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Anne Collett

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Front Cover:
Diana Wood Conroy, ‘Fragility of Love’ (detail), 50 cm x 90 cm, tapestry fragment on canvas with acrylic, gesso and gouache, 1997. First shown in an exhibition curated by Vivienne Dadour, Sarajevo, at Ivan Dougherty Gallery Sydney in 1997. The image is from the Shellal Mosaic, brought from Jordan in 1918 to the Australian War Memorial Canberra.

*Kunapipi* refers to the Australian Aboriginal myth of the Rainbow Serpent which is the symbol of both creativity and regeneration. The journal’s emblem is to be found on an Aboriginal shield from the Roper River area of the Northern Territory of Australia.
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EDITORIAL

Recently moving away from home and becoming more intimately acquainted with the day to day ordinary lives of others, my daughter was surprised to discover that the variety of evening meal with which she had grown up was not the norm. The young Australians with whom she mixed, many coming to Sydney from rural areas of New South Wales, had been raised on the ‘meat and 3 veg’ that was the staple of my generation’s childhood — or rather the staple of a generation of Anglo-Celtic descent at various stages of remove from Britain; and those of Italian or Lebanese or Vietnamese descent, for example, had been raised in the food tradition of their transplanted parents, grandparents or even great grandparents, with the exception perhaps of the ubiquitous ‘ozi-barbi’ (Australian barbeque). They did not eat Chicken Mysore on Monday, Cheese and Spinach Pie on Tuesday, Lasagne on Wednesday, Chilli Con Carne on Thursday, Stir Fry Beef & Black Bean on Friday…. This also came as something of a surprise to me, for I had assumed that Australia was the multicultural nation it purported to be, and that this multiculturalism would necessarily be represented in the food ‘we’ eat. It is of course represented in the food available at cafes and restaurants, in the variety of produce available in supermarkets and shopping mall food courts, and the local ‘take-away’ or global fast-food industry; but the style and type of food cooked and eaten in the kitchen of the individual Australian home, is not as various or multi-cultural as I had assumed.

This gave me pause for thought, more perhaps about myself and my own heritage, than about the cultural practices of Australians in general. The kinds and styles of food I cook in my kitchen, say something about my personality and my interests: I have always been fascinated by difference and eager to experience new ways of doing and being in the world — food is just another example, like my interest in commonwealth literatures, of that predilection. But we are what we eat (and what we read), and food (and literary) consumption and associated practice is inherited — a matter of custom — whose residue remains to some degree no matter how far the diversification from that state of origin.

Although my memory of childhood dinners is dominated by various forms of ‘meat (mainly sausages and lamb chops) and 3 veg (mainly potato, carrot and cabbage)’, prepared solely by my mother (or on occasion by my grandmother) until I was old enough to cook; it is also marked by deviations that, although probably shared by many Australians of similar family background, taken together constitute an idiosyncratic inheritance. My mother, for example, was (and still is) addicted to technology — so throughout the 1950s and ’60s of my childhood and adolescence, she purchased and experimented with a wide variety of kitchen technology and associated recipes: my memory of the wonders of the modern ‘electric’ kitchen include an electric frypan, an electric slow-cooker, a Mix-Master (electric beaters), an electric coffee percolator, and (bizarrely) an electric yoghurt.
maker; but perhaps most memorable of all was not the new but the old technology
of bottling fruit (with a Vacola bottling set) and jam-making.

Every summer would be devoted to the mammoth task of harvesting and
preserving the fruit of my father’s enthusiastic participation in the greening of
Canberra (a planned ‘garden city’ designed by Walter Burley Griffin and Marion
Mahoney Griffin). All manner and variety of trees and plants were available free
from the Canberra nursery in the early years of the city’s development. The trees
that took my father’s fancy were not the native Australians — the gum, wattle and
bottle-brush — but the silver birches and maples, the roses, wisteria, forsythia and
lilac: this was the front garden. The back garden was an Eden of fabulous fruits
— loganberries, youngberries, blackberries, pears, apricots, peaches, nectarines,
plums. Every spring the garden was a fantasia of pink and white blossom and
every summer we children secretly glutted ourselves, usually at the first blush
of colour — too impatient to wait for full ripeness (the result of course was a
stomach ache but that did not stop us). The halved or sectioned fruit would be
packed with syrup into jars of various size and shape, fitted with rubber rings and
metal clasp tops, and brought to the required temperature in a huge green vat.
Great pots of fruit and sugar boiled on the stove, the mixture tested on saucers for
setting quality, and then poured into glass jars and sealed with wax. The preserved
fruit and jam was then packed into the kitchen cupboards and onto the shelves of
a small room at the back of the garage, to be eaten at leisure — the desert (usually
eaten with ice-cream) that always accompanied our evening meal — throughout
the remaining year. I was recently reminded that bottled fruit (and vegetables) are
more than the preserve of the private domestic sphere when my eye was caught by
an ingenious bottled vegetable man, on display in the Regional Produce section
of the Royal Easter (Agricultural) Show. Fruits and vegetables transported and
transplanted from another hemisphere are preserved and publicly exhibited as
icons of Australian national heritage.

