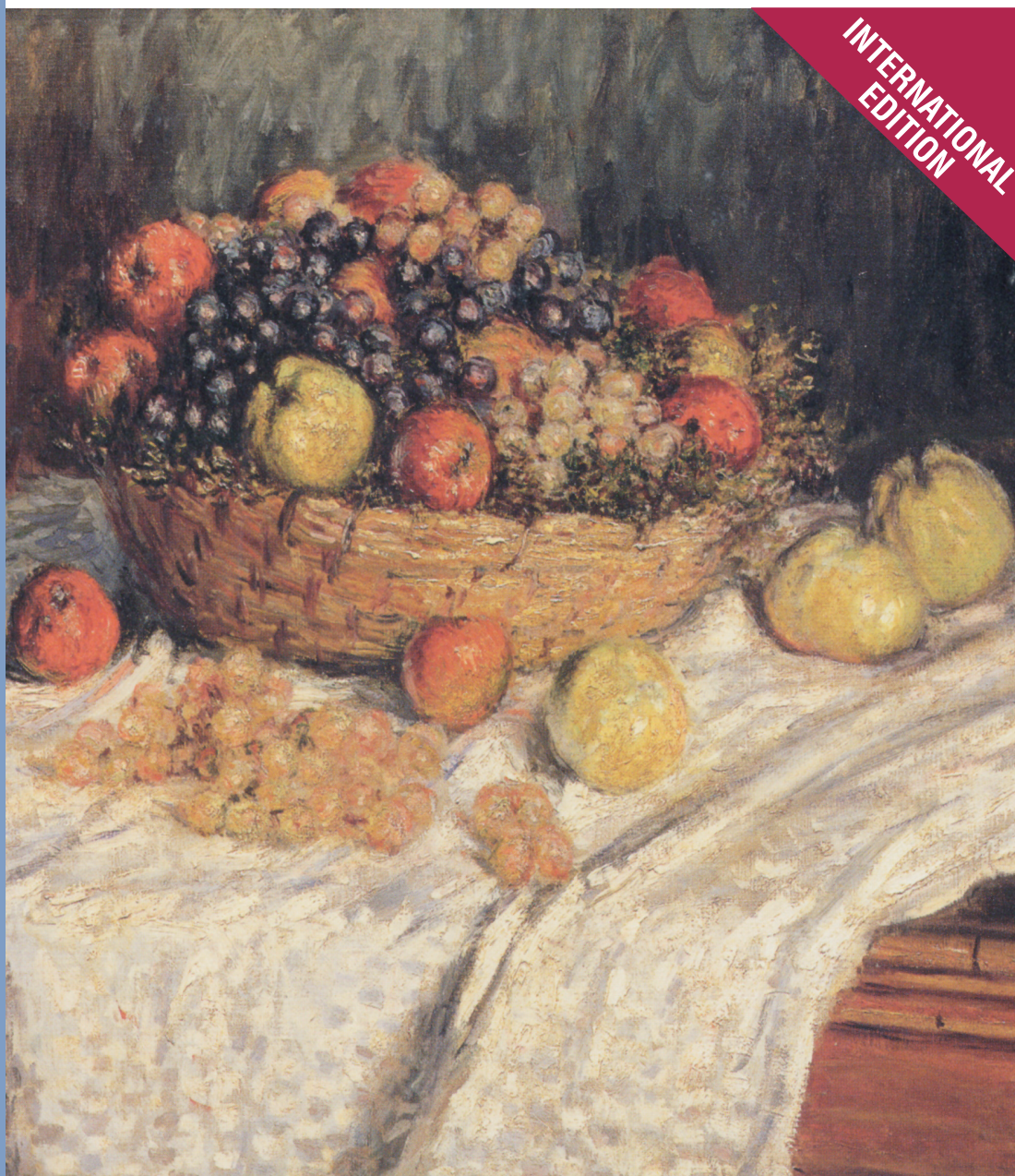


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WHIT MASSIMO ALBERINI AND VINCENZO BUONASSISI.

