers that was the envy of Europe. His favourite music master was the Frenchified Florentine, J-B Lully (1632-1687), who reformed the ballet and created French opera. Louis was also a gourmand, for whom dining ceremonially in public was a regular duty. He is reported as eating quantities of food that would be disgusting to modern tastes - and he was not a big man. But he lived a long and arduous life, which included not only the public duties of a monarch but also regular military campaigns, decades of construction at Versailles, the endless intrigues of court, several affairs, and as well, it is said, the daily practice of his favourite dance, the courante!

Louis found time to patronise the gastronomic arts and to encourage their improvement with the same passion he showed for the other arts¹⁶ - with such success that the age of Louis XIV came to be recognised as the first of the two great epochs of French civilisation, and of French gastronomy in particular. In this period arose the creative tradition and formative literature of *la haute cuisine*. Brillat-Savarin was among many who praised the achievements of the *grand siècle*; yet even he, who paid particular attention to the development of the *festin*,¹⁷ seems to have missed the full significance of Versailles in the history of gastronomy; for it was here that Louis created - or recreated - the musical banquet as a complete work of art.

Versailles was a unique and unparalleled achievement, a total work of art that still excites admiration, criticism and even some degree of emulation, three hundred years later. The wonder of Versailles is not just the achievements of individual artists, but also the harmonious synthesis of their different contributions in the great whole. Yet the workings of the whole often elude the specialised historian or critic. As a result, there is no difficulty in retracing through the literature the individual careers of Mansart, Le Nôtre, Molière, Lully and the other masters who worked at the château; but it is a different matter when it comes to relating their diverse activities and mutual influences. History is often silent on their creative interaction.

During the planning and execution of the brilliant fêtes at the château, there must have been some degree of coordination or collaboration, for example, between the musical organisations and the domestic staff responsible for the preparation and service of food; but the details are hard to come by. At the centre of the planning was Louis himself, though much of his creative contribution to Versailles seems to have been undocumented or perhaps taken for granted. His own writings tell us little about this side of his life, being concerned mainly with politics, diplomacy and war. But he had a good knowledge of the arts, a fine discrimination and, it must be assumed, definite views on the musical banquet. His observations on the music and food of the château would have been of great historical interest.

With the death of Cardinal Mazarin in 1661, Louis, now twenty-one, took full control of the government, determined on a glorious reign. In that year he began construction at Versailles and also his affair with Louise de La Vallière, who bore him a son in December 1663. By then the affair, which had been kept as secret as possible, was known to the court and the King was anxious to declare his love in some way, before making Louise his official mistress. The unofficial declaration took the form of a magnificent fête at Versailles, the first important showing to the world of the progress made so far at the new country house. *Les plaisirs de l'isle enchantée*, the first of Louis' *grands divertissements*, was planned as a three-day extravaganza for the Spring of 1664. At the last moment, however, Louis decided to make the spectacle a chivalrous emblem of his love for Louise and the fête continued for a whole week. The official description of the proceedings¹⁸ is subtitled:

Course de bague; collation ornée de machines; comedie, méslee de danse et de musique; ballet du palais d'Alcine; feu d'artifice: et autres festes galantes et magnifiques, faites par le roy a Versailles, le VII. May M. DC. LXIV. et continuées plusieurs autres jours.

The term 'course de bague' indicates that the fête was conceived in a traditional genre of chivalry, as a celebration centred on the noble exercise of tilting at the ring. Jousts and tournaments were often interspersed with poetry, music, games and other gallantries; but this occasion was designed as an exceptionally elaborate kind of theatre, a grandiose *ballet de cour* to be enacted with the participation of the King, the court and a large supporting cast. The production involved a galaxy of talent that was soon to make Versailles illustrious, including Molière, Benserade, Lully and the Italian theatre architect and scene designer Carlo Vigarani. The co-ordinator was the Count de Saint Aignan, who had known Louise de la Vallière since her youth and had been privy to the affair with the King.

Following the inspiration of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1516), Versailles was transformed into the enchanted island of the sorceress Alcina, visited by Louis and his chevaliers in the role of Charlemagne's knights. Israël Silvestre's famous engravings show the commencement of the entertainment on the evening of the first day. Louis, resplendent in the role of Roger, leads his knights in a march, to trumpets and drums, around the tilting field which has become a theatrical representation of Alcina's magical garden. The gorgeous scene, embellished with banners, heraldic devices and equipages glittering with gold, silver and precious stones, is observed by an audience made up of the rest of the court and other privileged guests, numbering in all more than 600.

The emblems of chivalry are augmented with numerous allusions to classical antiquity. During the opening procession, there are verses recited by Apollo and the Four Ages of Gold,

Silver, Bronze and Iron, while the King and his chevaliers perform a *comparse*. As Silvestre's illustration shows, this was a formal entry and presentation of the combatants in the tournament, a demonstration of the knightly art of horse-ballet. The King, 'riding one of the most beautiful horses in the world', opens the tilting but the prize is won felicitously by the Duke de la Vallière, Louise's brother.

Nightfall brings a well-timed end to the tournament and the scene is now brightly illuminated for a spectacular collation. Thirty-four costumed musicians enter and perform an *ouverture* (the standard introductory movement of the *ballet de cour*), whereupon the Four Seasons appear bearing plates of delicious food (it is Molière's troupe, making an *entrée* - in both senses of the word!). They dance an *entrée de ballet* with the twelve Signs of the Zodiac and the twelve Hours, after which Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter appear, mounted respectively on a Spanish horse, an elephant, a camel and a bear. In their train is a corps of forty-eight servitors - twelve for each season, represented in appropriate costume and by the food carried on their heads. Then come fourteen musicians playing flutes and bagpipes in the pastoral mode. They encounter Pan and Diana sitting on top of an ingenious mechanical device 'in the form of a small mountain or rock shaded by several trees'. (It is, we recall, a 'collation ornée de machines'). While everyone is mystified by the workings of this centrepiece -Vigarani's *pièce de résistance* - the cast is completed by twenty-eight of the King's pages, also richly apparelled, and the audience is regaled with more verses from Pan, Diana and the Seasons.

The scene changes again, with the appearance of a great table 'en forme de croissant' (Illus. 1), at the apex of which is revealed a small theatre or musicians' gallery containing thirty-six string players, also in splendid costume. During the music, the diners take their places attended by Abundance, Joy, Seemliness (*Propreté*), and Good Cheer; and the entertainment proceeds with the sumptuous collation which, in its delicacy and abundance, far exceeds the reporter's powers of description (Illus. 2). Contrary to ancient practice, the diners (apart from the royal family) are exclusively ladies of the court, including both Louise de La Vallière and her successor Madame de Maintenon. The magnificent spectacle is enhanced by countless lights; by the chevaliers, standing with torches at the barrier of the stage, still in their colourful regalia of the joust; and by the numerous serving-men also in rich costume.

Trente six violons, très bien vêtus, parurent derrière (la grande table) sur un petit théâtre, pendant que M. M. de la Marche et Parfait père, frère et fils, contrôleurs généraux sous les noms de l'Abondance, de la Joie, de la Propreté et de la Bonne chère, la firent couvrir par les Plaisirs, par les Jeux, par les Ris et par les Délices.



Illus. 3: Part of the dinner music by Lully, performed during the appearance of the household staff on stage

Reproduction by courtesy of The British Library

It is significant that the record specifically mentions the four *contrôleurs généraux* who impersonated Abundance, Joy, Seemliness and Good Cheer at the table. These were the directors of Louis' household, evidently performing a theatrical version of their official duties to the accompaniment of specially composed music (see Illus. 3).¹⁹ The recognition of those responsible for the food and service - their appearance on this exalted stage and inclusion in the official record - indicates the importance of their contribution to the spectacle, and the regard in which they and their office were held. This is in marked contrast to the lack of any reference in the record to Lully, who was responsible for the music and the ballet; or, at this point, to Molière who collaborated in the ballet of the Seasons and impersonated the figure of Pan. Lully had made his entrance at the head of the orchestra, in the role of Orpheus, and he must have been outraged to find his name missing from the memorial volume. The haphazard credits are not surprising for this period, though French chauvinism might explain the absence of Lully's name and the minimal acknowledgment of Vigarani, who worked for weeks on the spectacle. There can be no doubt that the conception and execution of this festival owed much to the two Italian artists and the traditions they had brought to France from their own country.

Overall, the record of this event is exceptionally rich in details of the three-day action, which ends with the destruction of the enchanted island in a stupendous display of fireworks. Exceptional, too, are the engraved views of the theatrical dining (Illus. 1 & 2): together with contemporary descriptions, and the surviving music, these preserve unmistakable evidence of the importance assigned to the musical banquet in the total work of art at Versailles. Although the meal was only a collation or light supper, the title of Illus. 2 shows that the theatrical dining was regarded as a *festin*. The French expression can refer any kind of festive meal, secular or sacred, solemn or gay; whereas the cognate Italian term, 'festino', acquired a more purely secular connotation, usually designating a princely feast with music and dance.²⁰ In his article on the *festin* in Diderot's *Encyclopédie*, Cahusac refers to a special class of such celebrations, the *festins royaux*:

ces banquets extraordinaires que nos Rois daignent quelquefois accepter dans le sein de leur capitale ou en d'autres lieux, à la suite des grandes cérémonies...

These banquets would normally include music, like the *festin royal* of 1744 which Cahusac gives as an example.²¹

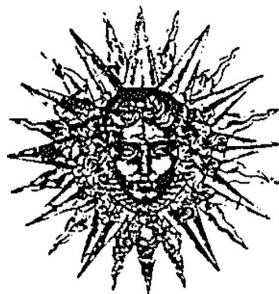
The *festin* terminating the first day's action on the 'Enchanted Isle' belongs explicitly to this genre of royal entertainment. But the traditional appellation does not sufficiently highlight the novelty of this occasion, let alone its special position in the history of European theatre and gastronomy: while not entirely new, Louis' theatrical banquet placed the art of dining at the centre of what was to become the most magnificent stage in Europe, in a place of honour among the fine arts. Whatever his precedents may have been, it was Louis' achievement to elevate the ceremony of secular banqueting to the highest place it ever enjoyed among the arts, at least in modern Europe. Thus Louis had partly achieved what Brillat-Savarin later envisaged in his 'gastronomical mythology' - the full integration of gastronomy within secular culture and the total art-work of the public feast.²² But, while Louis also was a well-schooled devotee of the Muses, he saw no need to reform the sacred banquet: his beautiful Gastéreas adorned a purely secular feast, where the gods themselves attended the table of 'le Roi-Soleil'!

The music of the 'Enchanted Isle' has not survived in its entirety but there is enough extant to show that the *festin* was composed in the style of the *ballet de cour*.²³ Much, perhaps most of the dinner music would have been recycled from Lully's very popular ballets; the music for the opening cavalcade and horse-ballet was probably derived from that composed for the famous Carousel at the Tuilleries Palace in 1662.²⁴ Despite a certain degree of improvisation, the music and the fête as a whole was an overwhelming success, a milestone in the history of the performing arts and a highpoint in the development of the musical banquet.

It is important to observe that *Les plaisirs de l'isle enchantée* preceded the creation of French opera by more than eight years: it was not until November, 1672, that Lully and his collaborators produced *Les fêtes de l'Amour et de Bacchus*, a pastoral pastiche in the operatic style. The main predecessor of this new genre of musical theatre was the *ballet de cour*, in which Lully had collaborated with the King since 1653; but the theatrical *festin* also made a recognisable, if more ephemeral contribution to the development of opera. French history here again followed the precedent of Italy, where the courtly feast became a fully composed theatrical creation, preceding and perhaps influencing the better known *opera in musica*.

Les plaisirs de l'isle enchantée was Louis' first but by no means his last essay in the grand manner of the theatrical *festin*. After its original production at Paris, Lully's first opera was given again the following year at Versailles, as part of another court festivity. The memorial volume of this occasion preserves a remarkable detail that has disappeared from the histories of music and opera: the opening scene ('sur le théâtre') was a magnificent collation of Portuguese oranges and other fruits which were then served to the court while the printed libretto of the comedy-ballet was distributed.²⁵ The absence of such refinements makes the modern opera a relatively dismal experience, especially when the performances are scheduled at dinner-time!

Modern opera and ballet audiences are used to viewing the stage as if it were no more than a picture or a television play; but for Louis XIV and his courtiers, musical theatre was a participatory art in which they themselves were the principal creators and performers. Since time immemorial, the feast has been a socially significant participatory art; and out of that festivity the Italians and the French raised a special kind of musical theatre, the musical banquet that was truly an *opera gastronomica*, glorifying the ritual of hospitality, the ceremony of dining and the culinary art. It was aristocratic theatre, even more of a total art-work than opera itself; and, being prohibitively expensive, it was never commercialised like ordinary opera.²⁶ So it remained a rare and exceptional genre of individual creations that failed to acquire a family name, because it was hardly necessary. Democracy and mass culture have not encouraged the princely art of the *opera gastronomica*, but the memory of that noble tradition is still alive today, preserving the ideal of the complete banquet, the musical feast in which only the well-educated can fully participate.



