

Invention of the Modern Cookbook

SANDRA SHERMAN



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SANDRA SHERMAN



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PREFACE

Like most books that emerge from someone else's suggestion, this was almost a different book. When Greenwood approached me to write a history of American cooking, I almost agreed. But as I thought about the project and my interest in British cookery, I wondered whether the fit was right. After some back and forth, however, I realized that the *pre*-history of American cookbooks is totally British and that to understand how the American cookbook developed we must think of it as initially Anglo-American. Once I came to that realization, *Invention of the Modern Cookbook* became a perfect fit. This book explains what makes a cookbook a cookbook—something that may not always be clear—and traces those qualities back to their British originals.

I have been interested in old cookbooks for more than ten years, ever since I began researching a book about eighteenth-century poverty. That book, *Imagining Poverty: Quantification and the Decline of Paternalism* (2001), demonstrated that the crisis of the poor in late eighteenth-century Britain was largely a food crisis. When I read cookbooks for the poor, I was sometimes aghast. When I read cookbooks for the rich, I knew that I had to study the whole genre. I spent a year at Cambridge University reading hundreds of texts, an astonishing trove that barely had been touched. I discovered women's domestic manuscripts—the culinary memory of country houses—and their connection to print just blew me away. I have been writing about cookbooks ever since.

Of course, no matter how much scholarship one piles on, there is a subjective element in explaining phenomena that one finds exciting. When I wrote my first book, *Finance and Fictionality in the Early Eighteenth Century: Accounting for Defoe* (1996), I admitted that Daniel Defoe was my hero. This book does not have heroes, but it has two heroines: Elizabeth Raffald, author of *The Experienced English Housekeeper* (1769), and especially Martha Bradley, whose *The British Housewife* (1756) challenged the matrix of cookbook norms. As you will see, Bradley lives on in twenty-first-century genre-bending culinary texts.

One further personal note. Lurking beneath this foray into cookbooks is *Julie & Julia*, the 2009 box office blockbuster. As I wrote this book, I realized that the eighteenth-century cookbook reader was a lot like Julie—young, urbanized, with no one to turn to for advice. *Invention of the Modern Cookbook* is about how cookbooks learned to address Julie's Georgian predecessor, offering recipes that she could understand and providing uplift while she struggled. I felt an instinctive camaraderie with that reader, and I expect that you will too.

This book is for anyone who loves cookbooks and who reads them seriously even if they never cook. Julie had a whole trunkful, and most of us—who really do not cook—still cannot resist picking one up. So I hope that if you read *Invention of the Modern Cookbook*, cookbooks will be even more fascinating and decidedly more fun. Actually, I hope that you will see them in a new, literary light, totally worth reading apart from the cuisine that they present.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Indiana University Press for permission to quote from my article, “Printed Communities: Domestic Management Texts in the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of Early Modern Cultural Studies* 3, no. 2 (2003): 36–67, and Duke University Press, for permission to quote from “‘The Whole Art and Mystery’ of Cooking: What Cookbooks Taught Readers in the Eighteenth Century,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 28, no. 1 (2004): 115–35.

I also thank my friends for listening to me carry on about celebrity chefs, intelligible recipes, and the explosion of generic norms. Phyllis Spaeth listened even with a broken wrist. Ann Rakoff looked up from her eternal spreadsheets. Heather Dubrow confirmed my sense that genre theory was crucial, even before I suggested that it was. Amelia Uelmen and Yael Mandelstam sacrificed lunch hours to my obsession. Tom Kaczorowski, who collects antique toy cars rather than old cookbooks, turned eighteenth-century woodcuts into gorgeous digitized image files. My boss, Prof. Hugh Hansen, gave me a wide berth. Indeed, were it not for the kindness and resources of Fordham Law School, this book would not be.

I also thank my editor, Wendi Schnauffer, for her indulgence. This may not be the book that she expected . . . but it is not what I expected either. I learned a lot as I went along, especially during those weekend mornings at Barnes & Noble that turned into afternoons. Cookbooks are energizing, and I want to convey their excitement.

