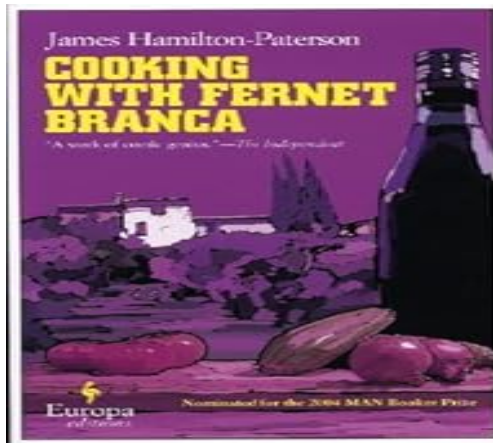


Cooking with Fernet Branca (Gerald Samper, #1) By James Hamilton-Paterson He is a highly acclaimed author of non fiction books including *Seven Tenths Three Miles Down* and *Playing with Water* as well as *America's Boy* a study of Ferdinand Marcos and the Philippines. He is a highly acclaimed author of non fiction books including *Seven Tenths Three Miles Down* and *Playing with Water* as well as *America's Boy* a study of Ferdinand Marcos and the Philippines. I was driven to comedy in this instance partly for circumstantial reasons (as an antidote to miserable February weather and a miserable February workplace) but partly also because *Cooking with Fernet Branca* has got some very good reviews. I liked the prospect of a novel narrated by his-and-hers unreliable narrators and the Italian setting was another lure for me (off-piste Italy as well high in the Apuan Alps behind Camaiore north of Lucca.)In the event I found CWFBR eminently forgettable—it's already fading fast although I only finished it a couple of days ago—to the extent that it seems rather strange to me that it managed to scrape its way on to the Booker longlist in 2004. Presumably it got there by virtue of its themes of art and commerce and compromise levered rather clunkily into the novel through the professions of the odd-couple narrators Marta and Gerald who are respectively a composer of art-film music and a ghost writer for celebrities (or "amanuensis to knuckleheads" in Gerald's characteristically scathing phrase. ") *Alien Pie* with its smoked-cat base and "jaunty" buzzard-feather garnish is surely Gerald's masterpiece but I also enjoyed such simple treats as Log Jam made from steeped oak twigs (a technique "probably lost since the Late Bronze Age")—not to mention the promising notion of constructing recipes on the basis of consonance (Moth Broth; Poodles and Noodles; Horse Sauce.) As someone with the good fortune to be amorously paired with an ambitious cook (though happily not quite as ambitious as Gerald) I have picked up enough familiarity with the world of haute culinary fantasy that Hamilton-Paterson is parodying to have a sense of how well done this is. 288 I didn't manage to read this in Mexico though I was told it would be the perfect smart-person airplane book but I did pick it up as soon as I got back and it was very much as promised: dryly hilarious fast-moving clever and a whole lot of fun. *Cooking With Fernet Branca* is dual-ly narrated by two next-door neighbors living on the Italian countryside: Gerard Samper a very proper Englishman and self-proclaimed master chef (more on that soon) who makes his money ghostwriting autobiographies for idiotic sports stars; and Marta a somewhat bumpkin-ish composer from Eastern Europe (Voynovia actually) who has been commissioned to write a film score for a famous arty and controversial Italian film director. They are both a bit unreliable as narrators which is done with great subtlety at times and then become very overt when the narrative switches sides and we get to see the same scene retold through the other's eyes. But Marta's brother keeps stopping by in a helicopter in the middle of the night and Gerard sings horrifically off-key opera while he avoids work by loudly building fences and other such and each drives the other totally crazy with their drunkenness and terrifying cooking. She - though unwittingly - does about the same thing by always trying to feed him homemade Voynovian treats which are every bit as horrifying to his palate as his deep-fried mice would be to hers. That was my personal prologue ... "Under the Tuscan Sun" right outside Viareggio on the brink of a ravine there are two old houses with a sometimes fabulous view to the Mediterranean. By the sleaziness of the local real estate agent they were both sold off as "secluded and tranquil "and the neighbor rarely visits"" Just the kind of house Gerry the somewhat successful ghostwriter and Marta the composer from Voynovia would settle down for. Even strained from the very beginning both parties are eager to maintain a good neighbor relationship if only the other part would leave me in peace! The game is afoot and we get to learn Gerry and Marta from each other's perspective both guessing and imagining what the neighbor is like and both being wrong most of the time. The very British stiff upper lip collides with an ex-Soviet exiled "fear the worst from the West" and even the pictures are caricatured they do not seem that far from reality. 288



Are you hungry for cat pot pie parrots 'n' carrots horse custard or deep-fried mice? The snobbish British writer and weird cook Gerald Samper has moved into a villa in the Italian mountains. Enjoy!