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On the cover: Still Life with Grapes and Apples
by Claude Monet (1880)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



The ethics of gastronomic criticism

*Gastronomic criticism is a difficult art,
with its own set of ethics that requires knowledge,
impartiality, honesty and tolerance.*

BY GIOVANNI BALLARINI
President of the Academy

Dear Academicians, it tastes good or it tastes bad; I like it or I don't like it. These are not critical judgments but personal preferences. While they are certainly significant, they are based on the tastes, memories, experiences, and the cultural level of whomever is evaluating a dish, a dinner menu, a chef's style and cooking method, or an eating establishment, be it a trattoria or a restaurant. Above all, it is a judgment that calls for the complete sincerity of the person expressing it. At best they are possible justifications of one's own memories, experiences, and in the final analysis one's own tastes.

At another level we can establish an evaluation "average" even for a diverse group of people. If we take into account the inevitable individual differences, is it possible to obtain a

result as an expression of a broader judgment? And is this a condition that enables us to resolve the issue? No, it cannot, because it moves the focus from the individual to the group and how it is made up. One must take into consideration the characteristics of the group. For example, the judgment a group of elderly food connoisseurs makes about a fast food restaurant or pizzeria is going to be very different from one made by a group of young people or adolescents. Is it even possible to constitute a group of people that is in any sense representative of a population that is increasingly fragmented and has different tastes? The result of bringing together ten people with different cultural and nutritional backgrounds and culinary memories and collecting their judgments in order to generate an average rating will not satisfy any of the many categories that make up today's society.

Criticism is a typically human activity. It is a natural and instinctive behavior, but also a complex one that we find in all aspects of life, from how we dress to how we live, and in every human activity, particularly those having artistic aspects and value. The same is true for the art of cuisine, be it popular or high gastronomy.

When criticism moves from the private world to the public realm - professional or not is immaterial - other qualities are required, and sincerity alone, while indispensable, is not

enough. In this case criticism becomes an ethic that also requires knowledge, impartiality, honesty and tolerance.

Knowledge means that critics must be well acquainted with the subject they discuss or about which they write. Such knowledge must have two main characteristics.

First of all, their knowledge should be direct, that is total and first hand, not based on hearsay. There are many cases in which a restaurant has been evaluated on the basis of second-hand information or only after a cursory or superficial sampling from its menu. A while back someone was said to have remarked that "in order to judge a restaurant all I need to see is how they make fried eggs". We have heard the same thing said about many traditional dishes.

The second requirement of a good critic is that they must know the subject matter that they are reviewing, from the characteristics of the raw materials used to preparation and cooking techniques, and so on. And, in this regard, one should not underestimate the rapid evolution of those techniques whose results cannot be deprecated as "no good" simply out of ignorance.

Impartiality is another indispensable quality of a good critic. Such impartiality should not be merely personal, nor obviously conditioned by other more subtle elements such as personal friendships with staff, one's own particular tastes, or mem-



bership in the same social, cultural or regional groups, etc. Not to mention negative judgments based on personal antipathies or perceived slights. Critics must also be impartial when evaluating a dish or eating establishment belonging to a specific category. For example, sampling a brodetto in a fish restaurant as opposed to a general restaurant. In these cases it is not always easy for critics to divest themselves of all their own personal ideas and make a judgment arrived at in a different context.

The honesty of the critic comes to

the fore when his or her judgment does not coincide with that of the public or with prevailing fads. For example, a dish or establishment may be in vogue but does not meet the necessary qualifications. In this case especially, after having examined and double checked their evaluation, the critic must be honest and not bow to the pressure of transient public opinion or of the market. The critic must also be tolerant. Tolerance is perhaps the most difficult attribute of a gastronomic critic, especially in Italy, where everyone considers himself infallible.

When someone expresses a different judgment, he or she is immediately labeled as an incompetent, bought and paid for, or even crazy. In these cases, the best one can do is to try to convince the antagonist that people can have different opinions - but it is difficult to do. In such circumstances it is best to explain that professional criticism, including gastronomic criticism, is a very different thing than expressing one's own opinions - an almost impossible task.