NOTES

1. See Peter Farb & George Armelagos, *Consuming Passions; the Anthropology of Food*, Boston, 1980, chapter 8 & p 71.
2. Graham Pont, 'Athenaeus and the Traditions of Classical Gastronomy', in *Foodism - Philosophy or Fad? Proceedings of the Second Symposium of Australian Gastronomy*, ed Barbara Santich *et al*, Adelaide, 1986, pp 11-26.
3. Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists*, Book V, 194 ff. See C B Gulick's translation, London, 1927, etc, vol II, pp 381 ff.
4. *Deipnosophists*, Book V, 205 ff (Gulick's translation, vol II, pp 425 ff).
5. 'Triumph' is derived from the Greek word 'thriambos', meaning a bacchic song or celebration: this goes back, presumably, to some old dionysiac rite.
6. In the French names for the banquet interlude ('intermède', 'entremets') the association of music and dining is still preserved, as it is in the term 'entrée'.
7. There is clear evidence that the ancients had banquets at which music was regularly or continuously performed. Athenaeus, for example, refers to a wedding feast where 'the entertainment was continuous'. (*Deipnosophists* V, 180; Gulick's translation vol II, p 341). Trimalcio's banquet in the *Satyricon* evidently had music throughout, even singing by slaves who pared the guests' toe-nails!
8. J-A Brillat-Savarin, *Physiologie du goût*, Paris, 1825, Meditation XXX, 'Bouquet'. See also Graham Pont, 'Brillat-Savarin's Bouquet', in *The Upstart Cuisine; Proceedings of the First Symposium of Australian Gastronomy*, ed Barbara Santich, Adelaide 1984, p 99. Cf pp 28-9.
9. Cf H. Prunières, *Le ballet de cour en France avant Benserade et Lully*, Paris, 1914, chapter I, especially pp 14 ff. This pioneering study contains incidental references to the banquets for which dance and other entertainments were provided. Prunières rightly acknowledges the primacy of the Italians 'dans l'art des spectacles et des fêtes' (p 14).
10. Cf Roy Strong, *Art and Power; Renaissance Festivals 1450-1650*, Woodbridge, 1984, chapter 1. In tracing the emergence of Renaissance magnificences, Strong generally neglects the musical banquets, even though they appear in his illustrations (nos 8 & 67).
11. Jenny Nevile, 'The Musical Banquet in Italian *Quattrocento* Festivities', in the present volume of *Proceedings*.
12. Cf Jacques Chailley, *40,000 Years of Music*, London, 1964, p 97; and Nino Pirrotta & Elena Povoledo, *Music and Theatre from Poliziano to Monteverdi*, Cambridge, 1982, p 39.
13. As far as I know, the expression 'opera gastronomica' was first used in the title of the musical banquet, *Les goûts réunis or Apollo in the Antipodes: opera gastronomica in tre atti*. This was the celebration which

- concluded the Fourth David Nichol Smith Memorial Seminar in Eighteenth Century Studies and the First National Conference of the Musicological Society of Australia, held at University House, Canberra, 31st August, 1976. Extracts of the recorded proceedings were played during the presentation of my paper.
14. One of Plato's words for 'uneducated' is 'achoreutos', i.e. 'danceless' (*Laws* II 654a.9).
 15. I thank Jenny Nevile and Fiona Garlick for making available results of their doctoral research and other valuable advice. Since 1984, both these scholars have performed in musical banquets at the Senior Common Room Club, University of New South Wales, featuring Renaissance and Baroque dances by the Early Dance Consort of Sydney.
 16. Barbara Ketcham Wheaton, *Savouring the Past; the French kitchen and table from 1300 to 1789*, London, 1983, chapters 6 & 7. See pp 131 ff for her comments on *Les plaisirs de l'isle enchantée* and other fêtes at Versailles.
 17. *Physiologie du goût*, Meditation XXVII, especially sections 126-8 & 132.
 18. Descriptions of *Les plaisirs de l'isle enchantée* were published, with engravings by Israël Silvestre, in various editions from 1664. The wording of the subtitle is taken from the edition of 1673.
 19. Pierre Gaxotte, *Louis XIV*, Paris, 1974, p 85. Despite the confusing terminology, Félibien was not referring to the *contrôleur général des finances*, Colbert, who had to find the money for all this extravagance.
 20. I thank my friend Dr Biancamaria Brumana, of the University of Perugia, for her helpful advice on the historical meanings of *festa*, *festino* and *festa teatrale*.
 21. *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, vol 6, Paris, 1756, pp 559 ff. Gaxotte (op cit, p 61) reproduces the engraving of 'Le magnifique festin donné pour le mariage de Louis XIV' in 1660. The musicians accompanying the banquet are clearly illustrated.
 22. *Physiologie du goût*, Meditation XXX. Missing from Louis' feast, of course, was the full participation of the people.
 23. Published in *Les Oeuvres complètes de J.-B. Lully... Les Comédies-Ballets*, Tome II, ed H Prunières, Paris, 1933, pp 3 ff.
 24. See Gaxotte, op cit, pp 84 ff; and Marcelle Benoit, *Versailles et les musiciens du roi 1661-1733*, Paris, 1971, pp 66-7.
 25. André Félibien, *Relation de la feste de Versailles. Du 18. Juillet mil six cens soixante-huit*, Paris, 1679, pp 12-13. The delicious association of opera and oranges recalls the theatrical encounter of Nel Gwynne and her royal lover (who, during his exile, knew the court of Louis XIV at first hand).
 26. A commercial approximation to *opera gastronomica* is the modern theatre restaurant. Sydney also has the tradition of the *Victoriana*, a popular kind of cabaret presented from time to time by amateur and semi-professional performers. As Brillat-Savarin realised, the most serious *opera gastronomica* would be a rival or successor to the Eucharist. In Australia, this might take the form of a new, post-tribal *corroboree*, perhaps a theatrical or ritual barbecue designed for mass participation.

THE MUSICAL BANQUET IN ITALIAN QUATTROCENTO FESTIVITIES

Jenny Nevile

THE FESTIVAL IN RENAISSANCE SOCIETY

The spectacle in fifteenth-century Italy was not a new development of the Renaissance. During previous centuries, festivals in Europe had included banquets, tournaments, indoor mascarades, and official royal entries. In Italy, during the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, feast days were celebrated with religious processions. Religious confraternities sponsored plays held in the churches, which sometimes included mechanical devices to enable angels to come down from heaven, Jesus to ascend to heaven, or to represent the tongues of fire descending on the heads of the Apostles at the feast of Pentecost. These mechanical devices were not always entirely successful. In the last-mentioned instance, the large number of torches caused the church to catch fire.¹

As the fifteenth century progressed, however, the medieval forms of spectacle grew and new ideas and emphases were added to the traditional formats. In his book, *Art and Power*, Roy Strong describes three concepts which were central to the philosophy of the Renaissance, and which enabled these changes in the form of the spectacle to take place. Strong emphasises that Renaissance writers and artists, and also their patrons, had a firm belief in the importance of their work in the service of the state. The court festival, he writes

could express philosophy, politics and morals through a unique fusion of music, painting, poetry and the dance, all terrestrial manifestations of the overall cosmic harmony which they believed governed the universe and which the art of festival tried so fervently to recreate on earth.²

It was no accident, however, that the images of power which the prince or noble wished to portray became an important part of the festival. The gods who were displayed on the triumphal carts and in the decorations of the arches, and who descended from the heavens into the midst of a banquet distributing gifts to the courtiers, were deliberately identified with the ancestors of the noble lord in whose honour the festivity was held.³

The Renaissance was also an age preoccupied with emblems and personal devices or *imprese*; the philosophy of the age was that 'truth could be apprehended in images.'⁴ As a consequence of this belief, the festival became a vehicle for the ruler to express his ideals. His personal emblems, mottoes, and devices appeared not only in his clothes, but also in the decorations for the entire city.⁵ Thus, increasingly, every aspect of the festival came to reflect the magnificence of the ruler or the heroic and noble lineage of the two families united in a marriage celebration.

The third influence identified by Strong as having had an impact on the development of the festival was the Renaissance interest in the 'exaltation of wonder as an experience.'⁶ Audiences

were increasingly dazzled by spectacular scenic effects deliberately designed to leave them speechless with amazement. For example, not only was the food of the banquet supposed to be spectacular - the flaming peacocks and complicated figures made of sugar - but also the manner of presenting that food, and the associated mythology, which was increasingly elaborated for each course as time went on.

The Renaissance festival, therefore, had several important functions. On one level, it was entertainment, a purveyor of pleasure to both the court and the general populace. On another level, it was an instrument through which the ruler could demonstrate his power and influence, or support the dynastic claims of his family. Through its prominent visual components it was also a means of conveying material for reflection by those learned members of the audience who recognised the allegories being presented.⁷ Finally, it was the vehicle through which the fifteenth-century humanists could express their rediscoveries of the ancient forms of spectacle and theatrical practices.⁸

DIFFERENT FORMS OF THE FESTIVAL

In fifteenth-century Italy, the *feste* appear to divide into four different types; that is, the entry, the banquet, the tournament, and the popular carnival.⁹ (Later in that century, and into the next, when the Latin theatre was seriously revived, one could add another major category - that of theatrical performances.)

The entry of a prince or ruler into a city was a form of public spectacle which began in the medieval period and continued right up to the Baroque.¹⁰ It was essentially a ritual which reaffirmed the rights and obligations between a ruler and a particular town. The ruler would arrive at the city gates to be met by a delegation of city officials. There would then be a ceremony in which the keys were formally handed over, gifts exchanged, and the ruler would guarantee the rights and privileges of the townspeople. He and his court would then process slowly through the city. These were the basic elements of the entry, which continued for hundreds of years.

In fifteenth-century Italy, however, this simple form became increasingly more spectacular, with the addition of allegorical carts of Love, Strength, Justice, Virtue, etc., and of living tableaux which proclaimed once again the magnificence of the ruler, or, in the case of a marriage procession, the virtue and beauty of his bride. The entry came to be modelled on Roman triumphs, with triumphal arches built at various points along the route of the procession.¹¹

Two examples will illustrate this form of festivity.

During January 1487 in Bologna a *fiesta* was held to celebrate the marriage of Annibale Bentivoglio to Lucrezia d'Este, natural daughter of the Duke of Ferrara, Ercole d'Este.¹² The triumphal entry was only one part of the celebrations, but even that involved extensive re-building of the central part of the city. Seven wooden gates, or arches, were built, which were quite large and decorated with leafy boughs, festoons, paintings depicting the labours of Hercules, and the insignia of the Bentivogli, the d'Este and Sforza families. Each one of the arches supported a small structure, for example a throne or a pavilion, or a mechanical device, as well as a masked figure that represented a 'Virtue'.¹³ Along the streets through which the

procession would pass, platforms had been erected upon which the scenes prepared by the confraternities were performed; while at the conclusion of the journey, the Piazza Ravegnana, a large space had been cleared by the demolition of houses, in which a huge tent was placed for the musicians. The houses along the route were also decorated with hangings, leafy boughs, festoons and insignia.

In the following year, 1488, the heir to Urbino, Guidobaldo Montefeltro, was married to Elisabetta Gonzaga. As part of those celebrations there was also an entry in which a Roman triumph was realised through the identification of the Montefeltro family (and Federico in particular), with a famous Roman general.

... hobgoblins, antique vases and fountains were the background to a triumphal cart drawn by centaurs, where, in a triangle, sat *Cesare Scipione* and the Duke Federico, with their coat of arms gilded and made 'antique'. A little lower than them sat a Sybil.¹⁴

These entries were the public part of the celebrations. The processions were usually long rich and sumptuous (with perhaps 500 horses); there were often more ceremonies and opportunities for public display when the procession arrived at the main piazza. For example, on 16th May 1473, Sigismondo d'Este (brother of Ercole) entered Naples with his retinue of over 500 people to collect Eleonora d'Aragona, his brother's promised bride. The court was met by the ruler of Naples, Ferdinand I, and the whole procession moved to the Piazza dell'Incoronata, where two stands of seats had been built at the sides of the square, with a capacity of over 20,000 people. A stage had been erected in the centre of the piazza for the King, the court, and his guests. Then music began to sound and Eleonora opened the dances. Various ceremonies followed, then a march past of the delegation from Ferrara, who presented Ercole's gifts to Eleonora, followed by a procession of all the knights who were to fight in the next day's joust. About two hundred people, preceded by trumpets, then paraded past the centre stage, all carrying dishes of marzipan and other types of confectionery. This food was meant for display rather than sustenance; and so it was made into fantastic forms, each painted with the insignia of the King of Naples.¹⁵ By this time night had fallen, and so everyone retired to recover for the next day's festivities, the joust.

The tournament, the second form of the *festa*, was also a tradition inherited from the medieval period. What happened to it in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries resembled the changes that had occurred to the royal entry, with their marked increase in their theatricality. The joust, armed combat between one knight and another, gained in popularity, as opposed to the *mêlée*, or *tournoi*, which involved groups of knights in the fighting. Often elaborate stories were invented for the knights, and even the seating for the spectators was built to represent a particular place or setting.¹⁶

The third type of *festa* could be described as a carnival. It would include the religious festivals, races, games, bull chases, masquerades, processions and fireworks.¹⁷ This kind of *festa* would also involve the participation of the general populace.

The fourth type of *festa* was the banquet. Once again its characteristics resembled those of the royal entry and the tournament; that is, its increasing theatricality, its emphasis on the magnificence and power of the honoured family, the love of display and opulence, the use of ingenious mechanical devices, the identification of modern heroes with the ancient divinities

from Olympus and famous Roman warriors, and the use of Greek and Roman mythology. The banquet combined the skills of cooking, decoration, music, dancing, poetry, architecture (for scene construction), costume design and painting.