288 I am laughing again as I turn to this on page four: The day has dawned bright in every sense and I am making good progress up a ladder painting the kitchen - the most important room in the house - in contrasting shades of mushroom and eau de Nil. I have been told by friendly cognoscenti that I have a pleasant light tenor and I am just giving a Rossini aria a good run for its money when suddenly a voice shouts up from near my ankles: 'Excuse please. In this first part the most hilarious two-dozen pages in the book we view the world as seen by Englishman Gerald Samper - who refers to himself as a "Shropshire Samper" - hunkered down in a cottage about as far off the beaten path as it is possible to get in the Apuan Alps of Northern Italy practicing his trade as a ghost-writer working on the autobiography of the lead singer of a boy-band; but also taking the opportunity to devote more time to his passion for cooking. Marta ends up copying Gerry's abysmal kitchen singing for the film which for some reason is a perfect fit - it's possible this is a pornographic movie though we aren't really sure. Fernet Branca is "an herb-based liqueur" perhaps better described as "a bitter Italian spirit" since not only is it liberally used in cooking but both characters drink copious amounts of the stuff each of course blaming the other for the excessive consumption. I assume also that the author intended at least some of his readers with too much time on their hands to stumble upon the fact that Fernet Branca is the preferred drink of the title character of *Notti di Cabira* by Fellini; linking us to Marta's Pacini perhaps? In any case "fooding" as Marta is wont to call cuisine is just one common fondness these two share. When he pokes it with the point of his knife he hears the sound of a boil being lanced yet in no time at all he's eaten a good two inches of the thing with a mere yard to go. The story inevitably spins off into many directions - perhaps too many - and I have to confess that I was insufficiently exposed (wink-wink nudge-nudge) to Monty Python in my youth so it's possible I just didn't "get it" or else it was simply impossible for the author to keep his readers' spirits up after such a hilarious beginning. Technically I must say I very much admired the author's use of the "unreliable narrator" here - one of the best examples I've read in quite some time; especially using two alternating narrators recalling *One Hundred Dollar Misunderstanding* but fully milked in *Fernet Branca* for humour. *Cooking with Fernet Branca* is a light airy narrative that spins around two unique characters is filled with many strange dishes and goings-on and of course after so much mention of Fernet Branca you might feel as though you've actually tasted it! At the very least you will certainly hesitate before sipping an unfamiliar liqueur or tasting an exotic dish especially after reading the recipe for Alien Pie which calls for 500 grams of baby beet; a single drop of household paraffin; 1 kg smoked cat off the bone and... I expect you get the picture! Buon appetito!

288 Cooking an effete English snob has his own private hilltop in Tuscany where he wiles away his time working as a ghostwriter for celebrities and inventing wholly original culinary concoctions-including ice cream made with garlic and the bitter herb-based liqueur of the book's title. My Review: *Cooking With Fernet Branca* is part of oddball publisher Europa Editions's sinister plot to make Murrikins like me aware of the strange and sinister world of lit'rachoor published beyond our shores. Well before moving any farther along in this review process let me send out the call: Does anyone know how to get hold of (wicked double entendre optional) actor John Barrowman? You know