GIOVANNI BALLARINI



GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE MAGAZINE

Contributions to the magazine by Academicians are not only welcome, they are indispensable. However Academicians need to keep in mind some essential guidelines, so that their effort and passion are rewarded by rapid and thorough publication.

- **Articles:** It is essential that **articles be sent electronically**, in Word format (not pdf) to the following email address: redazione@accademia1953.it

- **Article Length:** To avoid cuts that are irritating for both the writer and editor, articles should be between **4,000 and 6,000 characters** (including spaces). Your computer provides character counts.

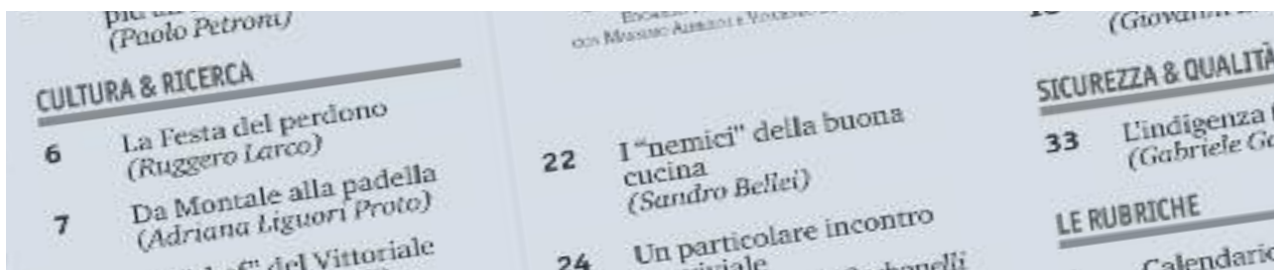
- **"From the Delegations" Column:** For ease of reading, **maximum length is limited to 2,500 characters including spaces.**

- **Convivial Dinner forms:** it is equally important that the "notes and comments" section of the rating sheets **respect the 800 character limit** (Maximum 1,000 characters) include spaces, in order to avoid cuts and errors. Rating sheets that arrive at Headquarters more than 30 days after the event will be discarded.

- **Please do not send reports on convivial dinners held outside the territory of your Delegation**, or on those **held in the homes of Academicians** or places other than restaurants and public settings, as they will not be published.

- By observing these simple guidelines Academicians can be reasonably assured of rapid and accurate publication, thereby avoiding painful cuts.

- Obviously, the Editors reserve the right to edit all articles and publish them according to available space.



An Academy that is true to its mission

A synergy of the work of the Delegations and Study Centers together with all the means we have of communicating with the world, will enable the Academy to reach important objectives.

BY PAOLO PETRONI
Secretary General of the Academy

We live in a world where appearances are often more important than reality. In our global village, sometimes knowing what we are going to do counts for more than what we are already doing. This is not the Academy's usual way of thinking and acting, but an increased "media" presence and the continued upgrading of our publications have been major goals of this Academy presidency for many years. In recent months we sent a questionnaire to over 100 Delegates, Coordinators and Directors of the Regional Study Centers (a significant sampling) and the results were very clear: the almost unanimous support for the continuation of our magazine (but too with often the same contributors and not enough homogeneity in content) and for the graphic format (with some modifications in the print version). Taken altogether, a very flattering evaluation. It is for this reason that the copy you are reading now uses glossy paper and has a new layout and style. Other modifications include the order of the articles (Academic Life now appears at the end of the magazine). Many important changes concern the Itineraries collection (the annual theme) and the Cultural Gastronomy series, not to mention the new 2014 Guide to the

Good Table, which will be completely redesigned in light of cost considerations and a not very high level of acceptance. Other modifications involve our Internet site (with already 6,000 hits each month), not just in terms of graphics but up to date content and information available in real time. Smartphone and tablet functions will also be improved. It is altogether an ambitious project, but one that is essential in order to maintain a vital and "industrious" Academy such as ours.