It was an elaborate, expensive spectacle, with its own rituals supervised by the *gran siniscalco* (seneschal), who would have come from an important family and had his own retinue of *servitori*. For example the *siniscalco* at the banquet given by Cardinal Pietro Riario in 1473, in honour of Eleonora d'Aragona, changed his clothes four times (along with the four changes of table cloth); each time he also changed his collar of gold, pearls, and precious stones.¹⁸ The men who filled this position were expected to be multi-skilled. Girolamo da Sestola, for example, was a master of dance, music, horsemanship, fencing, a prudent diplomat, and a faithful messenger of his government's business, as well as being a *trinciante* (carver at the noble table).¹⁹

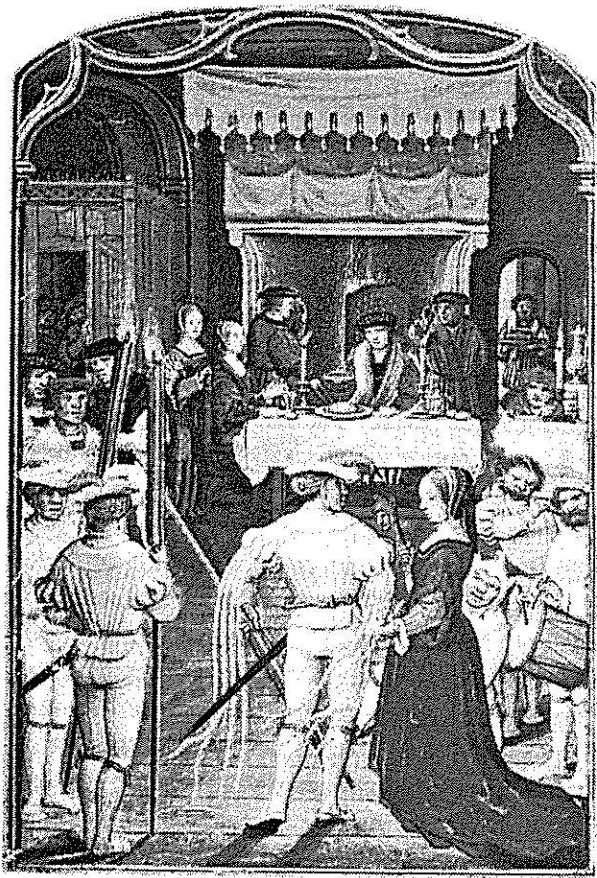
A banquet usually took place in the *sala maggiore*; that is, the largest room in the host's palace.²⁰ This room was usually decorated in fashion similar to the streets and houses along the path of a triumphal entry - with tapestries, festoons, leafy boughs, paintings, devices, and emblems, which were often picked out in gold. The ceiling of the banqueting room frequently depicted the heavens with the stars in silver paint.²¹ At Pesaro, for the wedding celebrations of 1475, the ceiling was painted with the figures of the Zodiac, which opened onto a splendid paradise full of gold and silver, from which the Sun, and then the Moon, descended.²²

The attempt to imitate classical festive practices can also be seen in the banqueting hall. For the celebrations given by Cardinal Pietro Riario in 1473, the banquet took place, not inside the palace, but outside in a large portico which was divided into three open rooms, in the ancient Roman fashion. The guests sat at tables arranged around the sides of the room, with the host and the most important guests sitting on a raised platform or *tribunale*. The centre of the room was thus left empty for the dances and dramatic scenes that accompanied the entry of each course. The room also contained a platform, or box, for the musicians, and a *credenza*, or sideboard, on which the host's family would display their most expensive vases and silverware.

THE MUSICAL BANQUET

As one can see from the first half of this paper, the banquet was an important part of public occasions of celebration in fifteenth-century Italy. The official banquet had always functioned as more than just an elaborate meal and social occasion. It was not, however, until the latter part of the fifteenth century that all the different elements that had been part of the banquet for several centuries (that is, music and dance as well as food), were united to produce a coherent performance with a single theme - in other words, a 'gastronomic opera'.

In Italy, there are records of marriage celebrations and other occasions which involved a dance master, from 1431 onwards.²³ In 1452, at the wedding of Sante Bentivoglio of Bologna and Ginevra Sforza at Pesaro, the celebrations included dancing;²⁴ a triumphal entry through streets decorated with the device of Bentivoglio; a piazza transformed into a huge pavilion and also decorated with the device of Bentivoglio, resounding to the music of *piffari* and *trombetti*; and *credenze* set up at the sides of the piazza. But as Patrizia Castelli says in her article, 'La kermesse degli Sforza pesaresi':



Torch dance during a banquet - early sixteenth century



Depiction of a fifteenth-century banquet showing the *credenza*, the musicians, the rich tapestries, with the seneschal directing the proceedings

The sumptuousness of the *fiesta* was exceptional, but it lacked in those years a more complex programme, a true performance as would be done twenty years later for the marriage of Costanzo Sforza with Camilla d'Aragona.²⁵

At Siena, a *fiesta* was held in 1465 to honour Ippolita Sforza on her wedding journey to Naples. The celebrations included a banquet with a dance spectacle - a *moresca* danced by twelve people who emerged from a large, gilded she-wolf.²⁶

Many similar examples can be given from this time: looking at the records of the banquets during the quarter century from 1450 to 1475, one can see slow changes taking place as the banquet moved toward a unified theatrical event. The first occasion I wish to discuss in detail, to illustrate this change, is the event mentioned by Castelli in the passage quoted above: that is, the wedding of Costanzo Sforza and Camilla d'Aragona held at Pesaro in 1475.

After the triumphal entry with its procession of carts, the court proceeded into the Sforza palace for the official banquet, which lasted for hours. Numerous courses were interspersed with music, choreographed dances, mimed action of scenes inspired by classical allegory, recitations of verses in praise of the *signori* and so on. The different courses were presented according to a precise choreography, each under the 'protection' of a messenger from a particular divinity. While all the guests would have been well aware of who in reality had organised the banquet, the conceit was that the dinner was directed by the gods from Olympus. The Sun supervised the hot food, which made up the first part of the banquet, while the Moon supervised the cold food, the second half of the meal. Both these gods descended literally through the ceiling (which, as was mentioned above, was painted to represent the heavens), in order to fulfil their role. For example, two of the courses were sent to the banquet by Juno, under the authority of the Sun, and Neptune, under that of the Moon.

The foods of Juno (roast meat and cooked peacocks) were carried in by Iris, who had wings of gold, coloured clothes and a rainbow on her shoulders, and who advanced preceded by a peacock, symbol of the goddess.²⁷

Neptune, god of the sea... sent Triton, half man and half fish, who came in without the aid of any feet, carrying dishes of fish only.²⁸

Other gods and goddesses who participated in the banquet were Hymen, god of marriage, who came in person: Venus, who sent Erato: Jove, who sent Perseus: Vesta, guardian of every honest and modest act, who sent Tatia (holding an emblem of virginity); and Mars, who sent his son Romulus.



Hymen



Arethusa



Venus

As mentioned earlier, the Renaissance was an age in which visual symbols were considered to be specially important, and a spectacle therefore had to appeal not only to a participant's sense of wonder, but also to his intellect. Take, for example, the second half of the 1475 banquet at Pesaro, which was centred around various allegorical scenes. These included the homage of wisdom, a scene which was represented by Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, and an allegory of Reason which consisted of a dance enacting the hunt (and victory) of men over 'savage beasts.'²⁹ For this dance the 'beasts' emerged from a mountain made of sugar,³⁰ the mountain being accompanied by three young girls, who represented the arts of the Trivium, and by twenty poets, who recited their verses in Greek and Latin, and then distributed to the guests appropriate books, also made of sugar.³¹ Then another dance of Boaz and Sarah, which alluded to the dynastic continuity of the Sforzas; and, finally, a scene in which Modesty introduced Love and, supported by Fame, announced that the bridegroom would be the grand champion of the final tournament.³²

This event in Pesaro, however, did not suddenly arise from nowhere. It followed the precedents of other celebratory occasions in the past. Indeed, it had many elements in common with a very famous dinner given in Rome in June 1473, by Cardinal Pietro Riario, to honour Eleonora d'Aragona as she travelled across Italy from Naples to Ferrara to meet her future husband Ercole d'Este. This banquet lasted seven hours, from dawn to midday, and its fame was both immediate and enormous.

The ten guests at this banquet first stood at the table and were served a *colazione* of sweets; that is, sweetened and gilded oranges, cups of malmsey, sweetmeats with the imperial eagle made of sugar. They then washed their hands with rose water and took their seats. The dishes for the first course were introduced in many different ways to the sounds of *piffari* and *trombe*. After the first course of dishes a young man entered, who sang Latin verses. Next a mountain, encircled by strange animals, was carried in by four helpers, and on top of this was another young man singing Latin verses. (This scene was very similar to one in the 1475 banquet at Pesaro).

After more food and the removal of a tablecloth, there was an *intermezzo* of Perseus with Andromeda and the dragon (Perseus was the messenger of Jove at Pesaro). Then came dishes of roast eels, followed by the entrance of Ceres on a cart drawn by eels (Ceres also appeared at Pesaro). Other fish dishes followed, then cakes, fruit and rose water for the hands; and so the second tablecloth was removed.

More food arrived, shaped in the form of men; and live quails flew out of pastries. Then came another *intermezzo*, with Venus, Atalanta and Ippomene, also with singing, followed by roasts of pork, chicken, goat, etc. After this food was served, various figures representing the personifications of Hercules arrived, one on a lion, one on a wild boar, another on a bull, all of whom, accompanied by Diana, also sang.³³ (Venus and Diana were also featured at Pesaro). Bacchus and Ariadne arrived to sing more songs, before the next course of food was served.

As at Pesaro, the Sun came also to the table; and, after dishes of capons, Venus arrived on a cart with Bacchus. After more sweets and recited verses, the company finally rose from the table and a dance commenced with Hercules, together with five men and nine ladies (who represented mythological figures such as Jason). Centaurs then entered and a beautiful battle took place, which led to the defeat of the centaurs by Hercules.

As ambassadors, members of the nobility and dance masters travelled to the different parts of Italy and attended various *feste*, so would the news of these sumptuous occasions spread to all the courts of the country. Reading the records of the banquets of the last quarter of the

fifteenth century, one finds the same themes recurring - the same mythological figures, the entrances of palaces, towers and mountains, the danced hunts, and mimed battles.

Fourteen years after the wedding at Pesaro, there was a banquet at Tortona to celebrate the first meeting between the betrothed couple, Gian Galeazzo Sforza and Isabella d'Aragona. Tristano Calco, the Milanese historian, has left an account of this banquet in Latin.³⁴ In his opening paragraph, he explicitly describes how each course was introduced by appropriate action of dance, song or mime.

Since the hour had come when the spirits need to be revived with drink, a meal began to be prepared which seemed to surpass every other in richness and extravagance. No course was brought in which was not preceded by some actor, mime or singer with a tale suited to that particular course, taken from a story of olden times and the dramas woven by the past.³⁵

Some of Calco's comments are brief, for example: 'Then Hebe, the daughter of Jupiter and his cup bearer, brought nectar and ambrosia from the table of the gods.'³⁶ For other scenes he expands on the mythological background.

Orpheus now relates that, when he was wandering in the Apennines, while his wife Euridyce was weeping at home, he heard echoing down the mountainside news of a magnificent wedding preparations, and, when he came down to have a look, birds had flown to the music of his lyre: he presented some of those he had captured.³⁷

Diana appears in order to carry on the venison dishes, that are disguised as the transfigured Actaeon. Jason arrives, then Iris...

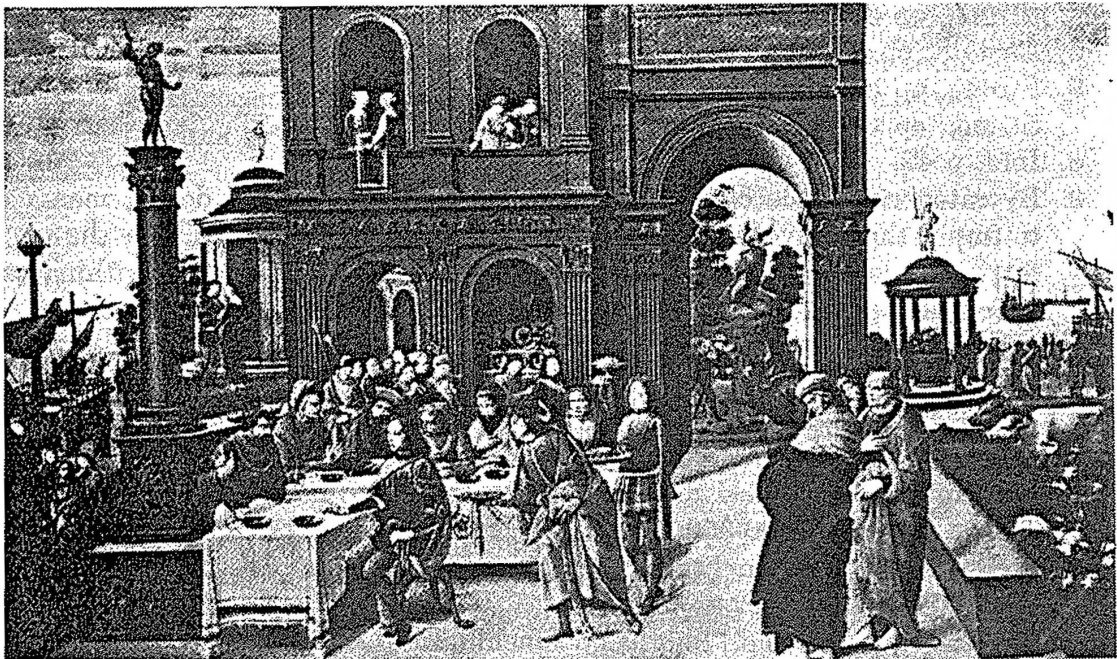
But when... a cooked peacock was carried in, Juno's messenger, Iris, preceding it, presented a chariot drawn by Juno's most beloved birds.³⁸

Note that this passage could equally apply to the 1475 celebrations at Pesaro. Obviously by 1489 certain favourite scenes were becoming standard. Similarly, it was felt that some allegorical scenes were more appropriate to wedding celebrations. Thus, the 1489 banquet ended with a series of scenes involving Hymen, Conjugal Faith, Renown, and other *personae*, all giving advice and praise to the young bride.

