context of how she was to conduct herself in her marriage and in society. The book’s sections of marketing instructions, menus, and recipes are, like the rest of the book, very helpfully footnoted, and there is a glossary of culinary terms as well. These sections comprise a detailed exposé of how the medieval upper bourgeoisie indulged themselves in the pleasures of eating, drinking, and entertaining. Where the previous translation by Eileen Power (The Goodman of Paris, 1928) rendered the medieval French into a slightly tortured English, Greco and Rose have made their translation far easier to read, helping to attract an audience that should include interested amateurs who are not medieval specialists.

—Kyri Watson Claflin, Boston University

NOTE

**Tomato Rhapsody: A Fable of Love, Lust & Forbidden Fruit**

Adam Schell

New York: Delacorte Press, 2009

340 pp. $25.00 (cloth)

A delight to read, this book follows in the medieval-Renaissance literary tradition of Italy, even in the author’s cleverly penned chapter titles: “In which we learn of Truffles and other Mushrooms” (p.27) or “In which we learn the Recipe for Insalata di Pomodoro e Menta” (p.58). Set in sixteenth-century Tuscany, the book is both a fable and a love story with a villainous stepfather, Giuseppe; a lovely maiden, Mari, who is Christian; and the sweet, innocent Jewish boy, Davido, who is meant for another. With imagination and humor Schell weaves their story with that of the tomato—pomo d’amore. Nonno, Davido’s grandfather, sails with Christopher Columbus to the New World and is abandoned there. But he discovers the tomato and ultimately brings it back to Italy, cultivates it, and transforms it from a shunned poisonous fruit to a sweet love apple embraced first by the Jews and then by Christians.

Without any attempt or desire to re-create history, Schell is clearly aware of such figures as Cosimo I de’ Medici, who becomes the misunderstood and reluctant Cosimo de’ Medici, the Grand Duke of Tuscany. He runs away from his stressful life to become a peasant farmer, if only for a short time, before he is discovered by his chef and must return to the Meducci estate. This is at once a parody, spoof, and satire of historical characters. Schell cleverly incorporates into the fable the tradition of Italian feste (festivals), patron saint’s-day celebrations and processions, and even the palio (horse race), but with a twist. Here, the palio becomes a donkey race in which the rider has one arm tied behind his back, and it is held at the Festa del Santo Ubiaco.

The overriding theme of the book is not just the tomato—it is food. The Meducci chef, Luigi Campoverde, cleverly procures giant truffles, olives, and tomatoes not with money but with objects he borrows from the Meducci household (pp.77, 128, 129), while the Good Padre fantasizes on what he will do with an eggplant he’s about to pick from his garden:

…the eggplant, cut width-wise into finger-thick slices…dip the slices into egg batter and then dredge them in chestnut flour with coarsely crushed walnuts, pignoli, sea salt and red pepper flakes. Filling a skillet half-knuckle deep with olive oil…fry until their outsides are golden and their insides soft…lay slices of particularly pungent, semi-firm cow’s milk cheese upon the fried eggplant…oven to soften the cheese and back the eggplant. (p.22)

We learn two different ways that pizza was invented—first by accident, when a focaccia spattered with bits of tomato and cheese is slipped onto a hot brick near a fire (pp.293–294); then by plan, when chef Luigi makes a “pizea” for little Margarita (pp.309–310). We also learn how olives were cured (pp.171–172, 186–187), how the tomato was accidentally turned into a lovely sauce (pp.274–275), and much more. In Tomato Rhapsody not only is the history of the tomato re-created, but Italian food is, too. Read it with pleasure.

—Katherine McIver, University of Alabama at Birmingham

**Swindled: The Dark History of Food Fraud, From Poisoned Candy to Counterfeit Coffee**

Bee Wilson


384 pp. $26.95 (cloth)

Readers will learn in Bee Wilson’s engaging new book about food fraudsters through the ages that fishmongers in nineteenth-century northern England sold their catch to the working poor by candlelight on Saturday evening. Sounds romantic, doesn’t it? The truth, however, is that the wealthy had already bought the freshest fish that morning, long before workers, who had only just got their weekly pay in late afternoon, finally had a chance to shop.
Unfortunately, by that time, what remained in the stalls was the smelly, old mackerel that didn’t look too bad in the dark. But just in case, some sellers daubed gills with a little “fishy makeup”—red paint—to feign the bloom of the recently netted. Certainly the smell proclaimed the fish’s rottenness, but as Wilson notes, the duped knew the midnight price would be cheapest. Besides, what choice did they have? All sorts of food buyers and sellers of the period had similar “curious” relationships based on implicit mistrust, Wilson tells us, and both groups seemed victimized by market forces beyond their control.