This is what we do! But we must spread the word about our various activities. Therefore, in terms of "appearances" (in the positive sense of the word) we are analyzing a new communications and information strategy, especially in light of the upcoming 2015 International Expo and the publication of an important new national cookbook that is in the final stages of production. The perfect synergy between the work of the Delegations and the Study Centers, together with all the communications means at our disposal today will enable the Academy to achieve important goals in terms of public awareness and prestige. These are objectives that will only be achieved thanks to the enthusiasm and dedication of all our Academicians.

2013 ECUMENICAL DINNER



The convivial ecumenical dinner will take place October 17 at 8:30 pm, and its theme will be *The Cuisine of Unforgettable Meat*. The theme, chosen by the Franco Marengi Research Center and approved by the President's Council, includes the cuisine of the "fifth quarter", but also other meats and animal products that have always had a place in popular cuisine but that are seldom used today because we are no longer subject to a "cuisine of poverty". The objective for 2013 therefore will be to rediscover traditional dishes that use offal - giblets, organ meats and tripe - that can still have a place in frugal modern Italian cuisine. Delegates will be charged with ensuring that the ecumenical dinner is accompanied by an appropriate cultural presentation that discusses the proposed theme and that the dishes chosen reflect the foods that have been selected by the Council.



From a poet to the fraing pan

The cuttlefish has inspired poets, literates and artists, but also the creation of dishes in the kitchen.

BY ADRIANA LIGUORI PROTO
Crotone Delegate



To speak of the cuttlefish from a historic-literary-gastronomic viewpoint at this time of the year is particularly germane and propitious. Among mollusks, the *Sepia officinalis* of the Sepidian family is one of the most beautiful to look at on account of its livery that undulates with its lateral fins depending on its habitat while taking on mimetic colors for defense purposes in a range of tones of a dazzling beauty. Curiously, this extraordinary marine creature is mentioned with great sympathy as a well qualified cultural specimen, and not just because it lent its bones to the poet Montale but also due to that black and dense liquid, or ink, that is utilized in the art of drawing to impart light and darkness to sketches and engravings. Owing to such peculiarity, there is even a German cultural magazine named after the cuttlefish. In brief, it is a cultured fish that is rightly celebrated for its singular customs as well. Pliny wrote: "Did a trident blow hit the female? The males come rushing to her help but if the victim is a male, the female runs away." In classical times there was not a single author who has not spent a word in the cuttlefish's favor. Catullus, Ovid and Athenaeus sing most of all the delicate taste of the Mediterranean's cuttlefish that graced the tables of the Greek and Roman gourmand. And again, just to stick to the literary - gastronomic field, in a letter addressed to her daughter, Madame de Sévigné indulges in a flattering panegyric of the cuttlefish while Leon Daudet cal-

led it the most excellent food for Lent by associating the taste and whiteness of its meat to the religious sentiment and purity that befit lean foods. From March until December, the fish markets of the region display an abundant variety of this mollusk by variable weight that includes cuttlefish of just a few grams and specimens that can weigh as much as four or six pounds. Along the coastline of Calabria, even a few feet from the shore, magnificent specimens of considerable dimensions can be caught. The most common fishing techniques to capture cuttlefish are: the bottom nets dragged by the so called paranze; the stationary nets that are lowered into the sea from small boats; the nasse or special pots that are built by skilled artisans using reeds bent in the shape of large baskets.

The most enchanting fishing of the cuttlefish, however, occurs at night and calls for the precise launching of spears - the lanzaturu - from swift and agile boats equipped with lampare or lanterns. The crew is composed of two very experienced fishermen, an oarsman and a spear thrower. The latter crewman is a distinguished archetype of the local marine folklore, someone who must possess uncommon skill. When the fisherman has seized, with great labor, the prey that he was after, cooking it is almost a rite. In particular, cuttlefish lends itself to various preparations; stewed with potatoes; grilled, basted with olive oil and flavored with oregano and red hot pepper; properly stuffed in a fraing pan.



The fifth quarter abroad

From France to South Africa to the United States, there are those that love it and those that hate it.