When the tables had been set, the story most suited to the present affair was represented. First Orpheus came in, attired in a Grecian costume and crowned with laurel; he summoned Hymen to his lute. Hymen entered with a crowd of boys decked out to look like Cupids as his retinue: they sang wedding songs in alternating choruses. Then three Charities, one of whom was girdled with a belt, took up their positions in a triangular formation facing each other, the last of them recited appropriate verses. Conjugal Faith followed them, covered in a white garment and carrying in her right hand a pure white leveret, and on her left a jasper ring, and indicating her favours with a glittering heart; she afterwards gave these to the bride. Mercury, designated by his winged shoes and rod, flew down from heaven; he brought in Renown. She was a winged virgin, placed between Virgil and Livy. Telling their powers and her own in a loud voice, she taught that she was always the messenger of good and evil equally. Next the Latin poet sang a song on the same theme. Then Semiramis entered, accompanied by a crowd of shameless women such as Helen, Medea, Cleopatra; they were beginning to display their crimes but Conjugal Faith silenced them and forbade that these sacred nuptials and chaste minds should be polluted and profaned by indecent talk: she ordered them to depart forthwith from the company. She roused up the band of Cupids against the insolent ones,

and they immediately made an attack on them with the extended torches which they wore girded on them, and with the burning brands they got rid of them from the banquet in a great uproar. They were replaced by a chorus of honourable women and those who were renowned examples of purity, Lucretia, Penelope, the Scythian queen Tomysis, Judith, Portia, Sulpicia; these, one after another, in songs from their own characters and lives, first commended purity and wifely chastity to the attention of Isabella, whom indeed it would not be right to desire more chaste, then, as they went off extolling chastity, each offered her palm to Isabella. Finally, an occasion for mirth was introduced gravely amongst the performances - Silenus came in on a crook-backed ass and, either intoxicated by the thing itself, or feigning drunkenness, he was overcome by drowsiness and made a fall from his mule in the midst of the sight of the people. These performances, done with the greatest skill and beauty, affected those standing by with agreeable enjoyment. But a great part of the night having been taken up in this way, they gave themselves up to lying down in their separate chambers.³⁹

In the passage just quoted, it is possible to see how a banquet could be described as a 'gastronomic opera'. Today, with the banquet viewed as mere amusement, we are entertained only by the comic element of an occasion. In the Renaissance, however, intellect was not neglected: at the banquet of 1489, all the different modes of drama were represented. Comedy was certainly there, with Silenus's fall from his ass; but so was the pastoral, as represented by Orpheus, Hymen and her Cupids, as well as the Arcadian Shepherds who brought in the cheeses sent by the god, Pan. The tragic, or serious, mode of drama involved homilies for the bride Isabella, by Conjugal Faith and Renown, as well as the defeat of the shameless women by the band of Cupids, and the subsequent entry of the chorus of honourable women, who, in their songs, commended purity and wifely chastity to Isabella.



CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of the musical banquet did not end with the fifteenth century. It continued to develop throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, being such an essential part of both the cultural and political life of the court. The drama of the musical banquet was finally presented as a fusion of all the arts of music, dancing, poetry, food, painting, sculpture, costume, and set design, to present a feast for all the senses, as well as the intellect, in a range of moods encompassing the tragic, the comic and the pastoral. It was regularly used by princes as an important instrument of public policy. And it is in Italy, in the last quarter of the fifteenth century, that we find the earliest modern records of what must have been at the time, marvellous and overwhelming occasions.

NOTES

1. Nino Pirrotta & Elena Povoledo, trans by Karen Eales, *Music and Theatre from Poliziano to Monteverdi*, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p 285.
2. Roy Strong, *Art and Power*, The Boydell Press, 1984, p 6.
3. Patrizia Castelli, 'La kermesse degli Sforza', in *Mesura et arte del danzare: Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro e la danza nelle corti italiane del XV secolo*, Comune di Pesaro, 1987, p 14.
4. Strong, op cit, p 22.
5. Castelli, op cit, p 15.
6. Strong, op cit, p 39.
7. Strong, op cit, p 28.
8. Ibid, p 42.
9. By categorising the celebrations into these four groups, I do not mean to imply that only one 'type' occurred at each celebration. Often the festivities lasted for several days, or even for two weeks, and within that time-span, all the four different 'types' of events would usually occur, sometimes more than once.
10. Strong, op cit, p 7.
11. For a detailed description of the changing nature of the triumph from Roman times to the Baroque, see Antonio Pinelli, 'Feste e trionfi: continuità metamorfosi di un tema', in *Biblioteca di storia dell'arte*, Torino, 1985, pp 280-350. See also Elvira Garbero Zorzi: 'Festa e spettacolo a corte', in *Federico di Montefeltro: lo stato, le arti, la cultura*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1986, pp 301-329.
12. See Gabriele Cazzola, 'Bentivogli machinatori. Aspetti politici e momenti teatrali di una festa quattrocentesca bolognese', in *Biblioteca teatrale*, vol 23/24, 1979, pp 14-38.
13. Ibid, pp 22-23.

14. Patrizia Castelli, "Quella città che vedere è Roma." *Scena e illusione alla corte dei Montefeltro*, op cit, p 336.
15. Clelia Falletti, 'Le feste per Eleonora d'Aragona da Napoli a Ferrara (1473)', in *Spettacoli conviviali dall'antichità classica alle corti italiane del '400... Atti del convegno di Viterbo 1982*, Viterbo, Agnesotti, 1982, pp 272-73.
16. For more information on tournaments, see Strong, op cit, pp 11-16.
17. Fabrizio Cruciani, *Teatro nel rinascimento Roma 1450-1550*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1983, p 11.
18. Falletti, op cit, p 273.
19. Emilo Faccioli, 'Scenicità dei banchetti estensi', in *Il Rinascimento nelle corti Padane: società e cultura*, Bari, De Donato, 1977, p 605.
20. For example the largest room at the d'Este's country palace of Belriguardo, was 83 *passi* long and 21 *passi* wide. See Werner L. Gundersheimer ed, *Art and Life at the Court of Ercole I d'Este: The De Triumphis Religionis' of Giovanni Sabadino degli Arienti*, Geneva, Librairie Droz, 1972, p 65.
21. For a description of the *sala maggiore* of the Bentivoglio *palazzo*, see Gabriele Cazzola, op cit, pp 23-24.
22. Elvira Garbero Zorzi, op cit, p 321.
23. In my own research, which is not exhaustive, I have compiled a list of over fifty occasions, from 1431 to 1502, when *feste* are recorded as having occurred, from Milan in the north to Naples in the south.
24. Present at this occasion was Guglielmo Ebreo, *maestro di balli* and author of a treatise on the art of dancing.
25. Castelli, op cit, p 19. The translation from the Italian original is the author's own.
26. Alberto Gallo, 'La danza negli spettacoli conviviali del secondo Quattrocento', in *Spettacoli conviviali dall'antichità classica alle Corti Italiane del '400...* op cit, p 262.
27. Zorzi, op cit, p 322.
28. Ibid, p 322.
29. Castelli, 'La kermesse...' op cit, p 25.
30. A mountain in these feasts had both a sacred and a secular representation; that is, Calvary and Parnassus.
31. Zorzi, op cit, p 25.
32. Castelli, 'La kermesse...' op cit, p 25.
33. The bridegroom was named Ercole: that is, Hercules.
34. See the article by Eugenia Casini-Ropa, 'Il Banchetto di Bergonzio Botta per la nozze di Isabella d'Aragona e Gian Galeazzo Sforza nel 1489: quando la storiografia si sostituisce alla storia,' in *Spettacoli conviviali dall'antichità classica alle corti italiane del '400...* op cit, pp 291-306.
35. Ibid, p 297. The translation of Calcò's Latin text is by Dr Deidre Stone.
36. Ibid, p 300.
37. Ibid, p 298.
38. Ibid, p 299.
39. Ibid, pp 301-03.



From the Symposium Exhibition of Australian Banquet Menus, organized by Barbara Santich. Reproduction by courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales

A VARIATION CERTAINLY ON DINNERS AND DINING-ROOMS, AND TOASTS, AND SPEECHES, IN EITHER ENGLAND OR IRELAND: COLONISTS AT CORROBOREES IN EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY NEW SOUTH WALES

Jaky Troy

Since nominating the title for this paper it has occurred to me that I could have used instead 'Symposia indigena' and created the analogy between our gathering at this Symposium to feast and drink and intellectualise (just as did the ancient Greeks who first coined the term) and the corroborees hosted by Aborigines and attended by colonists.

First identified as a Port Jackson word for 'dance' (Dawes c1790-1791), corroboree became the generic term used by Aborigines and colonists alike for gatherings of Aborigines assembled for the purpose of communal festivity involving a feast followed by drinking, social and intellectual interaction and entertainment in the form of dancing and singing. In that sense a colonial corroboree can be regarded as an indigenous Australian form of symposium. However, the aim of this paper is not to focus entirely on corroborees but to present to you evidence of intercultural contact of Aborigines and non-Aborigines through the medium of food and festivity in colonial New South Wales. It is through the eyes of non-Aboriginal observers that we must view this subject, as I have found no relevant records written by Aboriginal people for the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries.

The material presented here has been gathered as part of the research I have been undertaking for my doctoral thesis in the field of sociolinguistics. I am investigating the development of New South Wales Pidgin (NSWP) from the first colonial settlement by the British in 1788 to the turn of this century. This may seem to be a topic removed from gastronomic concerns. However, in order to understand the contexts in which NSWP developed, I have been collecting accounts of interactions between Aborigines and colonists. Therefore, information about Aboriginal festivities and feasting has formed part of my database because many colonists attended Aboriginal festivities and wrote about their experiences.

On a purely linguistic level, food terminology was an important part of the NSWP lexicon. A fascinating story connected with a food term entering NSWP was that of Bennelong coining the word 'The King' to mean 'wine'. He came to use this term and pass it on to other Aborigines through having been told to say 'The King!' every time he was given an after-dinner drink at Governor Phillip's table. Understandably, he thought 'The King' was the name for the drink, not knowing of the King as a person, let alone the practice of toasting his health. Even after it was all explained to him he persisted in calling wine 'The King' and other Aborigines followed suit (Hunter 1793/1968:460). The legacy of Bennelong's influence and evidence for the wide distribution of early NSWP can be observed today in the use by Aborigines at Roma in Queensland of 'The King' as a generic for alcohol (John Ward-Watkins, personal communication, January 1988).

The initial reaction of Aborigines to the colonists' foodstuffs was usually negative. However, this was well and truly overcome in the first decade of settlement and they became quite enamoured of bread, sugar, tea, alcohol and tobacco. Aside from food substances it seems food preparation was an issue that interested Aborigines and colonists alike. Governor Phillip provided a nice example of cross-cultural exchange in food preparation (1789/1968:48-9):

On the arrival of the boats at Port Jackson... one man in particular, who appeared to be the chief of this tribe... under the guidance of Governor Phillip... went to a part of the beach where the men belonging to the boats were then boiling their meat... he then went off with perfect calmness to examine what was boiling in the pot, and by the manner in which he expressed his admiration, made it evident that he intended to profit by what he saw. Governor Phillip contrived to make him understand that large shells might conveniently be used for the same purpose, and it is probable that by these hints, added to his own observation, he will be enabled to introduce the art of boiling among his countrymen. Hitherto they appear to have known no other way of dressing food than broiling.

Manly or Arabanoo was the first Aborigine to experience the festive food of the colonial 'high society'. He had the dubious privilege of being Phillip's first captive, detained to be imbued with the ways of the colonists and then to be used as catalyst for interactions between themselves and his people. Tench (1789/1979:142) described the scene:

1st January 1789. To-day being new-year's-day, most of the officers were invited to the governor's table: Manly dined heartily on fish and roast pork; he was seated on a chest near a window, out of which, when he had done eating, he would have thrown his plate, had he not been prevented: during dinner-time a band of music played in an adjoining apartment; and after the cloth was removed, one of the company sang in a very soft and superior style; but the powers of melody were lost on Manly... stretched out on his chest, and putting his hat under his head, he fell asleep.

While it never became commonplace for Aborigines to attend the Governor's table and high society festivities, colonists seem to have readily availed themselves of the hospitality of Aborigines at their corroborees. The participation of colonists in the festivities of Aborigines began within a few days of the First Fleet's arrival at Port Jackson. Collins (1798/1975/1:29) noted that a 'family' of Aborigines was regularly visited in a cove of the harbour 'by large parties of the convicts of both sexes on those days in which they were not wanted for labour, where they danced and sang with apparent good humour'. According to the colonists who attended them, corroborees were of varying sizes and held for many different reasons - spontaneously following a hunt and purely for entertainment; formally organised to welcome home young men following a stage in their initiation; to celebrate an abundance of food; or to collect people for the purpose of trading artifacts and cultural forms such as songs, stories and dances. It also became common practice for Aborigines to welcome colonial dignitaries to their countries with a corroboree. In 1821, on his visit to Wallis' Plains Governor Macquarie (1956:219) noted in his diary that 'Bungaree and his tribe [the Boan people] entertained us with a Karaburie after dinner, and we did not go to bed till 11 o'clock'.



Macquarie recognised that Aborigines made much of festivity, feasting and gift giving. He also recognised the growing dependence of Aborigines in and around colonial settlements, on the food and goods of the colonists. In 1817 he attempted to establish firm diplomatic relations between Aborigines and colonists by instituting an annual feast and blanket distribution at Parramatta, holding what was effectively a corroboree for all Aborigines wishing to attend.

At ten o'clock on the morning of Saturday, 28 December, the natives formed a circle in the market place at Parramatta, with the chiefs placed on chairs, and the rest on the ground in the centre of the circle, several large tables groaned under the weight of roast beef and potatoes, bream, and a large cask of grog, which... lent its exhilarating aid to promote the general festivity and good humour which so conspicuously shone through the sable visages of this delighted congress. (Clark 1979:315)

Governor Brisbane continued the feasts. The 1824 festivity was a particularly auspicious one, as it was the first at which the Bathurst Aborigines attended, marking the end of hostilities in that area.