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INTRODUCTION

This book starts from the premise that cookbooks in English—like the English novel—have a distinct, peculiarly eighteenth-century history, and that during that period they assumed a “modern” form that still dominates the skillfully edited, heavily marketed texts available today.¹ The relationship that English speakers have with the cookbooks they own—that they read in bed, take to the supermarket, or have at their elbow while the blender is running—is not that much different from the relationship envisioned by eighteenth-century authors intent on making their own texts indispensable. *Invention of the Modern Cookbook* argues that early English cookbooks were designed to captivate readers (as novels did) and that, as a consequence, their authors had to learn to communicate so that readers felt comfortable, trusting, and eager to remain involved.² But unlike novels, which promised nothing more than a good time and occasional moral uplift, cookbooks had to convince readers that laboring in the kitchen would produce tangible, successful outcomes on the way to even greater success. Both were purveyors of fantasy, but only one genre had to deliver verifiable results.³ Cookbooks had to convince readers that they would be better for relying on them, a complex enterprise that turned their eighteenth-century authors into pitchmen, psychologists, cultural arbiters, and cultural authorities. This book explores how that happened.

* * *

“American” cookbook history begins in 1796 with Amelia Simmons’ *American Cookery*, opening up an immense terrain that

Invention of the Modern Cookbook does not survey.⁴ Instead, this book examines the rise of what could be termed the Anglo-American cookbook, that is, a genre that becomes mutually recognizable on both sides of the Atlantic, spurred in part by American imports, reprints, and pirating of English texts during the eighteenth century.⁵ Thus, the real history of avowedly American cookbooks unfolds in England, beginning just after the Restoration (1660) and ending around the turn of the nineteenth century.⁶ American cookbooks have deep English roots, and the story of what is considered a “cookbook” is English until it becomes Anglo-American.

This story is not primarily an account of specific recipes or types of preparations—though many of these naturally crossed the Atlantic—but rather of textual strategies, ways of communicating with readers that ultimately defined the genre. It involves how English cookbook authors learn to teach cooking, an art that almost from the beginning was passed down through real-time demonstrations and hands-on apprenticeships.⁷ Indeed, one old confectioner apologized in advance for his text’s limitations:

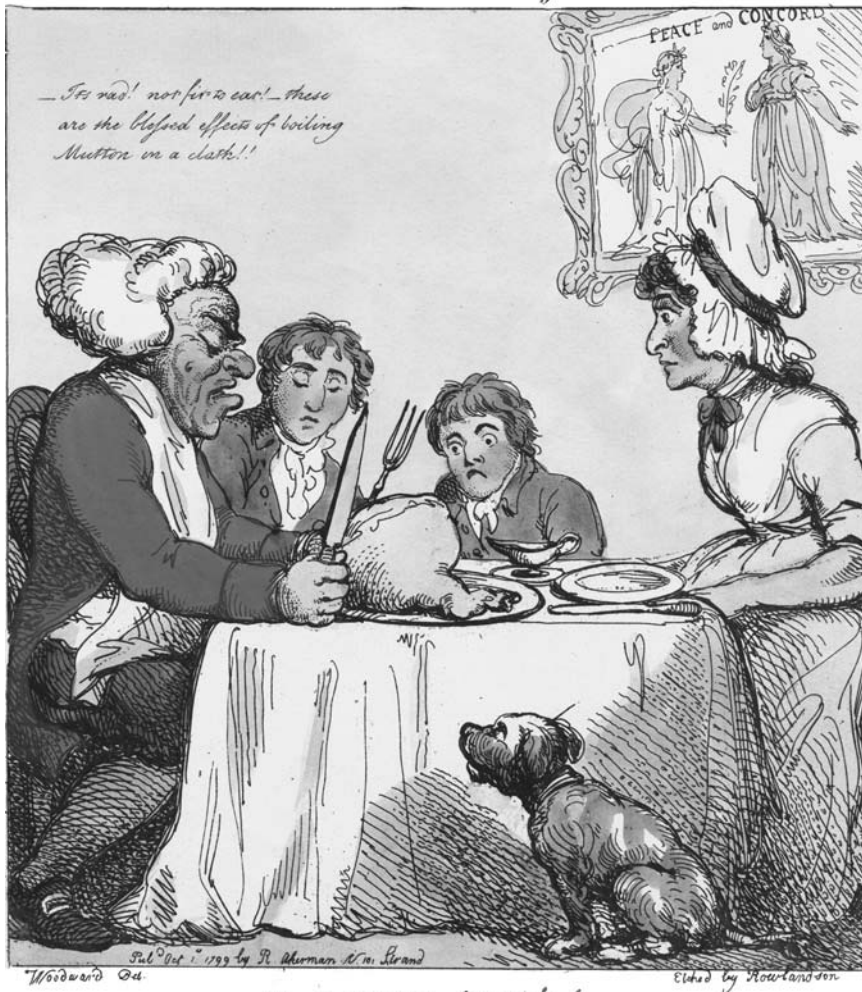
As the Old Saying is, It is Use that makes Perfectness; and no Person can do with a Pen, that your seeing and observing shall do; for, if so, then all arts would be easily obtained; and, What needed Seven Years Apprenticeship?⁸