Wilson, a weekly food columnist for London’s Sunday Telegraph, admits that she writes disproportionately in Swindled about fakers of Britain and America. It is partly because of where she lives but also, troublingly, because foodstuff fraud has historically flourished in places like the UK and US, where industrialization coalesced with “a relatively non-interventionist state” (p. xiv). Being comprehensive isn’t, in any event, her aim. Rather, she presents a series of case studies that illustrate the basic trends in food crime and punishment, from which we may extrapolate to guard against contemporary deceptions. Yes, given human nature, it is most assuredly an ongoing problem, and not just in China, whose infant-formula scandal recalls that of the swill milk sold during Tammany Hall days in New York.

The first half of Wilson’s account features several flawed heroes, including Friedrich Accum, author of the first fraudulent-food exposé, A Treatise on Adulterations of Food, and Culinary Poisons, published by the German chemist in 1820; Arthur Hill Hassall, a Notting Hill doctor who used his microscope to expose food adulterators in the 1850s; Thomas Wakley, founder of the Lancet, who published Hassall’s research and boldly named offenders’ names; Harvey Washington Wiley, who laid groundwork for the US Pure Food and Drugs Act of 1906; and, of course, our own investigator of the putrid Chicago stockyards, Upton Sinclair.

These tales—of sweets dyed red with lead; pepper and other spices bulked up by floor sweepings; oatmeal padded by barleymalt, which produced vomiting and diarrhea in children; and bread baked with alum, to make wholesome bread look to the class-conscious like white-flour bread—are not the most original part of the book. Rather, it is Wilson’s general discussions of how early-twentieth-century campaigns for food purity begat such “solutions” as overly processed foods, additives, pesticides, and packaging, while at the same time warping the very word pure, as commercial interests, like Heinz, used the purity pitch questionably to build empires.

Wilson is also good at describing odd paradoxes, like the sentiments in Hitler’s Germany, where ingesting ersatz foods and drinks—e.g., “coffee” made from ground walnut shells and rhubarb as a substitute for lemon—came to be considered acts of patriotism that were one indication of a culture gone mad.

Wilson shows in the second half of Swindled that by the postwar period, the problem of adulterated food and drink grew more complicated as marketing forces gained more power to persuade and occasionally deceive the public. The new artificial colorings, flavorings, and preservatives were advertised as marvels of progress, and government attempts to protect consumers by passing laws like the US Food Additives Amendment of 1958 worked perversely to offer greater protection to manufacturers of “foods” like Pringles and “drinks” like Coca-Cola’s cyclamate-sweetened Tab.

The situation only gets worse with the “great panacea of food safety” (p. 276) —labeling—that allows industry to make misleading statements of “fact.” For every step forward, it seems, we take two proverbial steps back. Most disheartening of all, Wilson introduces us to a new medical condition, orthorexia nervosa, a term coined by Steven Bratman, M.D. and defined by him as an obsession with healthful eating and by Wilson as “righteous eating” (p. 309). While buying organic is among the solutions that Wilson advocates, she describes the plight of one extreme case of an orthorexic who insisted not only on organic vegetables but those that had been out of the ground for no more than fifteen minutes. As Wilson herself depressingly acknowledges: “History suggests that all victories in this struggle are the presage of further battles to come” (p. 321).

—Jeanne Schinto, Andover, MA

Milk and Melancholy
Kenneth Hayes
Toronto: Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art, 2008
206 pp. Illustrations. $24.95 (cloth)

Crying over spilt milk makes sense when milk is all you’ve got. Such is the crisis that Jeff Wall captures in a white sweep through the foreground of his 1984 photograph Milk, an artwork at the heart of Kenneth Hayes’s hunt through images—some obscure, some renowned—for milk’s secret meanings.

To the young man in Wall’s image, the white fluid splashing from the package he holds could mean several things. His rough appearance—greasy hair and bare ankles—and his seated posture on a sidewalk before a