BY FERDINAND TESSADRI
Merano Delegate

There is a saying in Africa: “Kilanyana nyana tu” that simply means “meat is meat”. Very true, but not everyone would agree. Even in Italy with our tradition of dishes made with “fifth quarter” meats there are many who grimace at the mere thought of eating tripe, liver, spleen, etc. But what about beyond the Brenner and Ventimiglia? Well, it depends. There are countries that have a significant culture and long tradition of eating offal, and those where it is not even mentioned. Starting with our cultural cousins, it is obvious that in a country like France with a centuries-old culinary tradition, there will be plenty of dishes that contain entrails. I greatly enjoyed a plate of os à la moelle, or ox bone with marrow, sliced horizontally, roasted and served with sea salt and half a toasted baguette at the bistro Les Becchante on a side street

behind the Opera Garnier. And I could never forget the kidney cooked in its own juice and served with mustard at Aux Charpentiers, also in Paris. Or the tripe served Caen style cooked in Normandy cider, or tablier de sapeur, tripe marinated in wine, then breaded and fried. I could continue with pieds et paquets, lamb feet and tripe, or tripe stuffed with pancetta and herbs, shaped into bundles and cooked in white wine and tomatoes; then there was veal tongue served with chestnut puree. Madrid is famous for its callos a la madrilená, tripe stewed with tomato and served with spicy sausage and blood sausage. In Austria one cannot shirk sampling their famous Beuschel. It consists of a ragout made with veal lung and heart, cooked with herbs and spices, seasoned with vinegar and served with Knoedel. Germany is divided: Bavaria would be inconceivable without its Leberknoedel (knoedel with liver) served in broth, or its Leberwurst (liver paté). So would the Rhineland without its Saumagen (pork stomach stuffed with meat and potatoes) cooked and served with cabbage. However as soon as you cross the Main river heading north the inhabitants don't even want to discuss these meats. Tripe, liver and similar things are considered fit only for dog or cat food. The same refrain is heard in the Scandinavian countries, although the Norwegians and Icelanders enjoy smoked boiled sheep head. The English are not fond of offal, but they do have some well known exceptions, like steak and kidney pie, a pastry crust filled with minced meat and kidney. The Scottish na-

tional dish, haggis, is the stomach of a sheep filled with the animal's chopped entrails, oats and spices. All boiled for a long time and served with a digestive sauce made of whiskey. And we must not forget oxtail soup that is eaten around the world. In the United States it is better not even to raise the subject of consuming offal, which is considered inedible and not presentable - even though Americans have no problems eating their beloved hot dogs, which contain considerable quantities of it. One American cookbook that includes such recipes is entitled Unmentionable Cuisine. There is even a ban on the import of Scottish haggis to the United States because sheep lung is considered potentially dangerous. As I said at the beginning, in Africa nothing is thrown away. A friend of mine told me the story of an interesting dinner in South Africa, where an enormous buffalo head, complete with horns, was served, boiled slowly with herbs and spices. The eyes were reserved for the guest of honor. As we know, the Chinese eat everything with legs, except for tables and chairs. In their markets I have seen boiled chicken feet and fried duck heads, both greatly prized by the Chinese when they are cooked with medicinal herbs. This fits in well with their perception of cuisine as salutary rather than gustatory. For those who are shocked by the strange tastes of the Chinese, I would like to draw attention to the French dish of “stuffed veal eyes”, wherein the eyeballs are hollowed out and filled with truffles, then breaded and fried. Small world, isn't it?



Philosophy and literature

An article analyzing the close link between gastronomy, history and literature, emphasizing that provincial cuisine is great cuisine because it respects our culinary rhythms, family traditions and procedures.

BY ORIO VERGANI
Founder of the Academy



One of the last pages written by Orio Vergani. He wrote everything by hand, with the lines growing increasingly shorter.