Such self-reflexivity, touching on the limits of the genre and indeed of language itself, ultimately would find its place in novels. Laurence Sterne’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, which appeared between 1759 and 1767, satirized the narrative capacity of novels by never getting past the hero’s childhood. English cookbooks, like English novels, were at times uncomfortable with themselves and with the limits of print to communicate directly. They struggled with contradictory visions of themselves, at points asserting pedagogical competence, while also carefully limiting their claims and advising readers to Practice, Practice, Practice.

Yet if hands-on experience was the ideal case, and authors had no measure of readers’ individual situation, what assumptions could they make about readers’ general knowledge and abilities? How did cookbooks finally replace in home-cooks’ esteem the handwritten collections of recipes and remedies that they personally had adapted in consultation with friends and family? The history of cookbooks is an important chapter in the History of the Book.⁹ Concomitantly, cookbook

Matrimonial Comforts

Sketch 1

*The DINNER SPOIL'D!*

"The Dinner Spoil'd." (Courtesy of The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.)

history opens into cultural history, providing entry into an array of phenomena: domesticity, class, health, urbanization, nationalism, a changing food supply, and the effect of colonialism on developing tastes.¹⁰

More than any genre of their time, eighteenth-century cookbooks were self-promotional. They were artifacts of the market, rivaling novels and chapbooks as the first truly mass-market texts. Cookbook

history, therefore, is tied to the expanding book trade, where booksellers developed techniques to enhance books' circulation.¹¹ Indeed, cookbooks were often avatars of larger promotional ventures—for taverns, nurseries, catering establishments—that centered on farming and food. Most boisterously, during the eighteenth century, cookbooks became vehicles for celebrity chefs. While many late-seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century cookbooks were aimed at professional cooks in upper-class households, subsequent cookbooks registered the growth of markets and the middle class; they reflected the notion that keeping up with the best and latest was of crucial importance.¹² Indeed, as artifacts of the market, cookbooks were not above scaring readers into making a purchase. Amelia Chambers' *The Ladies Best Companion* (1780) raised the specter of domestic and even economic ruin should the reader's skills be deficient:

It is well known, that the woman who is ignorant of cookery is neither qualified to be a mistress or a servant; for the dressing of victuals . . . is so essential a part of female education, that those who neglect to acquire some knowledge of it, labour under many difficulties in their advanced years.¹³

While few people now consider cooking “essential” to success in life, anyone might still consult a cookbook on those occasions when cooking looks to be fun, adventurous, or perhaps a strategic imperative (how about *Recipes for Romance* from the *Epicurious* editors?).¹⁴ The only trick is to find the right text. Yet, for all the ways that cookbooks can coddle one's individuality, they actually are astonishingly similar. That similarity—and how modern cookbooks attained it—is the subject of this book. *Invention of the Modern Cookbook* therefore addresses the fundamental question of what a Modern Cookbook is. This introduction briefly describes its characteristics; subsequent chapters discuss their development. The last chapter discusses how cookbooks are now breaching the limits of the genre and taking off in new directions. This development was also foreshadowed in the eighteenth century.