About two the feast was served up. The various tribes... formed an extensive circle. Each chief was distinguished by the honour of a chair. The entertainment comprised 40 loaves, 22 monstrous large dishes of inviting roast beef, 13 massive plumb cakes, a huge cask of soup, several tubs of potatoes, and to sum up the whole a hogshead of three-watered grog! They partook of this abundance for about an hour, after which the "fair" sex providently filled their nets, and stowed away as much as it was possible to stagger under... We should remark that Saturday [leader of the Bathurst Aborigines] wore a straw hat, on which was affixed a label with the word "PEACE" inserted, besides a little branch representing the olive, which rather increased the interest as regarded him... When HIS EXCELLENCY retired from the scene after having gone repeatedly to each tribe, and attentively conversing with the various chiefs, the whole of the black throng arose, as well as they were able, and cheered the Donor of the feast. We observed the Bathurst forces were so intent upon paying becoming respect to the repast, that they considered one cheer quite enough. The number of visitors was particularly large as well as respectable; many of the first Officers of the Colony, Merchants, and other Gentlemen being present. It was quite a fair day though we beheld few of the "Fair" giving their attendance, for reasons too obvious to need explanation. (*The Sydney Gazette*, 30.12.1842, in Salisbury and Gresser 1971:36-7).

Evidently the feast fulfilled Macquarie's desire to create an occasion for interaction between Aborigines and colonists as it was well attended by both, although it seems the spectacle of Aborigines feasting and making merry was considered too 'indelicate' for women to attend.

I turn now from plum pudding and roast beef and cheers for the Governors to corroborees held by Aborigines. Food was also an essential part of Aboriginal festivities; they prepared for a major corroboree by collecting large quantities of big game, such as kangaroos and possums which were hunted by men. Large quantities were needed because an Aboriginal group would invite others to participate and they would play host to the visitors. The hunt preceding a corroboree was generally described as contributing to the buildup of excitement about the ensuing corroboree and enhancing of the festive atmosphere. Many non-Aboriginal men living in proximity to Aborigines liked to attend the hunts and were subsequently invited to the corroboree. The form followed was to cook and divide the proceeds of the hunt, first among the male guests (including any non-Aboriginal guests), then the male hosts and finally among the women and children attending. Speeches, dancing and singing began during the feasting and continued after it ended. In the reports by non-Aboriginal guests the most frequently remarked on aspect of the food was that the meat was consumed semi-cooked and tasted 'surprisingly' good. Colonists often commented on their reticence to try Aboriginal food and their surprise when they found it delicious. It seems Aborigines were keen for them to have the experience, as Threlkeld noted, in 1825, at Lake Macquarie:

from the middle of the vegetable substance [he] picked out several fine large maggots, commonly called cobra [shipworm], and ate them with all the enjoyment of a fine delicacy of the season! On expressing surprise at his eating such nasty looking grubs, 'Oh!' says my guide, 'all the same as oyster to you, and just as nice!' (Gunson ed 1974:155)

Representative of the fullest accounts of corroborees reported by colonists is that by James Graham, an emigrant from Ulster (in John Graham, ed, 1863:120-7). James and a friend attended a sequence of two corroborees near Bathurst, in the 1830s, which were held to initiate boys into manhood. The first was a 'gloomy' ceremony in which food had prescribed ritual significance, the whole event being 'a highly impressive and instructive lesson to the young men'. Following the ceremony in which each of the young men had a front tooth removed they were

led away into a district of the forest, far from every human resort, and there... compelled to live on certain roots, grubs, and reptiles, with perhaps, an occasional snake or opossum; being compelled to keep lent, after their fashion, by abstaining from certain proscribed game, especially from kangaroo.

The succeeding corroboree was held three months later at the end of the ritual isolation of the young men. They were welcomed with a 'jubilee corrobora' in which a feast played the important role of breaking their ritual food taboos - 'nature defrauded of enough repays herself by a surfeit'.

There was a grand hunt of kangaroos, emus and opossums, just before the end of 'the three moons,' and a great feast was made to welcome the young men. Their long abstinence was repaid by a carnival; just as that of the Turks, through Ramadan, is repaid by the mirth and indulgence of Beiram.

Feasting began and was accompanied with songs and dances composed for the corroboree, until the feasting ended and the singing and dancing took over:

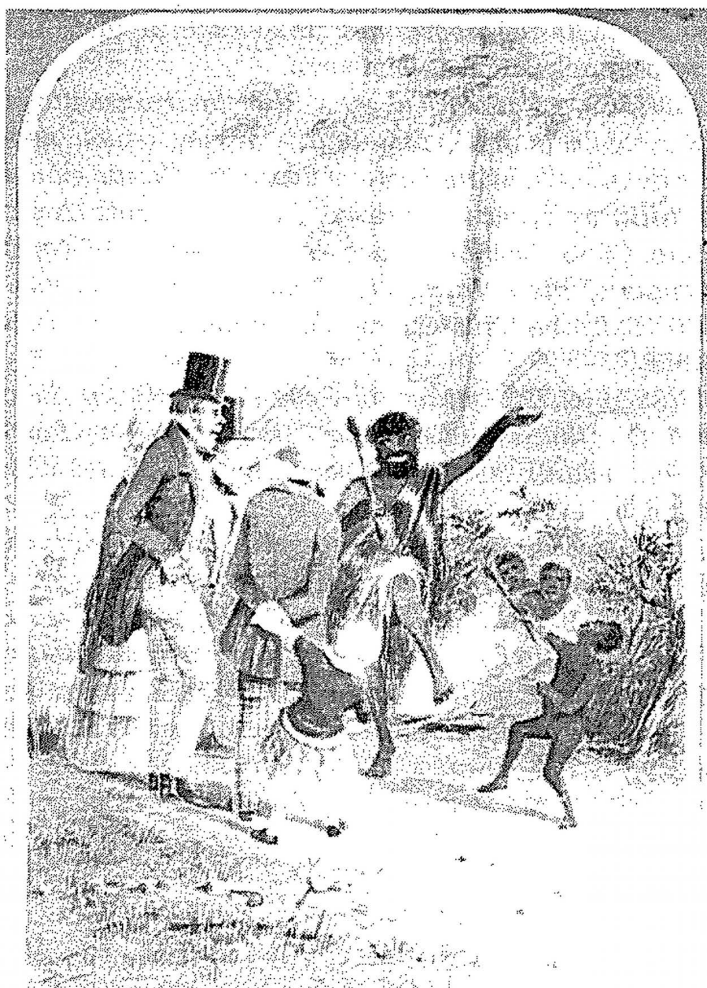
no dancing of stiff-starched gentlemen and strait-laced ladies, in conventional drawing rooms, had half the freedom or enjoyment of such a free dance, under the great forest trees, in the pure fresh air. Such a ballet... would bring down the house in Covent Garden.

The same young Irishmen attended a hunt and 'picnic corroboree' to follow at which the preparation and distribution of food was the focus:

The gins with their connois - long flat sticks which they always carry for digging roots, &c. - dug out four grave-like holes, in the bottom of which they laid flat stones, filled up with dry wood, which they burned till the pit was hot as an oven. They then cleared it out, and putting in the carcasses for dinner covered them up with hot stones and embers to stew. Roots were dug, grubs taken from the roots of a gum tree, calabashes were filled with water, and by-and-by the stewed kangaroos produced. And, oh! ye admirers of venison, what a meal was there! Such splendid cookery of venison I never saw before. The carcasses were cut up; the entrails and the fore-quarters, which are bony and dry, were given, or rather thrown, to the gins and pickaninnies, who ate at a distance; while the hind quarters were eaten by the sable lords of creation. One fellow I saw who dipped his calabash into the disembowelled trunk, and lifting half-pints of pure flesh-juice, cooled and drank it. A liberal distribution of tobacco set the

whole circle smoking, with little cane or grass-tree pipes. I saw a piccaninny in the net or narrabung on its mother's back, take her pipe and smoke like fun... Songs, and dances, and foot-ball followed... It was a strange situation, you will say, that in which we then were, - pic-nic-ing with savages in their own native wilds, and looking on at their pranks, and interpreting to ourselves, as well as we could, their post-prandial jokes. It was a variation certainly on dinners, and dining-rooms, and toasts, and speeches in either England or Ireland. Our dining-room was the forest, our dinner such as I have described, old Eagle-Hawk was our host, and did the honours, and his ladies gave us music by beating on opossum rugs stretched over their knees or rolled up between them, and by droning and howling their hideous songs, which had a kind of hoarse rhythm in them... They were most hospitable into us... (Graham ed, 1861:109-11).

In these days of increasing concern at the friction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, it is worth considering the other, happier points of interface between our respective cultures, during the colonial experience. As we gather at our Symposium, so Aborigines and colonists gathered at theirs, sharing feast and festivity in an atmosphere of oneness. Gastronomes I offer you some 'food for thought': the fact that, in the Northern Territory Aboriginal language Kriol, which is a continuation of pidgin, the word for 'together' or the 'same as' is *mijamet*, from the English 'messmate'. Perhaps if we all work at being *mijamet* - 'we all share in the one bread' - the friction will be eased and we can all be Australians together.



'The Newly Arrived'

From the watercolour by S T Gill, Dixson Library, State Library of New South Wales

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NINETEENTH-CENTURY PARTY FOOD MATERIAL EVIDENCE FROM THE POWERHOUSE COLLECTIONS

Ann Stephen

The exhibition entitled 'Never Done', now on display at the Powerhouse, is primarily concerned with everyday housework in which the preparation is basic, the technology simple, the food plain. This is particularly the case in the bush hut display. By way of contrast, we included a single display showing the moulds used in preparing elaborate Victorian party food: moulds for jellies, ices, ginger breads and sugar cakes. The level of elaborate preparation entailed in such food would have required a staff of servants with a sophisticated craft of food preparation. It is interesting that, in her introduction to 'Confectionary and Ices', Mrs. Beeton cautioned young ladies against too much concern for such dishes:

It is far more important to know how to boil a potato, to roast a joint or to fry fish than to be able to clear a jelly or decorate a cream; yet many girls will not try to learn the homely useful division of cookery.

VICTORIAN DECORATIVE MOULDS

In the display we show the decorative products of party moulds through illustrations from nineteenth-century English cookery books, where these puddings assume the appearance of fantasy architecture in miniature. In *Cassell's Household Guide* (1874), a chromolithograph shows the place of decorative jellies in a grand dinner, where even a dish of mashed potato has a moulded form.

On display in the exhibition are four types of moulds, each for particular kinds of food.

a. Pewter ice-cream moulds

The most elaborate desserts were ice-cream and sorbets prepared from cream, fruit juice, eggs and sugar blended together and constantly stirred in a freezing pot until frozen to a smooth stiff cream. The ice-cream was then transferred to a pewter mould, turned out, decorated and served. The exhibition includes pewter moulds for ice-cream in the forms of asparagus, a pumpkin and a 'baby in shell'.

b. Gingerbread and sugar moulds

Gingerbread was shaped in hand-carved wooden moulds and then glazed with sugar. There are four of these moulds carved in the form of animals - lion, donkey, sheep, and sheepdog - all of Northern European, possibly Flemish origin, dating from the nineteenth century.

c. Jelly moulds

Our jelly mould collection ranges from tinned copper and tinfoil in formal flower arrangements (which were available in all late nineteenth-century mail-order catalogues) to plainer moulds made by Wedgwood in ceramic. These were also produced in Australia, by Lithgow potteries, as well as in enamelled tin versions.

The different uses of these moulds is explained in an Australian household manual, as follows:

Earthenware moulds must be used for all mixtures containing acids or fruit juices, metal moulds may be used for others. All moulds should be dipped in cold water and drained for a minute or two, or brushed with a clear syrup or with oil, before the mixture is poured in, so that the jelly may turn out easily. Metal moulds may be plunged for a moment into hot water, or have a cloth wrung out of hot water placed round them to make the shapes turn out easily.

d. Boiled pudding moulds

Finally, we have for puddings, first, a heart-shaped mould with a cover, from the late nineteenth-century English maker, James Bros; and, secondly, a metal fluted pudding bowl advertised in the 1910 trade catalogue of the Adelaide ironmonger, Simpson & Son.

PARTY FOOD IN THE 1920s

By way of contrast to these elaborate Victorian utensils, the exhibition also illustrates the culture and artefacts of afternoon tea in the early twentieth century. Afternoon tea could be taken out, at one of the new tea rooms provided by department stores in the city; or it could be held at home. Essentially a 'non-meal', this became the most visible feminine ritual associated with eating and drinking, and it was celebrated in the still-life paintings of many women artists of the period, such as Bessie Gibson, Margaret Preston, Kathleen O'Conner and Grace Cossington Smith.

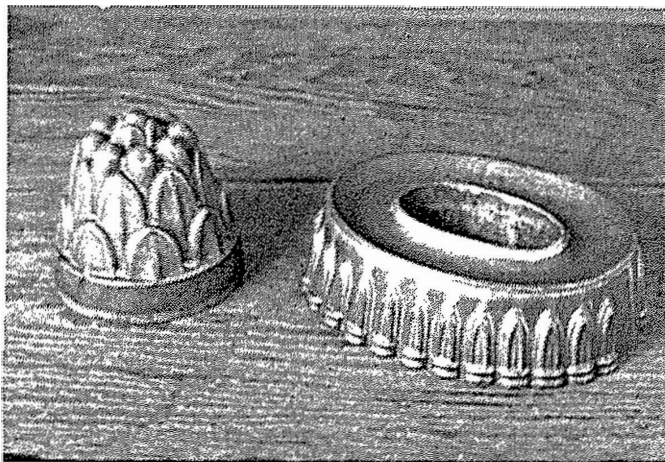
Of the objects in our display which were used for baking afternoon tea delicacies, some were hand-made, others produced by well-known local manufacturers of kitchen-ware, such as the 'Willow' and 'Kande' brands.