The first restaurant in Paris was opened in 1765 by a man named Boulanger. He was certain not a baker, but rather a kind of colorful scoundrel with his sword at his side and a jovial air. He offered his services as a guide, and his visitors always wound up at his little dive on the Rue de Poulies near the Louvre. There he prepared a meal for them according to the recipes of the physician Clarens (greatly simplified for economic reasons): bouillon, a soup made with wild game and minced ox meat that was strained and flavored with an infusion of barley, wilted rose petals and Damascus grapes. Given his personality, I suspect that Boulanger bragged to his clients about the arcane aphrodisiacal powers of his bouillon. Two years later he would serve it to a customer that was famous in the literary world by the name of Diderot. He was also a finicky patron because in a letter he wrote to a friend providing the address of the restaurant, he also complained that Mr. Boulanger's broth was too expensive.

With the birth of the first restaurant the first demanding client also appeared on the scene - one who closely scrutinizes the check. The French adore, extol, honor and award their restaurants, but they do not want to "come to blows" over the bill. Both restaurateur and customer must respect an honest business relationship. The Frenchman enjoys an hour or so of oblivion while at the table, but with the "wake up call" of the check his mind functions with Cartesian lucidity. It is no accident that one of the great

at French philosophers and one of their greatest poets, Pascal and Paul Valéry, were also great mathematicians. The French gastronome may have traveled widely through the complex labyrinths of gourmandise, but he will never be afflicted by the adamant refusal of any Italian to double check the bill. Here are some observations from my quiet table as a gastronomic vagabond, and as what the French in their wisdom call (and I wouldn't presume to translate it) a solitary "culinographe".

When I am seated beside a couple of friends - usually no longer in the flower of their youth - I see that they are well acquainted with both great and minor recipes. They have learned them through tradition: they consolidate their knowledge by means of consulting the publications of the gastronomic editorial houses that today churn out at least 50 books a year. These are not books intended to be given as a gift to a gluttonous old uncle or a provincial grandmother well known for her vegetable pies. These are volumes that booksellers display in places of honor, right beside those of Pléiade or the latest Goncourt Prize.

They are not meant for professional chefs or cooks; rather they target what we will call "Sunday cooks" - culinary dilettantes just like customs guard Rousseau and painting. From the solemn Larousse books - a gastronomic supplement by Treccani would shock Italians - all the way to the step-by-step cookbooks that can be found in the kitchen drawers of any good housewife. A "first" edition of Brillat-Sava-



rin in a French antique store is as expensive as a 16th century edition of the Divine Comedy in Italy. But the big publishing houses churn out books that are not only opulent but also erudite, dealing with even the most obscure provincial dishes with the goal of demonstrating that Great French Cuisine comes from all over the country, not just Paris. For those who have relocated to the big city of Paris the attachment to their regional cuisine remains strong. This is perhaps the only case in which Parisian dominance is not recognized and where even the smallest village does not feel subject to the laws of the Capital. It is a perfect way to defend oneself from anonymity and cosmopolitan misunderstanding. There was a "Parisian school" in painting; but not in cuisine: even if Paris does manage to succeed with its vast tourist industry in "exploiting" regional (let us call them "dialectical") gastronomic repertoires. For this reason "great cuisine" substantially remains that of the countryside, where life proceeds at a slower pace and where tradition and the respect for family life represent a society that venerates its classics in the bookstores and grandma's sauces in the kitchen. Philosophy, literature, love of anecdotes and history - specifically the "documentary dish" and integrity in ingredients - all attributes of a country that enjoys a

rich and carefully maintained agriculture. They come together in the cultural gastronomy of a country where the final work of Alexandre Dumas was a colossal cookbook. It was edited by Antole France and the preface to most recent reprint was written by Maurois. Like all solitary "culinographes", I smoke while I eat - something for



which I was chastised by one of Paris's wisest gastronomes: "Don't be so selfish... think about your table companions...the odor of your cigarettes damages the aroma of the food they are eating..." And if I do not smoke, I read to keep myself company so as to populate the unavoidable silence of the traveler. While waiting for a canapé d'écruissés I leaf through Francis Anumategui's Art des Mets. In a chap-

ter dedicated to veal Milanese he writes "Napoleon ate this throughout his Italian campaign, and to vary the menu a bit his chef would improvise a "chicken Marengo"; Lord Byron, Stendhal, Barrés, Anatole France, "innumerable 'lovers of Venice', and widows on their autumn vacation to the Lakes" also enjoyed the dish. He follo-

wed with this very lucid observation: "Those countries that seen their land used as military battlefields often did not have the time to devote to elaborate cuisine. They were at the mercy of the invading armies. The enemy might arrive at any moment, and so they ate whatever was prepared for them even if it was meant for different tastes. Because the land lay along the invasion routes, the cuisine of northern and eastern France has always been more improvisatory than the that of the land south of the Loire. Russia could peacefully devote itself to its Pojarski cutlets and Beef Stroganov."