CULINARY AUTHORITY

When a reader randomly chooses a cookbook from hundreds at the bookstore, she expects that the recipes have been tested; that they work; that they will not poison her family. She even assumes that

the recipes taste pretty good. Thus, even if she is not persuaded to buy the book, she does not ordinarily question its authority, its reliability. The development of authority (or rather the appearance of authority) during the eighteenth century was a foundational element in printed cookbooks' ability to supersede domestic manuscripts, and it has remained central—if more subtly touted—in these old cookbooks' modern descendants. Returning to questions of authority in different contexts in successive chapters, *Invention of the Modern Cookbook* examines how print culture deployed many of the features of manuscript culture to replace that culture, creating texts in which readers could have even greater trust. Print texts created a kind of immediacy, an expanded intimacy that manuscripts lacked, giving readers the sense that authors were there with them, guiding them, urging them through the challenges of learning to cook.

Authors claimed to feel readers' anxieties—to anticipate their needs—as if such authors had the type of affinity with readers that characterized manuscript culture. The Preface to Charlotte Mason's *The Lady's Assistant* (1773) observes that, on account of personal experience, she understands that loneliness in the kitchen can be debilitating:

The great inconvenience, I experienced, on commencing mistress of a family, from the want of such assistance [i.e., “instructions for



“The Business of the Kitchen” (Courtesy of The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.)

Regulating a Table”], has since prompted me to attempt a set of bills of fare, which, I flatter myself, will be of great use to ladies in general, but particularly to the younger part of my sex, who, on their entering into life, may not have those advantages which arise from instruction, as well as from practice, and are greatly at a loss how to conduct their table with that decency and propriety which are much to be desired.

The cookbook appeals to a need and suggests that help is at hand. It projects empathy, and by that same token, an awareness of readers’ precise needs. It claims an ability to know just how to help, and rests its seeming authority on just such precision.¹⁵ Cookbooks, therefore, take up where manuscripts leave off, imitating but also outdoing them in the amount of detail that recipes can provide. The development of niche cookbooks constituted yet a further step in this direction. Cookbooks aimed to convince readers that they contemplated an individual, particular reader (the one reading the text), an illusion that modern cookbooks cultivate through an array of devices that simulate intimacy.

INTELLIGIBLE RECIPES AND COMPETENT INSTRUCTION

Although cookbooks can be difficult and demand that readers use complex techniques (think of boning that duck in *Julie & Julia*), readers still expect cookbooks to be intelligible. That is, a recipe should have all the elements that enable a reader to understand it, and envision herself making it without outside help. Ingredients must all be listed, along with measurements. Directions must be step-by-step. If a recipe requires that other recipes also be prepared, for example, a steak with Bearnaise sauce, such other recipes must be provided, if not within the main recipe then by reference to a page in the text. When recipes are not clear, modern readers complain—targeting authors, publishers, or the blogosphere—and take down a recipe by proposing their own.