There are biscuit cutters made from a single ribbon of tinfoil that has been soldered to a tin sheet to take the form of a kangaroo, emu or horse. Other simple pieces of local folk art on display include wire-work cake stands, home-made. There are also cake mould trays and a sponge-cake tray made from stamped and folded tinfoil - probably the work of a local tinsmith. Compared with the Victorian pewter moulds, the workmanship here is quite rough and ready.

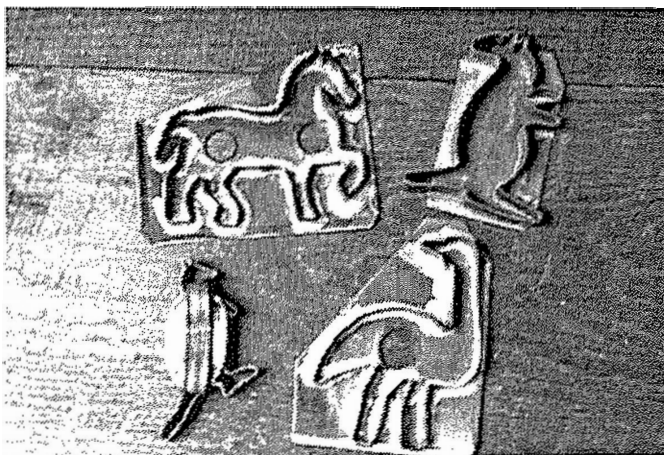
In *The Australian Household Guide* by Lady Hackett (1916), we find recipes for an array of dainty food to be prepared for a special occasion - 'An Engaged Girl's Tea'. These include Bachelor's Buttons, Coconut Rings, Napoleon's Kisses, Hearts and Darts, Sweetheart Biscuits, Love in Ambush, Passion-Fruit Cake and a Wedding Cake.

In his account of Australian food, *One Continuous Picnic*, Michael Symons has shown how international food manufacturers like Bushells and Nestlé's were active agents in this cult, encouraging women to produce dainty, labour-intensive delicacies. In publishing numerous recipe booklets which promoted their products, they were joined by government bodies like the New South Wales Fruit Board, which devised such wonders as 'eccles' cakes and a sago and currant mould for use of their products.

Most active in this sphere was the Sydney biscuit manufacturer Arnotts, whose advertising projected their product right into the heart of the tea party, offering the housewife 'a pleasing opportunity for showing her individuality in the form she serves them'. She was reassured that she could buy a packet of commercially produced biscuits and thus 'avoid kitchen drudgery without lowering the standard of her hospitality'. She no longer need even an apron, for all that was left for her to do was the fiddly task of decorating the biscuit with designs picked out in two-tone olives, eggs, capers and other fancy ingredients. As this display of culinary artefacts and traditions reminds us, the new emphasis on decorative presentation was to become a major feature of party food in Australia for the next couple of decades.



Tinned copper jelly-moulds (Powerhouse Museum)



Tinsplate biscuit-cutters (Powerhouse Museum)

THE PLACE OF DECORATED CAKES IN AUSTRALIAN FESTIVITIES

Bernice Vercoe

As a cake decorator, teacher, author, national and international judge of sugar craft, I am indeed honoured to be asked to speak at this Symposium, on the place of decorated cakes in Australian festive celebrations.

I have been addicted to sugar-work for the past forty years. My husband declares it is the first love of my life, with him running a poor second! I must admit that to be a successful decorator, one needs the support of family and husband; I have been fully enriched by both throughout my professional career.

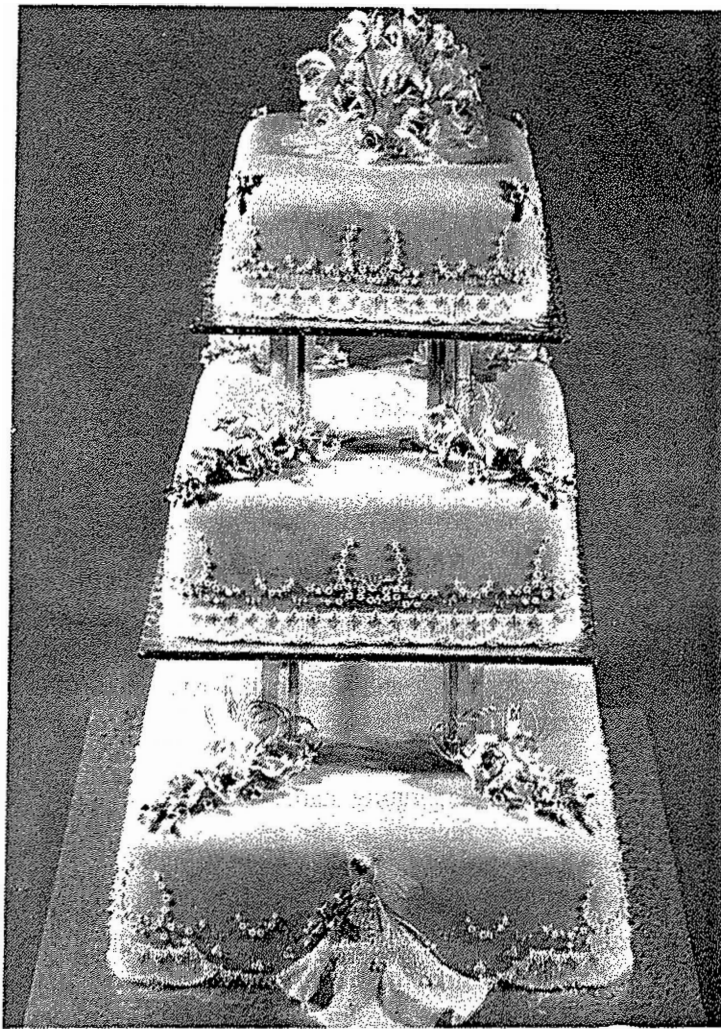
During these years I have seen cake-decorating standards rise from a commercial level to the high standard represented today by exponents of the art.

We have all had the experience of shuffling around the display cases of various agricultural shows, following large queues of people absolutely engrossed in the exhibits before them. It is by decorators such as these show competitors that Australia has become recognised for its sugar-art, throughout the world. Australians are known internationally as masters of the rolled fondant cover, and our extension borders - lace and embroidery piped from the finest of tubes - are yet to be equalled. To gain an even finer thread of royal icing we have resorting to inserting a piece of hypodermic needle into the tip of our fine tubes, to produce a thread of royal icing almost as fine as cotton.

Australia is a country that celebrates almost every special occasion with a festive cake. We are mainly a population of fruit-cake eaters: it is this rich fruit-cake that forms the base for most of our decorated cakes.

Just think of the numerous occasions we attend or celebrate every year of our lives! At certain times we have family cakes and seasonal cakes; then there birthday cakes for the children, teenagers and adults. Special importance is placed on the coming-of-age cake; and, as the key is the appropriate symbol here, cakes baked in a tin shaped like a key are always popular.

The engagement cake signifies 'Best Wishes' from family and friends to the loving couple for a happy future. Following soon after this happy event is the wedding: the cake for this occasion may be a single cake, if the wedding is small, or one of several tiers for a larger celebration. Befitting that day of days, the cake is usually given pride of place on its own special table, often placed beneath a spotlight, waiting for the big moment when the bride and groom cut the cake.



Three-Tier Wedding Cake



Mother's Day Cake

Two classic Australian cakes, decorated by Bernice J. Veroe and illustrated in her publication, *The Australian Book of Cake Decorating* (1973)

The next happy event to look forward to is the arrival of the baby and the christening cake. Some couples celebrate this occasion by cutting the top tier of their wedding cake; others welcome baby with a freshly decorated cake, usually featuring special motifs of bibs, booties, rattles, and tiny animals such as bears, rabbits or chickens as a design.

Later on, the children will share a first Holy Communion cake or Confirmation cake. As life-styles begin to develop and careers and professions are adopted, an ordination cake might be baked and decorated for those going into a religious order, or a graduation cake for those completing their courses of university study.

Overseas trips provide occasions for 'Bon Voyage' and 'Welcome Home' cakes. In both cases, Australian themes and emblems are always popular. Here we might also add to the list the various anniversary cakes of which the 25th (silver anniversary) and the 50th (golden anniversary) are the most popular.

In this, our bicentennial year, every state celebrated January 26th with an Australia Day cake. Most of these cakes were made in the shape of Australia and decorated with appropriate state emblems, such as hand-moulded wildflowers and native fauna - a fitting tribute to our country, culture and heritage, and indeed most suitable to the occasion.

We also celebrate our special seasonal days, each in accordance with the festive calendar. These include St Valentine's Day, Easter, Mother's Day, Father's Day and Christmas. I might also mention re-union cakes for schools, colleges, clubs and societies, as well as debutante's cakes for the 'coming-out' ball.

Many of these cakes will be decorated with painstaking skill, exhibiting some of the finest techniques in piping, moulded work and design, and showing that many hours of labour have been dedicated by the decorator to the finishing of the cake. Other cakes are less laborious, with frosting or buttercream decoration; some of these fall into the category of fun cakes. Many of these are made from a butter cake, chocolate cake, carrot cake or light fruit cake recipe, which do not have the keeping qualities of the rich fruit cake.

Today, there are so many books available on the art of cake decorating. These all contribute in their own way to suggesting ideas suitable for any special occasion.

In conclusion, I am sure you will agree with my saying that, 'We are a Nation which celebrates each and every occasion with a Festive Cake'.

AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC HOLIDAYS AND THE DISENCHANTMENT OF THE CALENDAR

Michael Symons

I have here a brief document which reveals much about the Australian gods. It is a copy of the South Australian *Holidays Act, 1910-1989*. This and similar statutes in other states close government offices and make some financial actions unenforceable on certain scheduled days. These scheduled days we can take to be the prime Australian festivals. The selection of festivals should tell us what we in this society take most seriously. The dates in the Holidays Act are:

The first day of January
The twenty-sixth day of January
Good Friday
The day after Good Friday
The twenty-fifth of April
The third Monday in May
The second Monday in June
The second Monday in October
Christmas Day
The twenty-eighth day of December
and Sunday

What these public holidays make sacred are: the European invasion of the continent, the foundation of the State, the monarch's 'official' birthday, the working-class's eight-hour victory, a military defeat, and a horse-race.

While some of these holidays are at least nominally Christian, they are also often secular, celebrating, in the words of Kapferer, 'legends of People' and 'myths of State'.¹ In other words, we inherit relatively few religious dates from traditional European society, and the rest belong to the modern, industrial nation-state. Compared with those of traditional society, modern festivals are restricted in number, restricted in popular involvement and restricted in meaning.

As an indication of how infrequent festivals have become, in traditional society - whether in China, ancient Rome or medieval Europe - the number of public holidays has been remarkably consistent, about one day in three.² The richly celebratory medieval calendar was eroded initially by the so-called 'puritan work ethic'. As Marx notes: 'Protestantism, by changing almost all the traditional holidays into workdays, plays an important part in the genesis of capital'.³ Extracting every ounce of labour, the early industrialists campaigned against public celebrations, drinking bouts, popular sports, and the worship of 'Saint Monday'.⁴

Striking examples of antagonism to traditional festivals include the French Revolutionary Calendar, which remained in official use from 1793 until 1806, and which abolished not just

all Church holidays, including Sundays, but the seven-day week. Each month comprised three ten-day weeks, each *decadi* or tenth day being a day of rest. The five remaining days of the year were proclaimed the Festivals of Genius, Labour, Actions, Rewards and Opinion.

The Soviet Union introduced a staggered five-day workweek in 1929. Workers had every fifth day off, but different days. The constant rotation of staff created bureaucratic difficulties and disoriented family and communal relationships. So, in 1931, Stalin decreed a six-day week with a common rest day. By 1940, the old seven-day week with Sunday holiday was restored.⁵ Likewise, the Chinese communists found 'too many religious festivals' and substituted a small number of new holidays, May Day, Red Army Day, etc.⁶ The fate of French, Soviet and similar reforms might seem to confirm the tenacity of traditional festivals. However, despite such instances, the general trend has been the steady rationalisation of the traditional calendar and the suppression of public festivals. Even our existing holidays are losing their hold; Sundays have largely become secular. Television interviews of the person-in-the-street 'prove' how little notice is taken of Labour Day, Adelaide Cup Day, etc. More to the point, large retailers have argued, with some success, for the de-regulation of shopping hours, so that they might open during weekends. In the name of 'economic rationalism', industry leaders claim that Australia has 'too many' holidays. Even in this year of celebration, truly public festivals are being made less numerous, less compelling and less significant.

The peak council of employer associations, the Confederation of Australian Industry, recently published a short document, entitled 'Flexibility of working time in Australia', which draws attention to 'certain traditional and outdated ways of viewing working life', notably the conventional working-week, and declares that the nation 'cannot afford the luxury of... these impediments'.⁷ 'Many industries by their very nature require work to be performed outside standard hours' (e.g. hotels) and... others require seasonal work (eg, the manufacture of tumble-driers outside summer).⁸ The report speculates upon such innovations as the 'annualising' of working-hours (calculating hours annually rather than weekly) and increased part-time, casual, temporary, job-sharing and shift work.⁹ In relation to festivals, it questions the existing penalty-rate system, which includes the payment of double-time for Sunday work, and double-time-and-a-half for public holidays.¹⁰

This argument was taken up more aggressively by the chairperson of the Business Council of Australia, Sir Roderick Carnegie, when he called for the abolition of weekends. The demise of the Great Australian Weekend, he said, was necessary to get greater use from buildings and machinery. 'Why work capital equipment five days a week and leave it idle for two days?' Carnegie asked. 'Others countries can't afford to do it, and we can't afford to give the world two days a week head start.'¹¹ Note that while he attacks Sundays, his use of the phrase 'Great Australian Weekend' seemingly targets not religious observance but the stereotype of the easy-going working-class. This is an example of how the New Right undermines groups like the Festival of Light, and yet manages to keep them onside politically.