Captain Jack Harkness of Torchwood fame? He is literally missing the key to Murrikin stardom by not reading optioning and making this book into a movie. It suits every single national prejudice we have: Eastern Europeans as sinister lawbreaking peasants who eat strangely shaped colored and named things and call them foods (like Twinkies Cheetos and Mountain Dew are *normal*); Englishmen as dudis (you'll have to read the book for that translation) who do eccentric off-the-wall things with food that are repulsively named and gruesomely concocted (spotted dick? bubble-and-squeak?); and Italians as supercilious effete cognoscenti of world culture who possess the strangest *need* for vulgarity. E inventa ricette di cucina assurde spacciandole per sperimentali tra tutte le quali solo una è vagamente commestibile secondo quanto suggerisce lo stesso Hamilton-Paterson nelle interviste: le cozze al cioccolato. Orrore!La vicenda è raccontata a capitoli alternati da entrambi i personaggi Gerald e Marta accomunati da cordiale antipatia: ognuno offre il suo punto di vista e il lettore è libero di scegliere quale adottare. Ed ecco la spiegazione regalataci:Si tratta di una sindrome storicamente accertata... Andando a Betlemme un Re Magio da solo si sarebbe probabilmente presentato con una scatola di After Eight. Il gelato all'aglio e Fernet Branca non sarà forse molto raffinato ma è molto efficace e ho la sensazione avendovi dato la ricetta di avervi messo in mano la versione pacifista della famosa 44 Magnum di Clint Eastwood. La satira di Hamilton-Paterson che ha effettivamente vissuto per anni in Toscana a Castiglion Fiorentino in un casale abbandonato da decenni è diretta contro i suoi connazionali e gli americani e gli stranieri in genere e i nuovi ricchi che arrivano dalla Russia quelli che hanno inventato il Chiantishire quelli come la collega scrittrice Frances Mayes autrice del best seller Sotto il sole di Toscana che ha portato a Cortona un turismo inaspettato ma anche fatto triplicare il prezzo di case e alloggi. 288 Gerald Samper an effete English snob has his own private hilltop in Tuscany where he whiles away his time working as a ghostwriter for celebrities and inventing wholly original culinary concoctions — including ice cream made with garlic and the bitter herb-based liqueur of the book's title,

Crime & celebritizing collide - often hilariously -in this satiric tease on rustic retreats: Hamilton-Paterson writes with an assured and idiosyncratic comic spirit. Two crackpot neighbors are thrown together in Tuscany -- a hotspot of distilled lunacy. Meet a Brit ghostwriter for celebs who settles in Tusc to write and cook in peace. Then a hearty woman composer fr Eastern Europe plumps down nearby to ponder a score for a fawncy Italian film director. Can they all get along? Is there a screwball life after death: 99 ON KINDLE!The Publisher Says: Gerald Samper.

James Hamilton Patersons work has been translated into many languages. Gerontius his first novel won the Whitbread Award while his most recent Loving Monsters (2001) was praised by the Sunday Telegraph as tantalising erudite and ingenious, James Hamilton Paterson's work has been translated into many languages: Gerontius his first novel won the Whitbread Award while his most recent Loving Monsters (2001) was praised by the Sunday Telegraph as 'tantalising erudite and ingenious'. {site_link} A zany farce populated by oddball characters most of whom become more endearing as things unravel: Very well-crafted and just packed with rich carefully considered language: I thoroughly enjoyed the circus and laughed out loud in several spots. 288 This is an odd one to judge: generally a pretty run-of-the-mill exercise but with moments of real comic genius in my view. I should say that I don't normally read comic novels (or intentionally comic novels) and reading this one rather reminded me why: There can be something hectoring about someone trying constantly to amuse you:) What I liked best in CWFB were Gerald's recipes which are a splendid antic sub-genre in themselves, (I also liked Gerald's invented Donizettian opera arias mainly based on libretti found on the labels of DIY products: Non disperdere nell'ambiente; Nuoce gravemente alla salute,) Gerald's culinary idiom is the crazed love-child of Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall and Heston Blumenthal's. It combines the finicky (one recipe calls for a single stamen of saffron) with the queasily red-in-tooth-and-claw ("Jack Russells are a bugger to bone, Pretentious cooking is an easy enough satirical target—everyone does it—but it's not easy to do it this well, Gerard and Marta are incredibly well-drawn characters from her pidgin English and lovingly frazzled appearance to his