Such complaining, however, would not always have jibed with readers’ expectations. Initially, cookbooks were not user-friendly, and their authors assumed that readers had, or had access to, more culinary information than their recipes provided, or they did not adequately consider the reader as a cognitive subject. In time, however, print culture learned to respond to the new, urban, solitary reader, who for lack

of an instructional community, required the type of culinary self-sufficiency that a book, if well crafted, could provide.¹⁶

Detail became a source of authority, creating a metadiscourse in some texts as to which text best addresses the intended audience. Texts such as *A Collection of above Three Hundred Receipts in Cookery* (1724) touted their own pedagogic competence:

The Directions relating to COOKERY are Palatable, Useful, and Intelligible, which is more than can be said of any now Publick in that kind; some great Masters having given us Rules in that Art so strangely odd and fanatical, that 'tis hard to say, Whether the Reading has given more Sport and Diversion, or the Practice more Vexation and Chagrin, in spoiling us many a good Dish, by following their Directions.¹⁷

Cookery went on to conjure an even more frightening scenario, designed to make a reader blanch as she considered some competing text at a book stall that she might haplessly carry home:

But so it is, that a Poor Woman must be laugh'd at, for only Sugaring a Mess of Beans; whilst a Great Name must be had in Admiration, for contriving Relishes a thousand times more Distasteful to the Palate, provided they are but at the same time more Expensive to the Purse.

In the eighteenth-century cookbook, cognitive dilemma is depicted as domestic drama, that is, the befuddlement of having no one to explain things, including the author of a text one had relied on. Raising the fear of such dilemma became a marketing strategy, sowing distrust even of the very chefs—the Great Names—who had captured timorous readers' trust.

Throughout the century, cookbooks battled each other over pedagogic competence, casting doubt on the genre even as they claimed to transcend its limitations. Such constant sniping betrayed a self-consciousness among authors (or at least their publishers) regarding the ability to deliver instruction. Yet what matters is that readers of eighteenth-century cookbooks ultimately did acquire a level of competence, at least insofar as readers were able to understand the recipes, albeit after a few befuddling tries.

COMPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

While the earliest cookbooks contained scant material instructing cooks in basic techniques, marketing, table-setting, and avoiding

household poisons, by the mid-eighteenth century, cookbooks learned to reassure readers that they would not be abandoned in a domestic vacuum. Such books situated themselves in the reader's midst, anticipating and answering questions, defining concerns (will I be poisoned by a chipped pot?) and setting out rules of propriety (how do I set a table and arrange the guests?). These cookbooks offer encouragement. They intervene in defining gender roles; ways of serving the poor, the sick, and those on voyages at sea; how to stock a pantry; and how to resuscitate spoiled meat. They explain new spices and provide menus. If readers need to truss a goose, *The Lady's Companion* (1753) demonstrates how, complete with an illustrated diagram. If the flour is possibly adulterated, *The London Art of Cookery* (1792) advises as follows:

To detect the adulteration of flour with whiting or chalk, mix it with some juice of lemon or good vinegar. If the flour be pure, they will remain together at rest; but if there be a mixture of whiting or chalk, a fermentation, like the working of ye[a]st, will ensue. (439)

Cookbooks establish authority by becoming indispensable to households bereft of guidance. Like assurances of intelligibility, the provision of complementary material calms domestic jitters. Even the arrangement of some books—month by month, instead of by culinary category—offers readers a type of calming instruction, demonstrating the household's connection to the garden and, ultimately, to nature's ineluctable rhythms.¹⁸ Seasonal menus, which become commonplace along with month-by-month tables of seasonal ingredients, underscore this connection. As populations shift toward urban areas and become increasingly remote from food production, such instruction becomes increasingly important, guiding readers toward what to buy in large urban markets. While encyclopedic books of household management become less relevant to households in London, Leeds, or other urban centers, aspects of these books are reincorporated in cookbooks, making them more useful to urban dwellers no less puzzled by how to stay healthy or plan a monthly menu.