As yet another example of the attack on weekends and other public holidays, the Australian Government's Committee of Inquiry into Tourist Shopping claims that we are missing out on an extra \$2 billion of retail sales through 'restrictive' trading hours. Only 28 percent of tourists were 'very satisfied' with trading hours, and so the chairperson, Mr Bevan Bradbury (who happens to be a former head of Coles-Myer), endorses Sunday trading for department stores.¹²

The logic of machines and of large stores is to keep working non-stop, and it seems this requires flexible working-patterns without penalty rates. While powerful employees might pretend not to be desecrating Sundays and other public holidays, they want every day to be ultimately equal to any other. They exert pressure, in the name of economic rationalism, towards the 'disenchantment' of the calendar, the robbing of days of meaning. I borrow the term 'disenchantment' from the great sociologist, Max Weber, who says in a typical use of the word:

As intellectualism suppresses belief in magic, the world's processes become disenchanted, lose their magical significance, and henceforth simply 'are' and 'happen' but no longer signify anything.¹³

This is the meaningless world confronted, as Anthony Coronos indicates in his paper, by Nietzsche.

Maybe the rich meaning of the traditional calendar was illusory. Perhaps we should accept that festivals are folkloric, superstitious hangovers, replaced over the past century by commercialised and privatised leisure activities. Perhaps the birth of Christ and the landing at Gallipoli should never have seemed so important. Or should we, as gastronomers, in some way justify public holidays? Maybe festivals have other, less obviously profitable uses. Maybe we should bring back meaning into the calendar.

Free time is plainly needed so that workers can return to work refreshed. But even if the hard-pressed workers of the early nineteenth-century needed breaks, does free time have to be synchronised as *public* holidays?

The 'hospitality' industry might be said to depend on the maintenance of the Saturday 'night on the town', the 'long' Sunday lunch, and annual festivals like Mother's Day and the 'end' of the year. Yet such employers have a somewhat ambivalent interest, since they have to pay 'punitive' penalty rates. More seriously, we could claim that public holidays provide something that money cannot buy, that is equally enjoyed by everyone.

There is also a pragmatic defence of holidays - their apparent universality.¹⁴ Boisterous festivals like Carnival are often said to 'release' pent-up energy which might otherwise be destructive. Sociologically speaking, shared festivals contribute to 'social cohesion', or 'one Australia', to use a current expression. Not only do festivals reinforce a common interpretation of the world, they facilitate a rhythmic pattern of activities.

But even if we can justify public holidays, can they be given special meaning again? What do we hold *sacred* any more, if no longer Christ's birth and death, the monarchy, the European invasion, military defeat in Turkey, or horse races? What should we celebrate?

We could answer that a multicultural Australia should uphold a range of other nation's holidays, including, say, Easter, the Chinese New Year and the Jewish sabbath. Indeed, every sub-group already has its own festivals. Like the society itself, festivals are now highly differentiated. Commercial interests sponsor festivals like Mother's Day. Then there are local and regional festivals like the Adelaide Festival of the Arts, the Grand Prix, the Barossa Vintage Festival, Aldgate's Autumn Leaves Festival, etc. (The Australia Council used to produce a calendar of such Australian Festivals.)¹⁵ I would include the Symposium as an

example of the diversity of new festivals. To these can be added personal and family festivals, such as the celebration of births, birthdays, marriages, deaths, etc. Indeed, with the precise registration of births and deaths, birthdays have become important individual festivals. While everyone used to have the same holidays, the annual vacation is now even taken alone or in small groups.

I think we should promote these private, small-group and community rituals. In this way a new festival calendar might even be built from the bottom up, as it should be. But as well as these pluralistic festivals of the post-modern or 'de-centred' society, I want to put the materialist case for festivals of universal meaning. I want to go further and claim that if we understand the real origins of festivals, we can rediscover the bases for any new set of public holidays.

The point is that what human beings enjoy and endure more fundamentally than anything else is the material realities of life and death, day and night, and the seasons. Social rhythms still have to synchronise with the natural rhythms of the earth (days), the moon (months) and the sun (years). When writing on 'Time for Repose', Brillat-Savarin recognised that 'the general laws imposed on the globe which we inhabit have perforce influenced our own patterns of living'.¹⁶ Indeed, I am struck by the extent to which time itself is linked with gastronomy. Having spoken of festivals during the Sung dynasty in China, Freeman concludes: 'Time and, thus, memory were suffused with impressions of food,.. Food was considered natural, in the forceful sense that it was linked to the grander flow of time and nature and, like nature, was constantly renewed.'¹⁷ In fact, I intend ambitiously to claim in my thesis that time is not a physical, not a metaphysical, but a gastronomic construct. I suppose it is obvious that we eat, work, house, clothe and sun ourselves according to the daily cycle. Similarly, we eat, work, sleep and clothe ourselves according to the annual cycle of the seasons.

Less widely-known is that the week is gastronomically-based. Throughout various cultures, there have been weeks of three, four, five, six, ten or whatever days. These have all, with very few exceptions, been organised around the market cycle. This includes the Christian week, borrowed by the Israelites from the Babylonian market week.

To help organise the activities which constitute our cuisine, we have created the concept of time. Within such a gastronomic interpretation, I regard festivals, certainly in traditional societies, as time-keeping devices. Festivals have traditionally marked out the market week and the seasonal year, dramatising the gastronomic cycles upon which our idea of time is based. We find that festivals have always celebrated human involvement in the inexorable cycles of production and consumption, and only afterwards have they been given religious significance. The intimate link of festivals with dining can be seen through consideration of Christmas and Easter, which are endowed, well before gaining their religious meaning, with culinary significance.

The trappings of Christmas belong to 'pagan' winter festivals: for example, the merrymaking and exchange of presents come from the ancient Roman festivals of Saturnalia (December 17th) and the New Year. With no certain tradition as to the date of Christ's birth, Emperor Constantine shifted Christmas to the winter solstice, to compete with the popular pagan festival. The word 'Easter' comes from the old English easter or *eastre*, a festival of Spring, just as

lamb, eggs and rabbits are not merely 'symbols' of spring but *are* spring. Again, the Christian festival derives from the Jewish spring festival of the Passover.

When the logic of economic rationalism 'disenchants' the calendar, it not merely neutralises religious significance, it ultimately robs the calendar of gastronomic meaning. The Australian cuisine is, as I have shown, predominantly industrial.¹⁸ We are so dislodged from agrarian roots that we suffer the peculiar inversions of holly without its berries, spring lamb six months from Easter and the ABC-FM announcer prattling on about the 'merry month of May'. But, being so alienated, we Australian gastronomers could be expected to be peculiarly attuned to the loss of gastronomic meaning of Christmas, Easter, etc, and thus inclined to think harder about modern festivals with a renewed gastronomic basis. Certainly, as gastronomers, we must defend the gastronomic institutions of festivals. After all, a 'festival' is a 'feast'. You might almost say that we should move to reinvigorate the unfashionable 'pagan sun-gods'. At least we should re-think our public holidays in terms of dining. We gastronomers must *re-invent the calendar*. We must restore its original and still basic meaning.

As usual, Brillat-Savarin has set a precedent, reserving our vernal equinox as the festival of his fanciful muse, *Gastérea*.

Feast days to the goddess are the same number as the days in a year, since she herself never ceases to pour out her blessings, but among these celebrations is one which is above all dedicated to her: September 21, called the gastronomical High Mass.¹⁹

To prove our theoretical point, if no other, we should argue for an antipodean Christmas in our mid-winter, and an Australian Easter in our spring. When we re-align festivals according to their gastronomic basis, we will confirm that, in the words of that ancient Epicurean speaking in the book of *Ecclesiastes*:

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; A time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal.²⁰

Or, as *Ecclesiastes* also puts it: 'It is God's gift to man that every one should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil.'²¹

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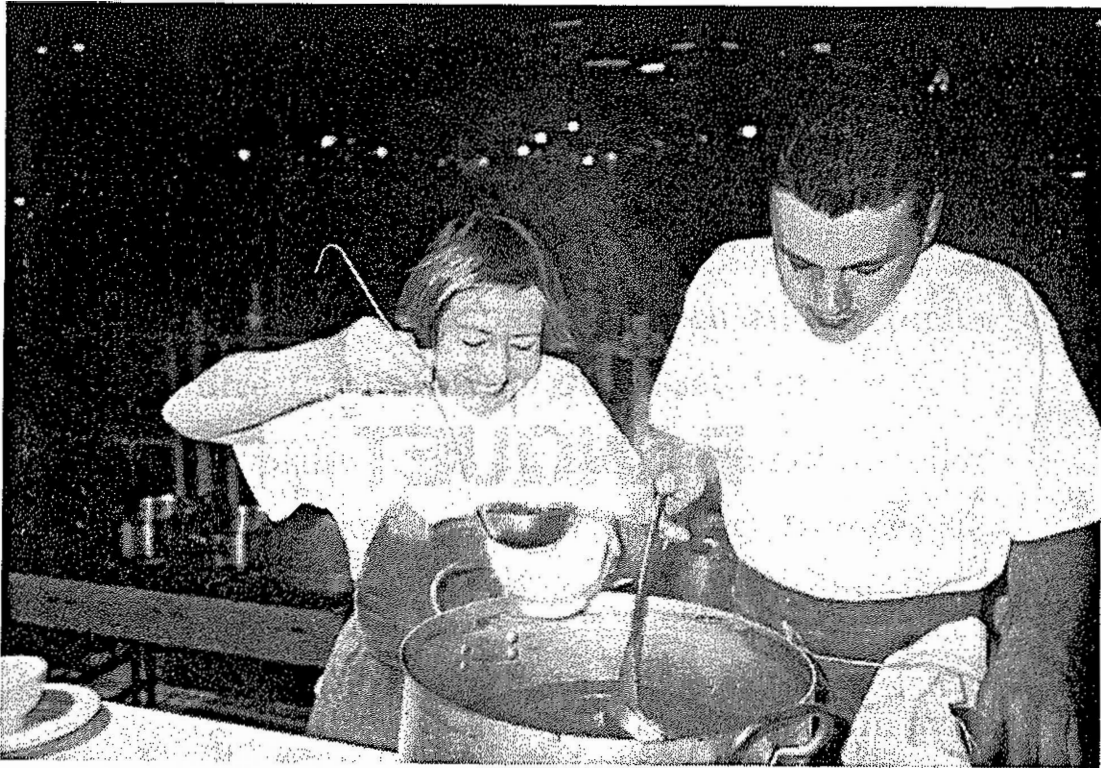
Le plaisir de manger est la sensation actuelle et directe d'un besoin qui se satisfait.

Le plaisir de la table est la sensation réfléchie qui naît des diverses circonstances de faits, de lieux, de choses et de personnes qui accompagnent le repas.

Le plaisir de manger nous est commun avec les animaux ; il ne suppose que la faim, et ce qu'il faut pour la satisfaire.

Le plaisir de la table est particulier à l'espèce humaine ; il suppose des soins antécédens pour les apprêts du repas, pour le choix du lieu et le rassemblement des convives.

BANQUET



I love the feeling in a theatre before a play starts or an orchestra begins, the palpitations before the curtain rises. I love my friends. I love art, it's taught me all I know about life.

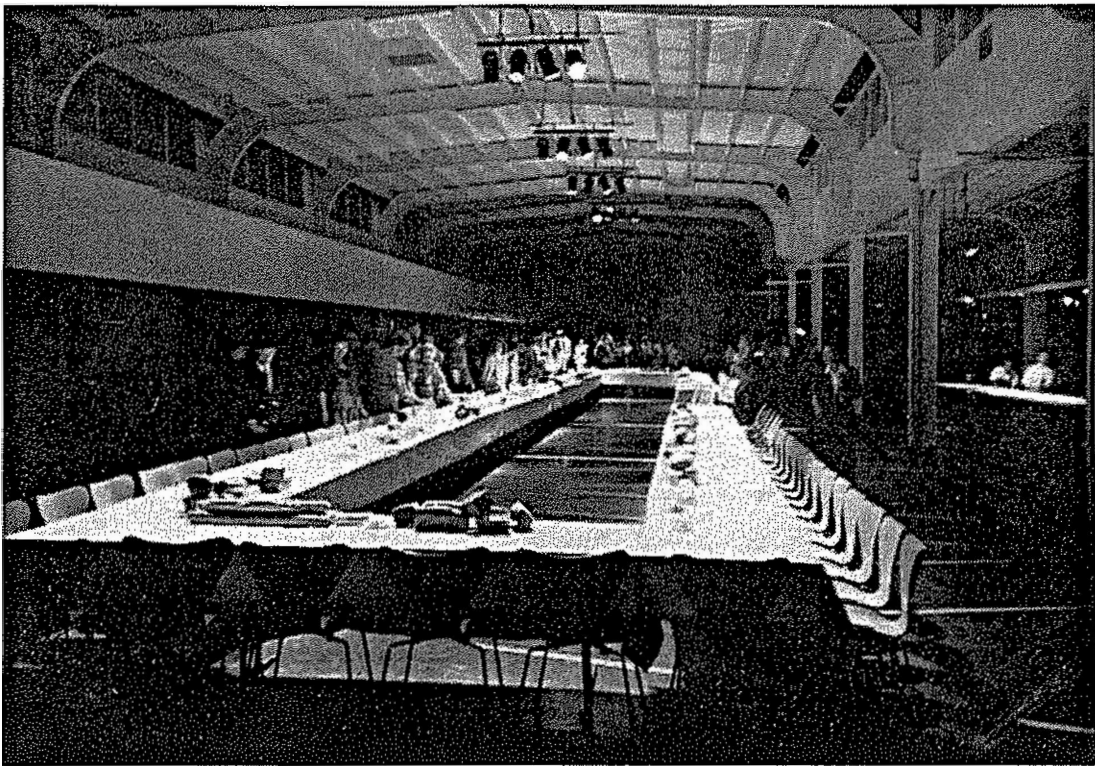
Lloyd Rees (1988)

Melanie looked for the sauce-boat. There seemed to be no potatoes.