Thus history and literature are good but invisible companions while I wait for the check like a good Italian - with an indifference that has Spanish origins I am too gentlemanly to look it over. And I think of Marcel Proust whose Recherche du Temps Perdu was inspired by the taste of a biscuit, which just goes to show that even the ways of the palate can be poetic.

INTERNET, BLOGS, FACEBOOK AND THE ACCADEMIA WEBSITE

Recently some Delegations have expressed an interest in opening their own websites. In order to avoid content conflicts with the Accademia's official website, the Office of the President has expressly stated that this is not possible. The Office of the President would like to stipulate that online conversations among Academicians and/or Delegations in blogs and on platforms such as Facebook are permitted. However, in these cases the use of Accademia logo is not allowed, and content should not discuss or involve the Academy's organizational activities.



The “enemies” of good cuisine

Overabundant antipasti, excess use of cream and spices, and outlandish fillings are the cover up for a bad cook.

BY SANDRO BELLEI

Academician, Modena Delegation



Good cuisine has enemies; and instead of enemies bad cuisine has accomplices. So who are the allies of good cuisine? Obviously one of the most important is a passion for cooking, and also the state of tranquility that culinary rhythms requires. Just as in gardening there are those who have a green thumb, in the kitchen there are women - and also men - who have the golden touch, managing with little or no effort to transform almost any recipe into a great dish even on their first try. But before discussing the allies, I would like to point out some of the enemies of good cuisine, which today as in the past should not depend on fantastical inventions, some of which seem more aimed at “shock and awe” than creating pleasant dishes. For quite some time now, with a few legitimate exceptions, we no longer come to the table simply because we are hungry. At the most, at the appointed mealtime we sit down with a light appetite. When faced with certain dishes, the primary stimulus is gluttony, which is one of the most negatives aspects of gastronomy.

The reason that we are less hungry when coming to the midday table today than in the past is due to a more rational daily eating regimen. Finally, after years of nutritional ignorance, modern science has helped us to understand the importance of eating a good breakfast, which allows our bodies to face the day with a sufficient dose of “fuel”. Once upon a time, to avoid heading to school or work wi-

thout the indispensable “gasoline” necessary to keep our motors running after almost 11 hours of fasting, we would consume that classic cup of caffelatte (coffee and hot milk - no foam) in which we would dunk a piece of leftover bread. Today the breakfast panorama is completely different. Industrially produced ready to eat snack foods (another enemy of good cuisine) include yogurt, coffee, cookies, croissants, honey, cereals, and citrus and other fruit marmalades.

In Italy breakfast is usually comprised of sweets, unlike in other countries, especially Nordic ones, where the population prefers a saltier start to their day: typically, scrambled eggs and bacon. Today many hotels in Italy, particularly those that cater to tourists offer two kinds of breakfast to satisfy their entire clientele: continental, generally comprised of coffee or tea, bread, cereal with milk and fruit juice; and international, which includes several offerings including cheese and sliced salami, eggs, sweets and American coffee.