CELEBRITY CHEFS

Domestic manuscripts had no conventional "author" since they were handed down within families and were written in by members of the household and community known to the manuscripts'

owners. They were noncommercial artifacts whose authority inhered in the mutual acquaintance of the parties who inscribed them. They were amateur texts. By contrast, print texts—produced by unknown experts, at a distance from readers—develop authority by foregrounding authors, allowing them to take over the authorizing function of manuscripts' communal mode of inscription. Such texts allow authors to comment on recipes, talk about themselves, and make their presence immanent. Readers are made to feel that authors are guiding them, imparting the fruits of their years of experience. "Experience" becomes a touchstone, frequently touted on a book's title page. The Celebrity Chef—Mrs. Raffald, Hannah Glasse—was born, taking over from one's mother or aunt and doing her one better. Finely etched portraits adorned many texts—Mrs. Raffald grew older and younger, slimmer and fatter, as edition followed edition of *The Experienced English Housekeeper* (1769). Bewigged representations of Francis Collingwood and John Woolams graced the front pages of *The Universal Cook* (1792). Even where authors remained relatively unobtrusive, they touted their associations with famous personages, reassuring readers that what pleased these cooks' patrons would serve readers as well.

"Puffery" became a much-satirized practice, as supposedly disinterested third-party praise rained down on consumers. The eighteenth-century publicity machine was celebrity's eagerly complicit handmaiden: "Newspaper advertisements puffed [the] 'latest' books by those said to be the most skilful or up-to-date authors. No educated or polite of fashionable reader could afford to be without the new works, and yet, assured the advertisements, everyone could easily afford to buy them."¹⁹ Such ads glamorized the cookbook author and made their status seem achievable, as if the reader could—with practice—achieve an equal level of skill.

Yet notwithstanding what others may have said about them, celebrity chefs brought a fascinating self-consciousness to culinary literature, in that they wrote at length in their texts about what "celebrity" actually means—could extreme ability (with which they credited themselves) transcend "experience" and be passed down through generations? The proclivity of celebrity chefs to think about their status was a singular development, one still profoundly in evidence in the long biographies and appended celebratory essays that appear in new high-end cookbooks that assume a devoted fan base. Parallel to the immanence cultivated by celebrity chefs was a discourse of unbreachable distance, of talent so extreme that no amount of

practice by the general reader could ever overcome such distance. The juxtaposition of these two lines of thought created a complex discussion of celebrity that still drives cookbook sales.

MARKETING STRATEGIES

Twenty-first-century cookbooks are fiercely marketed, often capitalizing on authors' names and television, magazine, restaurant, and even online fanzine tie-ins.²⁰ Yet eighteenth-century cookbooks were at least as competitive. What strategies did eighteenth-century cookbooks use to convince readers that they had to have this book? Prefaces claimed that other books were ill-written, secretly infiltrated by French recipes, and unsuited to English constitutions. They touted special features (often identical to the "special" features of competing texts), and the authors' unique experience. Book covers, as on Martha Bradley's *The British Housewife* (1756), not-so-discreetly cited taverns and great houses where the author had worked. Yet notwithstanding their great similarity, cookbooks asserted that each was the only book that a reader needed or even could profitably use.²¹

Eighteenth-century cookbooks provide some of the earliest examples of blockbuster-type shamelessness. Even before novels were heavily promoted, cookbooks touted themselves in wordy book covers, prefaces, and authors' biographies. Their tactics created an intensifying feedback loop, leading to yet more hype as well as to occasional innovation. It has been said of the eighteenth-century book trade, in general, that "competition forced greater attention to advertising, book design, the saleable value of the contents and the value of a work, and methods of attracting and retaining new readerships."²² Cookbooks—hundreds of titles in multiple editions—became part of the craze for self-help and improvement.²³ They also offered come-ons:

Any Gentleman or Lady, in or near Norwich, that chooses to have a proper set of stew-pans, sauce-pans, &c., in exchange for those that are old and of no use, by applying to the Author of this Book, may be furnish'd therewith, as he has an opportunity of having them made in the most serviceable manner, and as cheap as in London.²⁴

Even apart from celebrating the author, cookbooks engaged in puffing, allowing apparently disinterested persons to praise them without apparent inducement.

T H E
BRITISH HOUSEWIFE:
OR, THE
COOK, HOUSEKEEPER'S
AND
GARDINER'S COMPANION.

