Seeds in the Woods

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Angela Heuzenroeder
BAROSSA FOOD
Wakefield Press, $39.95pb, 334pp, 1 86254 461 1

Catherine Murphy
THE MARKET: STORIES, HISTORY AND RECIPES
FROM THE ADELAIDE CENTRAL MARKET
Wakefield Press, $29.95pb, 158pp, 1 86254 596 0

IN 1986 I TEMPORARILY closed Berowra Waters Inn restaurant in Sydney and, for a month, we became Berowra Waters Out in the dining room of The Botanic Hotel on the corner of North and East Terrace in Adelaide. It was Adelaide Festival time and, with the unofficial blessing of Festival management, we became the place where performers and audience, winemakers and cooks gathered in the heightened gregariousness that characterises that city during the biennial arts festival.

Because we performed for people who had been on stage, those who had been picking grapes, and those in high festival spirit, we cooked and served until dawn. At four a.m. our cars had to be moved, trucks having right of passage. I loved that hour, the rumble of the prime movers, the processional entry, the pre-dawn lights, the work that took place when most people were still asleep, and all in a ventricle of Adelaide. To retain what is disruptive but essential in the heart of a city keeps it vital and, in the case of a produce market, agricultural.

The Botanic is a lane away from what used to be the East End Market. Until the mid-nineteenth century, the market was a privately owned site where, The Advertiser reported at the time, ‘anybody who has anything to sell is sure to find anybody who has anything to buy’. In 1867 the Adelaide City Council bought the land that presently houses the Adelaide Central Market. The East End site became the wholesale produce market, which stayed put until shortly after 1986, closing despite strong community protest and moving to Pooraka, way north of the city.

In 1869 the Central Market opened and it is still there today, a living treasure at the centre of the city — much loved and highly valued, enriching to those who use it, and cherished and prized by all Adelaidians. It is now part of the idea of that city. Since the 1960s, when it was revamped and parking made available on two upper storeys, it appears to have been recognised as a treasure by the City Council as well.

Catherine Murphy herself is something of a treasure. For some twenty years, in South Australia, she has listened to diverse communities, recorded oral histories and compiled records of community cultural development programmes. (Waterworks, published in 2000, with South Australia’s marvellous Country Arts organisation, is a fine example.)

Her Central Market project is a compilation of city records, newspaper and photographic archives and, crucially, oral histories. The Market also includes some fifty recipes that work modestly to illustrate what the sum of the book’s parts conveys: successive immigration from different countries (Italy, Greece, China, Vietnam, Cambodia and more) has been the pivot around which present-day Australian food culture is defining itself.

The Savvas brothers opened their first stall at the market in 1959. Petros was quoted in the News: ‘I love this market because it is a place and I don’t like a business, I like a place.’ The Savvas, the Angelakis, the Marinos, the Rotolos, the Andonas, the Khuis and other families have grown prosperous and in some cases powerful. But this does not deny the market its diversity and conviviality, at its most central in Lucia’s cafe, which was opened by Lucia Rosella in 1957.

By the late 1970s the ‘place’ was beginning to have that certain caché that only a newly-food-obsessed middle class could bestow. The Central Market will survive this sometimes gauche onslaught as long as the City Council values its central, nourishing and multicultural vitality.

Immigrants also gave cultural and culinary shape to some land eighty kilometres north-east of Adelaide.

In 1841 Lutheran families from Prussia, Silesia and other regions bordering the Baltic and North Seas sailed away from uneasy relations with rulers and church. Many settled and prospered in the Barossa Valley. They brought their names, language, religion, domestic architecture, their love of choirs and band music, ‘an apparent passion for neatness and order’ and, central to Angela Heuzenroeder’s Barossa Food, their regional cuisines. They were not the first from this part of Europe, but they became a close-knit community in a specific place. ‘The food prepared in the Barossa had a chance to stabilise in a strong cultural base of European origin before beginning to develop characteristics of its own.’

If, of Horace’s two Roman mice, Murphy is Urbanus at Adelaide’s Central Market, then Heuzenroeder is a celebra-
tory Rusticus in the Barossa. I warmed to her immediately upon reading the dedication to her aunt, ‘an excellent cook’. This is in the face of the kinds of hyperbole that damn our upstart culinary culture. ‘Excellent’ is such a quietly complimentary word, neat and orderly. Bibliophiles talk about a book ‘in excellent condition’, and Heuzenroeder is a teacher–librarian. Later, she says of a dish that it is ‘good’. She is a quiet and deferential listener, too, and, by considering each season’s bounty and its excellent use by the German settlers and their descendants, she creates a book that sparked my interest in a region for which I previously felt nothing, quite possibly in wilful reaction to tourist advertisements.

*Barossa Food* was first published in 1999; this is the second edition. Heuzenroeder mentions that some of the old recipes have been modified since the first edition. There are many recipes, and many beckon, but they don’t intrude if the reader doesn’t want to take the book to the kitchen. Heuzenroeder’s description of the sticking of a pig and its entirely useful flesh is no rival for Thomas Hardy’s awful scene in *Jude the Obscure*, but is, instead, part of her steady documentation of the still-present connection between production and cooking. Reflecting on her beloved valley, the people who learned to understand and use its seasonal variation, and whose food was subtly changed by it, she writes: ‘It makes people into philosophers who mark the turn of the wheel, who maintain a sense of timelessness as they go through activities again and again connected to the earth and the seasons.’ You do not doubt her. Eric Rolls, when asked what it was that farming had taught him, replied that it put a stop to any sense of self-importance. Heuzenroeder, a quietly confident writer, has, in sum, made her own variation on Rusticus’s reaction to the city: ‘Better seeds in the woods than feasts in a trap.’

The Central Market in Adelaide takes the sting out of the trap, and both books defy the related trap set by the flashy consumerism of celebrity cookbooks that promise a new culinary Australia without grace of lineage or acknowledgment and where everything is impatient and new. Cookery, by its material nature, is conservative.

Catherine Murphy’s *The Market* is not a major work in the way that *Barossa Food* is, but both books share a belief in placing recognition fair and square in specific communities and the lives of ‘ordinary’ people rather than turning produce and dishes into costume jewellery for the affluent. Both spoon healing broth, not tainted concoctions, and both write encomia for the conjunction of people and place.