In our search for other enemies of our good traditional table we must not ignore some trends that are turning gastronomy into “gastro-sophy”, by proposing radical rules and often transforming their supporters into hyper-refined consumers, perennially on the trail of some long lost cheese or salami. For some time there has been an explosion of television programs devoted to cooking, all with more or less the same format. Always acclaimed for their successful



restaurants, today's chefs are finding ample opportunities to promote themselves in bookstores where culinary books fill the shelves, as well as on regularly scheduled TV programs. There is no question that these recipes are able to satisfy the most demanding palates, but their healthfulness is dubious. One study conducted by nutritional experts from the University of Coventry in the UK makes specific allegations: the dishes proposed by some chefs risk increasing the problem of obesity and overweight because they may contain excessive quantities of saturated fats, sugar and salt. The researchers examined over 900 recipes from the menus of 26 famous cooks. They found that 87% of these dishes do not comply with the nutritional recommendations for a healthy diet, and only 13% of the recipes included ingredients for healthy dishes. The authors of the study did not want to reveal the names of the less virtuous chefs, but it is clear that as in many situations one cannot generalize and accuse all chefs of not respecting the rules for healthy nutrition.

How then can we know if those dishes presented in cookbooks and on TV shows are harmful to our health? It is a good idea to judge a recipe on the basis of the principles of the Mediterranean diet, whose benefits are unquestionable, and choose to prepare only those dishes that are in line with the experts' recommendations. Imprecise magazines that for exclusively editorial and promotional reasons superficially deal with gastronomy are also enemies of good cuisine. Worse still in my opinion are many cookbooks in which recipes are presented without precise measurements of ingredients or the necessary cooking time. Expressions such as "a pinch of this" "a handful of that" or the classic "q.b." (quanto basta - as much as you need) are not helpful to amateur cooks attempting to prepare dishes from other regions. They cannot possibly be aware of small but in-

dispensable local secrets. After breakfast, we move on to lunch or dinner prepared with the inevitable antipasto that, according to the dictionary, should be a food designed to stimulate the appetite. It is one thing when a housewife hoping to impress her guests by showing off her culinary skills ignores the harm that overabundance can do to her guests, but the ambiguous role of antipasti in restaurants today is unacceptable. Instead of being an invitation to the sample the other dishes on the menu, antipasti today are often boomerangs that make it impossible to enjoy the rest of the meal: more than an antipasto, it is an anti-pasto. A typical fish restaurant offers some raw fish and a huge variety of cold and hot antipasti, but quantity does not equal quality. There are two consequences of this tendency, mostly negative. If the antipasto is very abundant we often find ourselves unable to eat anything else, especially the second course which is where the best fish dishes are found. If the antipasto serving is more modest, we often move onto a pasta or soup dish, which produces an even worse "filling effect". The practical result is that we end up eating only antipasti or first courses, but we spend as much as if we really ate fish for the main course. The same is true when eating meat. While awaiting the first course, we often order a plate of mixed salami, accompanied by many varieties of bread, which satisfies the appetite instead of stimulating it. Few of us manage to then enjoy both a main course and dessert. Therefore I believe that the antipasto is the most dangerous enemy of a good meal. Since today as never before we are experiencing the need for a leaner style cuisine, I suggest doing away with this "useless" series of opening dishes. Instead I propose that restaurants offer a small gastronomic "complimentary sample" under

the restaurant's signature. The sample should include a taste - without the heaviness of a full dish - of the dishes we have selected from the menu. Only in this way can we properly judge the culinary art of that particular restaurant.

To complete this portrait of the enemies of good food, we must include the culinary horrors that we occasionally experience: the overuse of cream, which is the cover up of a bad cook who will even serve it on dry tortellini, and of certain spices that are not part of our gastronomic culture. We often see this in pizzerias, where the most bizarre pizzas are served, including a inexplicably turquoise "smurf pizza".

One final example. Where I am from crescentina, or flatbread, is a typical local food, especially in the mountains. They are made from flattened disks of unleavened dough cooked between two *tigelle*, heat resistant stones that have been placed in the oven. They are sliced horizontally and stuffed with a mixture of lard, rosemary and grated *parmigiano reggiano* or with the traditional *salamis* of the Emilia Romagna region where for historical and anthropological reasons man's best friend is not the dog but the pig, whose meat has filled the stomachs of entire generations. There has been a recent tendency among young people of stuffing the crescentine with a certain well known spread made of chocolate and hazelnut. There is nothing wrong with that spread, but there is something strange about the sweet and salty mix. And thus bad cuisine collects yet another example.