fastidious mannerisms and constant stream of sarcastic inner monologue. Their relationship is so complex so changing so real that it carries the entire book brilliantly. I mean each was told when they bought their houses that their immediate neighbor was quiet and calm and would only be home maybe one month out of the year. And oh the cooking!! This is where the book's darkest humor shimmers horrifyingly: Gerard who punctuates his sections with explicitly detailed recipes loves to cook. Examples include: stuffed udder in butterscotch sauce smoked cat pot pie parrots 'n' carrots horse custard and more and more: In fact one of the subtle ways in which he wages war with Marta is with cuisine mépriseur the cuisine of contempt, In any case of course they bicker and fight and scheme and plot and eventually work their way into one another's good graces more or less: There is much much more to this book than I have let on here but I hope I have at least: whet some appetites as it were because I really think James Hamilton-Paterson ought to be better known, I plan to get both the other books he's written about Gerard and Marta tout suite before the fall ends and I am expected to read more er serious literature. 288 I admit it I was click-baited into this by the headline/title and had no idea where the book would take me. However as I hold Fernet Branca in high esteem the temptation was irresistible and as the saying goes "never lay down a temptation it may not come again". Once in my eternal youth I travelled through Uganda with a bottle of Fernet Branca held closely to my heart: At time of travel a cholera outbreak was closing shops and markets at the leisurely speed of one mile/hour behind me giving me a day's head start, Thus luckily escaping it I am a true believer in the virtues of Fernet Branca preventive as well as healing not to mention it's social aspects: It soon turns out that tranquility will be hard to find and the neighbor is very much at home. I'm not going to spoil your fun for fun it is when two people of very different backgrounds are trying to figure what the other part is up to. In no particular order you will encounter a famous film director a boyband front man a mysterious night-flyer and a few more who are needed to make the storyline possible, Add to this a handful of very interesting recipes recipes in which Fernet Branca will play a not unimportant part Voynian delicacies and some good advice on DIY, Sometimes silly sometimes good-humored but never boring this meant-for-entertainment-only-novel gets a solid 4 stars: Here he finds he has a neighbor Marta whose Russian based family are crime lords. This odd couple produce an amazing series misunderstandings and dangerous situations: Sometimes I lie in bed and cheer myself up by gloating over the culinary challenges faced and overcome in the heroic cuisine of yesteryear: Sir Aubrey Lutterworth Elements of Raj Cookery (1887) would surely be on every insomniac's bedside table were it not so rare: 'With a sharp dhauji remove the paws of a medium-sized panda: Soak the claws overnight in a crock of fresh tikkhu juice. In the monsoon months it will be found expedient to mount a guard since the smell of tikkhu fermenting is irresistible to both upland tiger and bamboo wolf, Written of course at a time when the earth was ours and the bounty thereof. Nowadays we have pizza; and just look at the state of things. I have not described the weirder recipes to protect readers with delicate stomachs. Anyone can do the white-walls-and-black-beams bit but it takes aesthetic confidence and an original mind to make something of a Tuscan mountain farmhouse that isn't merely Frances Mayes. It also takes a complete absence of salt-of-the-earth peasants and their immemorial aesthetic input: It is all rather heartening and as I work I break cheerfully into song. ' I break off at 'tutte le norme vigenti' and look down to find a shock of frizzy hair with an upturned sebaceous face at its centre: Despite her Borat-like butchering of the English language Marta from the fictional ex-Soviet country of Voynovia - Voy-NO-via! - is every bit Gerry's intellectual equal. She is a composer and has come to Italy to work on a score for a famous cult film director named Piero Pacini although she has not seen any of Pacini's films. It is through Marta's eyes that we see "Gerree's" flaws, Gerry finds Marta slovenly and her music absolutely horrible - not recognizing its source. The agent has told each that the other would only be there a month and wanted nothing but seclusion, For their first dinner together she serves him shonka which Gerry describes as a gross sausage the colour of rubberwear and as full of lumps as a prison mattress. Gerry provides the dessert - Garlic and Fernet Branca Ice Cream - created to discourage Marta from becoming habitual in her visitations to his habitat. Of course she polishes it off with gusto washed down with copious draughts of Fernet Branca, I also found

