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Introduction: Cookbooks: writing, reading and publishing culinary literature in Australasia

Cookbooks have recently attracted considerably scholarly attention for what they have to offer to the study of food and gastronomy. Cookbooks also feature in discussions about popular culture, gender and media, history, literature, ethnicity and national culture for the insights they provide on a range of subjects. This collection brings together a series of case studies which demonstrate different ways of looking at writing, reading and publishing cookbooks through the lens of different themes: culinary culture and gastronomy; historical perspectives; cookbooks as popular culture; and writing, publishing and selling cookbooks. Taken together, these articles reveal how cookbooks provide a range of insights into everyday life and community relationships. Equally they show that cookbooks are a wonderful example of material culture; they have historic and social value that make them important in both institutional and personal collections. The focus on Australasian examples makes a distinctive contribution to food studies as well as to food writing in our region.

At the same time as cookbooks are attracting an enthusiastic readership, they are also attracting both new and established writers to the form. Coming from a range of backgrounds – including culinary, literary, scholarly, scientific, journalistic and other areas – these contemporary cookbook writers include a diverse range of subject matter in their cookbooks. This ranges from all aspects of culinary matters to politics and environmental sustainability, history and human relationships, as well as the many other aspects of social and cultural life that can be addressed under the broad umbrella of ‘food’ as a topic. These authors’ writing styles are similarly diverse, including those with a very literary inflection, to others with a scholarly modulation or more journalistic and popular tone. In common with many other non-fiction writers, these authors are also often extremely flexible, varying their style and tone to match the requirements of the cookbook in question.

Taken together, the collection establishes cookbooks as a rich resource for Australasian culinary heritage and culture, and taps into the rich interest in writing, as well as reading, cookbooks. While the publication of texts on cookbooks internationally indicates the readership and interest in the subject (see, for instance, Bower 1997, Driver 2008, Humble 2005, Neuhaus 2003, Theophano 2003), the exclusive focus on cookbooks in Australasia distinguishes this collection. A recent issue of *M/C journal* on the theme of ‘cookbook’ that we edited (see, Brien & Wessell

2013) attracted a significant number of articles, including international contributions, and this new collection complements those articles.

Each author in this collection has written to their own area of expertise and we have designed the collection so that each paper stands alone as a case study that demonstrates the potential of cookbooks for an understanding of an aspect of the culture of the past or contemporary moment. These authors include experienced cookbook authors, editors, publishers and sellers, as well as experts in culinary culture from all fields. Draft papers were presented and workshopped at a symposium held at Central Queensland University in Noosa on Australia's Sunshine Coast on 2012, where participants also completed a food writing project, producing a cookbook in a day. This volume of cake recipes, edited by Jillian Adams and co-editor of this special issue, Donna Lee Brien, contained the memories and recipes contributed by the participants and was framed with the findings of a group discussion on the topic.

The value of contributing to a cookbook (as well as a special issue of this journal) was the joy and challenges it provided that gave us far more empathy for the cookbook writers we feature here. We spent at least an hour debating (and laughing about) the use of abbreviations, how to lay out the ingredients and method on the page, and indeed, core definitional issues such as what a cake actually is. The definition we settled on was 'always welcomed.' We hope you welcome this collection of papers, all of which show how much cookbooks reveal beyond the recipes they contain.

This collection is opened with a piece by prominent food historian and writer, Barbara Santich, on cookbooks and culinary culture. Santich grounds this collection by discussing how cookbooks, as collections of recipes, represent an ideal source of information on culinary cultures – but that their study can also lead to wrong conclusions. Fortunately, Santich explains, researchers have at their disposition a diverse range of written resources, including fiction and popular media, to complement the interpretation of cookbooks.

Bronwyn Fredericks and Rodney Stoter move back and forwards in time, with their piece on Aboriginal Australians and how they use, and can utilise and write, cookbooks. They explain that, following colonisation, many Aboriginal Australians have lost their connections to traditional food preparation practices and, given this context, describe a newly-emerging focus on reintroducing native foods and how cookbooks can be instrumental in making native foods accessible to all Australians

Following these framing articles, the papers are arranged roughly chronologically in order of topic, although the nature of this research means that some range across timeframes. Starting with early Australian cookbooks, Charmaine O'Brien presents new research on Hannah Maclurcan, while Blake Singley analyses the cookbooks of Wilhelmina Rawson. Moving forward to the end of the 19th and early years of the 20th century, Alison Wishart reads between the recipes of Flora Pell's *Our cookery book*, while co-editor of this issue, Adele Wessell, uses both this text and Mary Gilmore's *The worker cookbook* to discuss the place of women's work in Australia's transition to modernity.

Lorna Piatti-Farnell relocates the discussion to New Zealand where she reads the *Edmonds cookery book* as a popular icon. Staying in New Zealand, Gail Pittway discusses Maud Basham, known as ‘Aunt Daisy’ as that country’s first multi-media celebrity, linking her cookbook production to her other creative work.

Jillian Adams focuses on the work of the Associated Country Women of the World (assisted by the well-known Country Women’s Association) as activism, in particular focusing on a cookbook the association produced to promote world peace. Toni Risson traces cookbooks of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s to chart the relatively slow progress of Greek cuisine across the Australian culinary landscape, also providing insights about the meaning of ‘Greek food’ in Australia and on the impact of Greek cooks on Australian cookery.

While Rose Williamson provides an important and long-needed survey of prominent magazine *The Australian women’s weekly* cookbooks, which are often overlooked in favour of analysis of the content of the magazines, Sarah Black focuses on community cookbooks as a similar expression of Australian lifestyles and values.

Co-editor of this collection, Donna Lee Brien writes on the cookbooks of Maria Kozslik Donovan, who was writing from the mid-1950s, while Susie Khamis moves us to the contemporary cookbook, and how Julie Goodwin, an ‘ordinary’ cook achieved extraordinary success through the popular television show, *Masterchef Australia*.

A number of our contributors take highly creative approaches to the topic of cookbooks. Sandra Burr reflects on the evolution of human-animal relations in Australia through the lens of this small but significant body of Australian published cookbooks for pets. Rachel Franks describes food, cookery and cookbooks in fiction, Barbara Doran on how cookbooks and cooking have influenced her art and other work, while Jen Webb and Vanessa Harbour discuss food, cookbooks and the act of what they call ‘not-eating’. Barbara Russell completes the issue by reflecting on her experience of sourcing cookbooks for scholars as well as many others, describing her journey from cookbook admirer to cookbook seller.

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Adele Wessell is Senior Lecturer in History at Southern Cross University. Her recent publications include co-editing with Donna Lee Brien a special issue of M/C Journal on the theme of 'Cookbook' (2013), with whom Adele also co-founded the Australasian Food Studies Network, an online network of food scholars and other interested individuals and groups. She is currently engaged in a project with the Landed Histories Collective on biographies of land related to changes in food production. (see, <http://www.landedhistories.org>).