CALCULATED FOR THE
 Service both of LONDON and the COUNTRY;
 And directing what is necessary to be done in the *Providing for, Con-*
ducting, and Managing a Family, throughout the Year.

C O N T A I N I N G
 A general Account of fresh Provisions of all Kinds. Of the several foreign
Articles for the Table, pickled or otherwise preserved; and the different Kinds of Spices,
Salts, Sugars, and other Ingredients used in Pickling and Preserving at Home: Shew-
ing what each is, whence it is brought, and what are its Qualities and Uses.

Together with the *Nature of all Kinds of Foods, and the Method of suiting them*
to different CONSTITUTIONS.

A BILL OF FARE for each Month, the Art of *Marketing and choosing* fresh Provisions of all
 Kinds; and the making as well as chusing of *Hams, Tongues, and other Store Dishes.*

Also DIRECTIONS for plain *Roasting and Baking;* and for the Dressing of all Sorts of *Made*
Dishes in various Tastes; and the preparing the Dessert in all its Articles.

Containing a greater Variety than was ever before published, of the most
 Elegant, yet least Expensive RECEIPTS in

| | | | | | | |
|------------|---|------------|---|-----------|---|---------------|
| COOKERY, | † | FRICASEES, | † | TARTS, | † | DRY'D FRUITS, |
| PASTRY, | † | RAGOUTS, | † | CAKES, | † | SWEETMEATS, |
| PUDDINGS, | † | SOUPS, | † | CREAMS, | † | MADE WINES, |
| PRESERVES, | † | SAUCES, | † | CUSTARDS, | † | CORDIALS, And |
| PICKLES, | † | JELLIES, | † | CANDIES, | † | DISTILLERY. |

To which are annexed,
 The Art of CARVING, and the Terms used for cutting up various Things;
 and the polite and easy Manner of *doing the Honours of the Table.* The whole Prac-
 tice of *Pickling and Preserving:* And of preparing *made Wines, Beer, and Cyder.*

As also of *distilling* all the useful Kinds of *Cordial and Simple Waters.*
 With the *Conduct of a Family in Respect of Health;* the *Diseases* to which they
 are every Month liable, and the most approved *Remedies* for each.

And a Variety of other valuable Particulars, necessary to be known in *All Families;* and nothing
 inserted but what has been approved by *EXPERIENCE.*

Also the Ordering of all Kinds of profitable *Beasts and Fowls,* with respect to their *Choice, their*
Breeding and Feeding; the *Diseases* to which they are severally liable each *Month, and Receipts*
for their Cure. Together with the Management of the *pleasants, profitable, and useful Garden.*

T H E W H O L E
 Embellished with a great Number of *curious COPPER PLATES,* shewing the
 Manner of *Trussing* all Kinds of *GAME, wild and tame FOWLS, &c.* as also the Order of
 setting out *TABLES for Dinner, Supper, and Grand Entertainments,* in a Method never before
 attempted; and by which even *those who cannot read* will be able to instruct themselves.

The whole (which is deduced from *Practice*) completing the careful Reader,
 from the highest to the lowest Degree, in every Article of *English Housewifery.*

By *Mrs. MARTHA BRADLEY, late of BATH:*
 Being the Result of upwards of *Thirty Years Experience.*

V O L. II.

L O N D O N :

Printed for *S. Crowder and H. Woodgate,* at the *Golden Ball* in *Pater-noster Row.*

Front cover of Martha Bradley, *The British Housewife* (1756).