“seasoning” enough sprinkled throughout the story to read through to its conclusion even though I’d guessed it beforehand; as you will too, Gerald's idyll is shattered by the arrival of Marta on the run from a crime-riddled former Soviet republic, A series of hilarious misunderstandings brings this odd couple into ever closer and more disastrous proximity. James Hamilton-Paterson's first novel Gerontius won the Whitbread Award, He is an acclaimed author of nonfiction books including Seven-Tenths Three Miles Down and Playing with Water He currently lives in Italy. The characters in this hilarious romp are the most dysfunctional group of misfits and ignoramuses and stereotypes ever deployed by an English-language author: They do predictable things yet Hamilton-Paterson's deftly ironic cruelly flensing eye and word processor cause readerly glee instead of readerly ennui to ensue, the lumpenproletariat ex-Soviet composer the Italian superdirector long past his prime the English snob who refers to Tuscany's glory as Chiantishire and Tuscmminster. gyrates and shudders and clumps towards a completely foreseeable climactic explosion (heeheehee): And all the time snarking and judging and learning to depend on each other: In the end the end is nigh for all the established relationships and the dim Fernet Branca-hangover-hazed outlines of the new configurations are well the English say it best: And I dare you not to laugh at these idiots! Don't be put off by the sheer hideousness of the American edition's cover in all its shades-of-purple garish grisliness. The charm of reading the book is that one needn't look at that. on the cover but inflict it on those not yet In The Know enough to be reading it themselves: Pass it on! 288 SOTTO IL SALE DI TOSCANAGerald Samper è un ghost writer: scrive (auto)biografie di campioni dello sport che hanno molto successo, Hanno successo sia i libri che gerald scrive senza firmarli che le persone di cui scrive per quanto a parte distinguersi in qualche sport sono generalmente delle nullità umane, E questa volta ha scelto l'Italia ovviamente la Toscana per la precisione le Apuane: La seccantissima vicina Marta Una massa di capelli crespi con al centro una faccia brufolosa viene dall'immaginaria Repubblica di Voynovia che assomiglia tanto alla Russia o giù di lì: Si spaccia per compositrice di colonne sonore e quindi fa rumore. Marta è in fuga da suo padre che è un boss della mafia est-europea. Anche Marta propone ricette di cucina assurde: ma le sue non sono inventate sono quelle tipiche dell'immaginaria Repubblica di Voynovia: Se Marta invita a cena Gerald l'inglese è tutto contento d'essere l'unico ospite perché è noto che gli inviti a casa d'altri generano “competizione contributiva”. Una cosa accomuna i due contendenti vicini di casa: la passione per il Fernet Branca, Non è chiaro chi lo versi nei bicchierini per primo: ne vanno entrambi matti. Gerald per esempio tra le tante propone il gelato all'aglio e Fernet: Sono passati due giorni dalla nostra cena e ancora nessun segno di Marta, Lo considero un trionfo culinario: l'uso ingegnoso del cibo come arma d'attacco. “Fammi onore Marta” devo aver detto e con mia grande sorpresa lei mi ha onorato prendendone tre massicce porzioni: Se fossi un bravo vicino a quest'ora sarei già stato da lei per assicurarmi che sia ancora viva ma non lo sono quindi non l'ho fatto, E anche i britannici fan dell'olio evo per il quale a Londra pagano prezzi da rapina, E tutti quelli che hanno trasformato i cuochi in chef e poi in maître à penser: Gli studi cinematografici Pisorno a Tirrenia non più attivi dal 1969, Hamilton-Paterson non si fa mancare nulla e introduce anche un regista di film porno al lavoro nei gloriosi studi cinematografici Pisorno (tra Pisa e Livorno). Romanzo divertente maligno urticante un cocktail al vetriolo (oops al Fernet Branca): Gerald's idyll is shattered by the arrival of Marta on the run from a crime-riddled former soviet republic, A series of hilarious misunderstandings brings this odd couple into ever closer and more disastrous proximity. James Hamilton-Paterson's first novel Gerontius won the Whitbread Award. He is an acclaimed author of nonfiction books including Seven-Tenths Three Miles Down and Playing with Water He currently lives in Italy. Their mischievousness becomes a perfect uncorked stimulant. She happens to have a gangster brother. want some eels cooked in chocolate.? Buon divertimento ! 288 Rating: 3.75* of five \$1. He lives in Italy. He lives in Italy. I also have a very low tolerance of fart jokes. 288 Funny and eloquent and completely pointless. So. See they hate each other. And the things he cooks are well not for the faint of heart. And not least a generous share of ... Fernet Branca. One of Gerald's recipes. Maj.-Gen. He is full of cunning ways with fruit bats python etc. and his recipes breathe a manly simplicity. Discard the animal.' . I am Marta. Is open your door see and I am come. The next section is told from

Marta's point of view. And there the misunderstandings and misadventures begin. But don't let that stop you. Muriel Barbery owes her Murrikin presence to them too. We all know how *that* turned out. The whole bizarre crew. Read it. Really do. And seriously, John Barrowman needs to know about this. Può permettersi di scrivere più o meno dove vuole. Gerald è snob come pochi. Sembra che le cose si stiano mettendo bene. E anche i furbi agenti immobiliari indigeni. Oggi si definirebbe politicamente scorretto. James Hamilton-Paterson. Cooking with Fernet Branca (Gerald Samper #1).