Sybille Bedford, *A Legacy* (1957)

In life, as in art, much of what we accept is a barely adequate substitute for something we would rather have... The greengrocer's shop is crammed with colourful models, attractive vegetable rivals to those warm-blooded bipeds in blue jeans who lean provocatively against lamp posts... For sheer loveliness the fruit and vegetables win hands down...

Donald Friend (1985)



... The curious and mad public which demands of the painter the greatest possible originality and yet only accepts him when he calls to mind other painters.

Paul Gauguin



LOAVES

OYSTERS

PRAWNS

RICE

SALAD

HARE

SWEETS

PIES

PARTY



N.V. PIPER-HEIDSIECK
BARRIQUES OF
ADELAIDE HILLS CHARDONNAY 1988
COONAWARRA CABERNET MERLOT 1987
COURTESY OF BRIAN CROSER

FOOD IN FESTIVITY
FOURTH SYMPOSIUM OF AUSTRALIAN GASTRONOMY
PIER-13, PYRMONT TUESDAY 18TH OCTOBER 1988

IMPRESSIONS OF THE BANQUET I

Michael Dowe

Staging a banquet for a hundred gastronomers is a daunting task. Finding an exciting site is even more daunting. Gay Bilson chose an unused wharf to stage her *tour de force*. The harbour and the city skyline provided the backdrop to this vast space dominated by a squared-off crescent of tables bountifully decorated with an array of loaves of bread of various shapes, sizes and styles.

The menu read simply, *Loaves Oysters Prawns Rice Salad Hare Sweets Pies Party*. This was a meal devoid of any foodie fads, a meal of great originality. Despite the scale of the operation, it had no overtones of mass-catering; on the other hand, it was certainly not art-directed or earnest 'restaurant' food. And it had little to do with a meal at Berowra Waters Inn. It was a very personal meal, a meal with a strong presence of deceptively simple and robustly flavoured dishes - the sort of dishes which could just as easily belong at the domestic table. For this public stomach, it was a truly memorable banquet, a banquet praiseworthy for its simplicity.

Guests were greeted on arrival with the *Loaves* - glazed brioches filled with layers of eggplant, pesto, capers and red capsicums, and Sydney rock oysters, opened on the spot.

Once guests were seated, the *Prawns* arrived, a rich, dark, concentrated consommé of prawns with noodle-wrapped prawns and chives. The *Rice*, a creamy black risotto flavoured with squid ink, topped with squid meat and capsicum, was to prove the favourite dish of the night. The simple *Salad* of rucola, speck, croutons and poached egg followed.

The *Hare*, marinated and well-peppered fillets, was served seared and blue in a truly gamey reduction, accompanied by a purée of beetroot and tomato. The *Sweets* was to be the only time restaurant fare appeared at this banquet - the finest discs of *sablé* separated layers of a vanilla cream, poached grapefruit-like pomelo and slivers of the sugar-cured rind of the same fruit.

The meal finished with the *Pies*, old-English-style pies of minced fruit, sweet minced tongue and brisket, and aromatics, in an egg-butter-yeast pastry. Each pie bore a letter of the alphabet on top. Ms Bilson, always keen to blend literary pursuits with the table, had intended that all pies be arranged, in groups, with their letters spelling out Brillat-Savarin's definition of gastronomy. Even the best laid plans can go astray. And go unnoticed.

IMPRESSIONS OF THE BANQUET II

Barbara Santich

The announcement came with lunch: *Pier 13, 8.30 for 8.35.*

And promptly at 8.30, be-jewelled and bare-shouldered, we assembled at the wharf where once we had farewelled parents and friends, about to embark on the Overseas Experience. The air was still, as warm and smooth as velvet. We sipped champagne and engulfed oysters from an imperceptibly diminishing platter, as we gazed upon a remote illuminated city and an oddly foreshortened Harbour Bridge.

Inside the hall - decorated only by Gay Bilson's selection of quotations to do with the nature of cuisine and of art - we sat at tables arranged in the form of an open rectangle and garnished with loaves of bread, while we observed, on the one hand, the streamlined, sometimes frenetic, activities of the makeshift kitchen, and on the other, the primitive ritual of siphoning wine into jugs from large barriques.

It might be argued that tradition demands a musical component in the banquet, as in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century prototypes. But Gay Bilson's interpretation stressed simplicity, the banquet unadorned, and offered instead the theatre of the kitchen. The modesty of the *carte* was in total contrast to the extraordinary degree of finesse, in all the dishes: intensity and richness in the prawn consommé; butteriness of the squid risotto; texture contrasts in the roquette-croustons-poached egg salad; harmony of crisply-seared hare with a beetroot and tomato purée; subtle delicacy of the dessert pastries. If there was a statement in this banquet, it was understatement, as if Gay Bilson was saying that the genius of Australian festivity lies in excellence, not ostentation; and that festivals evolve with recognition of what is basic to our culture.

BANQUET REVERIE

Michael Symons

From the relative solitude of the Hawkesbury River, Berowra Waters 'Out', as it was renamed, shifted to the passenger terminal at Pymont's Pier 13. Instead of a cliff of angophoras, the nation's greatest restaurant offered a view across Darling Harbour at skyscrapers.

Exactly 104 symposiasts gathered on an elevated, dockland forecourt to be served champagne, freshly-opened oysters and slices of brioche loaves with a rainbow of Mediterranean flavours. Eventually a roller-door opened into the long departure lounge, and the lights came up on a white rectangle of tables. Everyone was to sit on the outside, facing in. Those who had attended Phillip Searle's banquet at the original Symposium would have remembered the arrangement, then suggesting a circus ring for a parade of dishes.

This time the main focus of attention was to be the six cooks, who were standing ready behind their makeshift serving bench in a gap in the tables, stirring big pots and polishing plates. They were to slave behind their instruments like members of a noiseless rock band.

Dozens and dozens of loaves had been scattered on otherwise bare paper-covered tables, and in a noticeably generous gesture, Bilson's fancifully dressed eleven-year-old daughter, Sido, distributed the menus. These announced with exemplary brevity:

LOAVES
OYSTERS
PRAWNS
RICE
SALAD
HARE
SWEETS
PIES
PARTY

The *Prawns* came in the form of a broth with wontons. *Rice* turned out to be squid-ink risotto with tentacles on top.

Salad was my favourite course, green leaves straight from the field, with chopped toast, bacon and egg. Who else would ever have contemplated serving one hundred perfectly-poached eggs? Gay spooned them from a large stainless-steel bowl, where they had been held just-cooked.

A small audience had gathered by the time the team sliced the seared fillets of hare, to be served (according to Michel Guerard's recipe in *Cuisine gourmande*) with a beetroot purée. Janni Kyritsis threatened to 'plate' the meat even faster than the queue of waiters could deliver it.

Then the production-line served *Sweets* - layers of biscuit, cream and lemon - and finally, with coffee, tiny alphabet mince-pies - proper mincemeat with beef in it and macerated months (the secret taken from one of Gay's favourite texts, Paula Peck's *The Art of Fine Baking*).

The letters on the pies were meant to have spelt out Brillat-Savarin's definition of gastronomy ('la connaissance raisonnée de tout ce qui a rapport à l'homme, en tant qu'il se nourrit'), except that Gay had left the quotation at home and none of the gastronomers could remember it.

Throughout, Berowra's eight white-shirted waiters worked quietly and meticulously, some of them assigned to pour jugs of attractive young white and red wine and, lastly, a tokay.

Just as the menu had been terse, there was no chef's post-dinner explanation (something that adds to Stephanie Alexander's important dinners). Instead, on long sheets of paper blanking off the distant end of the hall had been scrawled a half-dozen quotations from painters like Lloyd Rees and poets like Giacomo Leopardi. Typical was a cry against

the curious and mad public which demands of the painter the greatest possible originality and yet only accepts him when he calls to mind other painters
(Paul Gauguin)

By now it was midnight, the sound system was finally switched on and extra guests were arriving for the party. Most of the diners drifted away, satisfied by two-and-a-half days' eating and talking; but Gay, characteristically, had invited the city's restaurant workers to rage on.

This has been the practised attention to a thousand subtleties, from the timing of the risotto to the placing of the spotlights. This lovingly-prepared meal had been as great as any of us ever experience, justification in itself for the Symposium.

So much was obvious; but the dinner also created an unusual and utterly memorable mood. We had eaten in relative silence, our appreciation muted. Instead, the banquet itself had spoken worlds, providing so much to take in, and arousing, at least in this supplicant's breast, reverential sentiments.

Why was the contemplative atmosphere at this banquet so immeasurably removed from what so many outsiders would have expected, such a contrast from any of the stereotypes of medieval feast, gourmet blow-out or foodie indulgence?

For a start, the very lack of music and the damping acoustics of the vast space encouraged quietude. We were also subdued by a sense of place, first on the lost harbour viewing platform and then in the long hall, so that the occasion reminded one of us of the enormity of leaving on her first European adventure.

Then there were the table arrangements. Placing all the diners on the outside of a large rectangle not only encouraged us to pay attention to what was happening but restricted conversation to immediate neighbours.

The Berowra team went about their various tasks with their customary lack of fuss, which might be said to border on devotion, so that even fleeting merriment could seem jarring.

This calm meal was, in fact, humbling, putting me in immediate touch with all the vast processes of the temporary dining hall, the seemingly effortless kitchen, the city and even the heavens beyond.

To now justify this, I should begin by stressing how much the banquet was reduced to the essentials of good food, carefully presented.

The banquet seemed especially minimal in the light of our high expectations. For instance, appetites had been whetted by the exhilarating, stand-up supper the previous evening at the Oasis Seros restaurant.

Reminding us of his artistry at the original Symposium, Phillip Searle poured onto his long, paper-covered table more than 200 boned quails, stuffed with black and wild rice, wrapped in lotus leaves and baked in clay. Diners broke open the packages with hammers, leaving debris strewn like an historic midden. When Searle snuck out to have a look, we broke into long applause.

The menu had then promised a 'chequerboard of star anise ice cream, pineapple sorbet and licorice'; in other words, probably Australia's most celebrated restaurant dish. However, this version turned out to be 'hyper-real', about a metre square and borne in on a marble bier.

Anticipation had likewise been aroused by those Symposium papers, directed to the theme of *Food in Festivity*, which had featured conspicuous courtly consumption, food as architecture, as edible pyramids. In particular, Graham Pont had championed what he termed the 'opera gastronomica', a work reaching a peak at Versailles, requiring armies to stage and combining all the arts, especially food and music.

And over the preceding months we had heard rumours about Gay seeking sponsors for a lavish banquet at the Hordern Pavilion costing around \$500 a head, and about which ABC-TV would make a documentary. In the event, she rejected both ostentation and one-upping pyrotechnics in favour of a simplicity which was shocking.

The point was, however, that rather than focus on the products of the individual 'chef's art', Bilson demanded that we watch her team at work - indeed, Berowra Waters 'Out'. At this undistracting banquet, we were made witnesses to true creation, to collective ladling, slicing, stirring, piping and flinging hands away from red-hot surfaces. We were invited to celebrate the kitchen. And the kitchen, thus demystified, was even more exciting.

Under full-steam, a kitchen shares the strength and purpose of an ocean-liner, whose place these cooks had indeed taken at the passenger terminal. In turn, just over their shoulders was an even mightier machine, a metropolis in profile and in close-up, so that the cooks' energy

seemed to be repeated in the backdrop.

We were made even more aware of each of these awe-inspiring powerhouses by their being ironically counter-balanced, on the opposite side of the tables, by two oak barriques. From the barrels were drawn fresh Petaluma wines, even before being bottled for the market. This was particularly suggestive for me, since I sat with my back to the city I had left and facing the wine grown within walking distance of my home in the Adelaide Hills.

So there was drama at Pier 13, created by the unveiling of the kitchen, and its magnification in ocean-liners, harbours, cities and beyond.

And there was music. Not aristocratic chords and dances. But there was the rustle and murmur of diners in a spacious hall. There was the effortless sound of Australia's best kitchen powering along. Behind them, there was the interminable roar of the city. And beyond that again, there was the 'music' of the spheres.

The full authority of the meal came to me early next morning, during the hour before dawn when firstly fantastic notions bubble to the surface and then it almost becomes possible to lie in tranquillity. I recognised in the reverie of the previous evening these occasional times when, at the glimmerings of sunrise and the first rumble of the city, it almost seem possible to hear the sound of the earth rotating.

We gastronomers greet this 'harmony of the spheres' as the origin of our daily round and the seasons, as the orchestrator of our energies, as the foundation of our cultures. This and similar motions give rhythm to social life.

So, the kitchen was proudly demonstrated in this banquet as a microcosm of the total life processes, as the pivot of both the natural and the social machines. This banquet was not a work of high art, nor an entertainment with food too. Instead, it was the elemental ritual of preparing and sharing. It was a committed display of production and consumption.

In all religions, the meaning of a feast has been the same, the affirmation of people's fundamental accord with the world. We had heard philosopher Josef Pieper so quoted during the Symposium, along with Karl Kerényi's statement, 'to celebrate... is the union of peace, contemplation and intensity of life.'

But where this has usually been given supernatural interpretation, here was a feast of the material world. This was the banquet of real bread and wine.



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