

James Sherry

## MENUS A CLEF

This book is dedicated to all my former friends and to Deborah Thomas for having thought of this book and being a good egg about letting a more famous artist do the drawings so that we can sell more copies.

Blurbs for back cover:

"No way."--Mad Magazine

"Eat this."--MFK Fisher

"Eat me."--Mimi Sheraton

"Probably no one will publish this because they don't seem very tasty to me."--Author's Mother

## PREFACE

It has struck me of the serious and immediate need for this book to expand our awareness of the unseen, untasted, and untasteable in culinary experience. Too many cookbooks have been written solely for the recipes, forcing the cookbook reading public to see cooking only as it relates to eating, to the physical body, and not as it relates to the self, the, if you will, inner body.

In the *Philosopher in the Kitchen* Brillat Savarin describes a brawl he had on a riverboat in the American wilderness where the mere mention of truffles raised the hackles of one of those ruffians of whom Walt Disney and John Ford have been so fond. Of course, the brawn of the American was no match for the master's tenacity, Savarin promising to die, himself, if it was necessary to drown his antagonist and truffle-hater.

But this is the great cook's idea of philosophy. I am sure in his other writings he was able to articulate some more subtle arguments and certainly his understanding of the art of cooking and eating surpassed the standards by which most judge, yet the cookbook writing somehow bogged down in cookery, so to speak, not feeding the larger person.

Poetry, speaking as it does to the five senses as well as to other less palpable ones, is ideally suited to addressing the topic of cooking entirely. Language poets, as opposed to poets trying to versify prose, in particular, not content to languish in the idiom of the heart and the emotions, felt, true, deeper, creative, adjectival imagination, being today's poets and being the poets I know best and perhaps least likely to take umbrage at this slight deviation from the doctrinaire which I might make in order to clarify for the novice just which part of speech we are cooking and begin a parboiled letter writing campaign against me personally.

Not that this is not true of other American and significant poets of today who true to the standards of American democracy allow freedom of expression as the first tenet of their constitution and would never dream of questioning whether an individual might have a valid alternative to the politics which the use of words puts in our mouths.

After writing the first draft of these recipes, I sent them to the poets from whom they are plucked.

Dear Fellow Poet, (I wrote)

Enclosed is your recipe, part of the *Language Cook Book*. Please feel free to revise it as you would like. Keep in mind that this is my book not yours and if your revisions do not in my view reflect an amplification and exaggeration of your theory / character / poetry / politics (projected or actual) then I will ignore your suggestions as well as your lawyer's phone calls, summonses, and subpoenas except in so far as they will add to hyping and attracting

audiences to this volume soon to be published as a mass market paperback in Japan where they appreciate a good laugh.

I have eliminated your names except in the cases where you gave me permission use the possessive of your name in the title of each recipe. I have since of course heard that my dear friend Douglas Messerli is soliciting recipes from writers as well and I hope his effort will not prevent you from being mad at me that he is doing this.

One of the less honorable members of the group suggested I footnote which ingredients or functions of your recipe were added or amended by you in order that we can produce a second (authoritative), annotated, scholarly, variorum edition, hardbound to sell at even more outrageous prices to academies and libraries sucked into the neo-franco-frankfurter mode by squeaky professors.

In any case, let me know what you think.

Sincerely,

James Sherry

Early readers of this book, have said this is not cooking. Anyone can do this. It's just messing around with food. I advise them to read the Crackers without Cheese recipe carefully for a rejoinder and that messing around with food is not for the uninitiated and you should not try this at home.

## CRACKERS WITHOUT CHEESE

This recipe was derived from the famous Kung Pao concoction "For the Birds" which used fortune cookies. It is also related to the Tibetan cure for Herpes Zoster, usually transmitted to Vadraryana monks by their habit of french kissing yaks for enlightenment.

The charge that this is not cooking at all is answered in Engles' letter to Marx, "What is cooking? Cooking is the application of labor to food and non-food ingredients to accumulate

them for the diner." The charge that this dish is finally not eaten by humans can be dismissed as speciesist, because food only passes through humans anyway on the way to the cosmos, and because no one ever thought to problematicize the assumption that people had to eat using their mouths. This is a feast of restraint.

(serves God)

- I Box of crackers with shortest ingredients list on box
- I Starched, white, folded table cloth
- I High stack of dinner plates (more than 10)
- I Book of matches

Spend several weeks during which you are also getting married, starting a new business selling commercial air conditioning, training for the marathon, and writing the definitive tract on the "Barthes Brothers" during hours on the clock no one has yet dreamed of, researching the cracker question. Put the clean starched, white table cloth on the table. Keep it folded up. Put the stack of dinner plates in the corner of the table and the book of matches on the topmost dinner plate.

Remove crackers from box. Place box off center on the table. Lay out crackers in neat rows on the table cloth so that no cracker touches any other. Stare intently at the crackers without moving them or you for 157 minutes. Get up suddenly and leave the room. Come back later and throw the crackers out by the bird feeder. Write a long dissertation attacking everything and everybody in your vicinity revealing your self-hatred.

## BALONEY SANDWICH

White boys eat white bread and so on. There is no real need to explain this recipe which is a time honored American favorite even though Bologna might be an Italian city. The ingredients are intentionally bland, because although the dish is advertised as radical it is in fact only virtual radical, since any real spice be it culinary or emotional is too threatening and only the implication of spice will suffice.

(serves self)

- I container prepackaged bologna (liverwurst may be substituted)
- I loaf enriched white bread (must contain only "correct" [ingredients])
- I jar light yellow mustard
- I grey or green flecked with gold formica top kitchen table with [galvanized legs]

Spread two or three slices of bologna on the table. Spread them as far apart from each other as they can be without seeming to be moved simply to the edges of the table. A useful hint is to draw a margin within the edges of the table about four to six inches from each edge and place the slices wholly within that margin. Really you are using the center of the table around which to rotate a series of ellipses, but only the words margin and edge should inform the way you speak about positioning. Keying off the center is inevitable (STP), but questionable.

Radicalize the bologna by tearing off the plastic skin. If no plastic skinned lunch meat is available, don't tell anyone and try to make the meat look as if it had a skin and you tore it off to make it more easily used by an eater you imagine is too dumb to know either that bologna is skinned or not or how to peel it if it has a skin. Place two slices of bread equally far apart as the bologna so that the pieces of bread are unrelated to each other or the bologna.

Note: this may necessitate moving the bologna configuration, but it is necessary to totalize the structure with every change while posturing a community-based theory. Spread the mustard, using a sharp pointed steak or long bread knife to avoid charges of instrumentality, on the side and legs of the table. If the table has leaves, pull the leaves out but not before spreading mustard between the leaf and the body of the table. Spread mustard correctly rather than liberally.

#### Eating Bologna Sandwiches Out:

If eating this dish in a restaurant, eat each ingredient separately, by deconstructing the sandwich. Make sure you taste everyone else's food at your table while scoffing at the other tables in the restaurant. Whip out your pocket calculator and figure out how much the sandwich cost. Do not add your percentage of the tax into the kitty as a protest against the way taxes are allocated. Subtract from the total the difference between the waitress' salary and a first-year lawyer's salary. Put down exact change and leave before anyone else can add

up their share, saying you have to go to an avant-garde plumbing/dance collaboration and only the first 17 people who arrive with their calculators, subtly explaining why you carry the thing around to restaurants, will be admitted.