The migration and adaptation of plants and peoples is integral to the story
of the food that made me. It includes my father’s involvement with the migrant
population whose labour helped build the Snowy Mountains Hydroelectric
Scheme — begun in 1949 and completed in 1974. Many were housed in bleak
army-style barracks on the outskirts of Cooma, a town some 100 kms from
Canberra. Apparently the Italians were the most vociferous in their complaints
about the English-style cooking and their demands for ‘spaghetti’, which were
ultimately accommodated by an Italian contractor employed to build houses for
the management, who set up his own mess and had pasta sent from Melbourne.
My father taught the ‘New Australians’ to speak English, and with that teaching
came the salami and smelly cheeses that would become the staple of our weekend
lunches. I cannot now remember what we had for lunch before bread, salami and
cheese and it is a tradition I have continued with my own family, with the addition
of olives.
The story of the food that made me and the food that made my children is a story of ordinary and extraordinary practice — the story of making and doing, of remembering, reiterating and developing in a material way; but the other story that accompanies this, is the written story — the place of food in literature and the literature of food, of which the recipe itself is a literary form in its own right — a genre upon which the tools of literary and cultural analysis might be applied with interesting result.

As the essays, stories, poems, photographs and recipes in this special issue demonstrate, food — its plenty or its lack; as practice, politics or metaphor — has an important if not dominant place in much of the literature of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It often acts as a barometer of well-being — of the body and the body politic; it is sensitive to changing relationship between peoples and between people and the land that sustains them. This issue charts some of the vast wealth of food writing and writing about food in the colonial and postcolonial world; and it also comprises a cookbook of itself — each of the contributors being asked to include a recipe, either integral to their contribution, or of personal significance. Thus the Kunapipi Cookbook (The Kookbook) is food for body, mind and soul; bon appetit!
Christmas Brandied Fruit

I moved away from Canberra in my eleventh year, but returned in the early years of my marriage some ten years later. The house was and is still there, its white weatherboard barely discernable now behind the trees that have grown up like the rampant vegetation that obscured the castle of Sleeping Beauty. Returning to the house of my childhood evoked memories of summer fruit, and moving into a house with peach trees in the back yard, I decided to try my own hand at bottling. My mother’s Vacola set was long gone, but I advertised in the local paper for bottles and vat and was inundated with replies. The golden light and perfume of the peaches I bottled that first summer are laid down in the memory of the senses, and no peaches, fresh or tinned, could approach the flavour that came with the success of a loving labour, and now assuredly enhanced by the nostalgia of years. I no longer live in a climate suited to stone fruit, and no longer have the time or inclination to spend my summers bottling fruit even if I did. This recipe for brandied fruit that requires neither fresh fruit nor Vacola bottling kit, was passed on to me by an old school friend, and is one of which my mother would have approved, given her advocacy and practice of labour-saving techniques in the kitchen. I have given the measures of the original recipe, but a 15 oz tin would correspond to one of approximately 500 gms.

INGREDIENTS
15 oz tin cherries
15 oz tin peaches
15 oz tin crushed pineapple
¾ cup sultanas
½ cup raisins
1 cup chopped prunes
½ cup sugar
1 cup brandy

METHOD
1. Boil fruit juices and sugar, raisins, sultanas and prunes and stir until thick.
2. Add chopped, seeded fruit and when cool add brandy.
3. Pour mixture into glass jars and keep in the fridge.
4. The fruit is best prepared at least a week before use.

I often top up the jars with additional brandy and keep the fruit in the back of a cupboard rather than fridge if the weather is sufficiently cool. As the flavour of the fruit intensifies and mellows over time, I usually try to prepare it a month before Christmas. It is lovely poured over ice-cream.

Anne Collett