Above all, cookbooks promised modernity, cutting-edge instruction that outdid all their competitors. Early in the century, *The Queen's Royal Cookery* (1713) already claimed that "It is not stuff'd with superfluous Trifles, as most of its nature are; or with old and antiquated Receipts; but with things wholly new and useful" (Preface). Cookbooks loved to explain how the Art of Cookery was constantly advancing, while paradoxically suggesting that few cookbooks displayed the advances. Thus, George Dalrymple's *The Practice of Modern Cookery* (1781) denounced "half-bred gentry that affect to

despise the knowledge” in his breakthrough text, noting that even though “there are several excellent Treatises published, wherein you see the Ancient Cookery in a very perfect degree,” his “Work will show the Modern Manner, with its improvements” (Preface). For more than a hundred years and through dozens of printings, Hannah Glasse’s tome proclaimed itself *The Art of Cookery, Made Plain and Easy; Which far exceeds any THING of the Kind ever yet Published* (1747). The idea behind such rhetoric was that even while cookery constantly advanced, most cookbooks (all those except the one on offer) were hopelessly old hat. The unspoken corollary was that an aspiring hostess, ever concerned to seem *au courant*, needed to purchase this text.

The love-hate relationship that cookbook authors had with their profession was an affectation, a ploy to engage readers and keep them slightly off-balance, always in the market. Cookbooks spoke to aspiration (with its flip-side, fear) and to the fantasies and cravings that novels sought to excite. They played on middle-class desire to emulate economically superior classes. In this regard, they did not shrink from producing spectacle. Cookbook authors attacked each other by name, turning on former mentors and elaborately demonstrating in their own texts how rivals’ recipes were at fault. Feuds such as that between Anthony Bourdain and Rachael Ray were born in the eighteenth century.

NICHE AND SPECIALTY COOKBOOKS

Modern cookbooks are often highly specialized—fish cookery, barbecue, cooking for diabetics. The eighteenth century developed the first true niche cookbooks—confectionery, vegetarian, cooking for the poor. What is interesting is that these texts emerged amid encyclopedic texts that dominated the market, in which readers could have found at least some recipes of the type that the niche texts offered. So what was the impetus behind these texts? As always, it was marketing: publishers’ products that “were tailored for specific audiences” were intended to promote emulative buying.²⁵ That is, by appealing to a self-identified segment of the populace, publishers encouraged a type of group-think, in which group members sought to keep abreast of each other, wishing not to miss out on the latest and coolest as defined by the consumption habits of others in the group. Such texts sought to provide a level of detail not always

available in the more general texts, and to provide a sense that readers were in good, even expert, hands.

These new specialty cookbooks sought to capitalize on nascent, but still unfocused, reader interest, making it easier to pursue specific skills or follow specific programs. They encouraged people to become vegetarians; appealed to readers who sought status by learning to cook with sugar (a challenging enterprise); and enabled the poor to consider new dietary regimes (even as they permitted the rich to feel that the poor were being helped). Indeed, cookbooks for the poor adumbrated the current “frugal chef” genre and meal-stretching handbooks that got readers through two twentieth-century World Wars. Where readers were already interested in a type of specialty cooking—especially confectionery—they provided an outlet, encouraging readers to learn more and justifying readers’ initial (potentially daunting) interest.

Niche cookbooks often appeared in response to—or perhaps alongside of—crusading texts that did not focus on recipes. John Evelyn’s *Acetaria: A Discourse of Sallets* (1699) was primarily a plea for vegetarianism, and it relegated recipes to an appendix. Its featured “recipe” was an excursus on the perfect salad.²⁶ However, *Acetaria* was an early example of what became an extensive antimeat discourse, accompanied by more comprehensive proto-vegetarian cookbooks: *Adam’s Luxury, and Eve’s Cookery* (1747) and *Primitive Cookery: or the Kitchen Garden display’d* (1767).²⁷ The same type of discursive relationship is apparent between cookbooks and texts related to health, and especially those giving advice to the poor. Cookbooks were intimately related to wider discussions of social concerns. Confectionery books appeared despite and as a counterpoint to concerns over the politics of sugar, which swirled around the persistence of slavery. They were a testament to the power of marketing, functioning as a happy counterweight to negative images of sugar that presented a commodity soaked in the blood of fellow human beings.

POINT OF VIEW

Eighteenth-century cookbooks reflected eighteenth-century circumstances—food was not refrigerated, servants took care of the drudge-work, and provisions at sea had to last for years. Such contemporaneity is always present, of course, but in the twenty-first

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