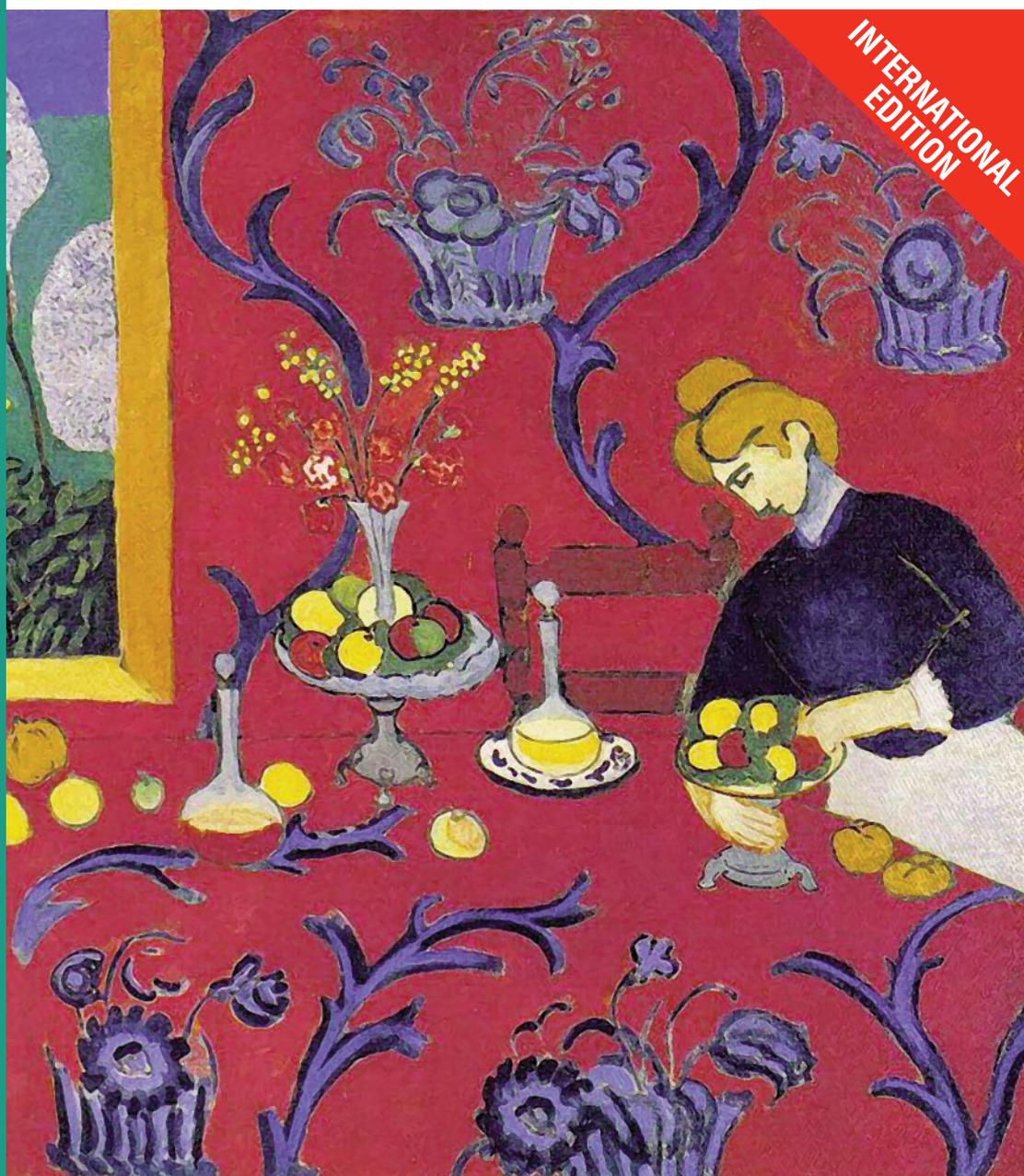


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On the cover: Graphic depiction of the work "The Red Room" (1908-1909) by Henri Matisse. On display at the Quirinale Stables in Rome as part of the exhibition Matisse Arabesque, through June 21.



The commonplace nature of the cuisine of non-places

Today's restaurants have been replaced by a great variety of places where one eats anonymous, standardized food.

BY GIOVANNI BALLARINI
President of the Academy

Dear Academicians, Pachino tomatoes, Bronte pistachios, Pantelleria capers, Colonata bacon, Castelluccio di Norcia lentils, and so on - are all deliberately limited niche foods that bear the name of a place that few people know in terms of its environmental, climatic and topographical characteristics. The same is true for many DOP and IGP foods that are known only for their name of origin and not for their productive characteristics or their gastronomic quality. Nonetheless they are all foods that have truly become "commonplace".

There is no dearth of menus featuring recipes containing two or even three commonplace ingredients, and this happens with a frequently and diffusion that would prove impossible for small producers, especially when they are present in cuisine that is increas-

ingly dependent on assembling foods that were prepared elsewhere.

Similarly, in that same cuisine, we are witnessing the almost uncontrollable spread of meat presented on a bed of *rucola*, crustaceans and fish unerringly associated with chickpea or other legume purees, and the diffusion of all sorts of *tortelli* pasta or recipes cooked "my way". In terms of recipes as well as food we come face to face with the common place, or commonplace. The commonplace is a relatively recent culinary reality and is increasingly linked to a concept (not necessarily a true or accurate one) whose diffusion, recurrence or familiarity are determined by self-evidence or immediate recognizability. The term "common place" derives from the Latin *locus communis*, the square where people meet and converse, often about trivial things, and have banal exchanges. In addition to not being stable over time, the diffusion of the common place is not necessarily homogeneous in terms of the population and groups can be limited according to culture, interests, profession or political orientation. The "common place" is often a place of consensus and therefore it is a constant in commercial and even nutritional communication and exchanges, in which it is essential that the potential buyer or consumer recognizes in the message a familiar way of thinking. It is even presumable that when there is sufficient interest some "common places" may be constructed and devoted to the arts, so that they may be consolidated and taken

advantage of. Today the common place is becoming the substitute, if not the alibi, for a new and worrisome non-place cuisine. This expression, which is sometime written as one word, as "nonplace", does not refer, as one might imagine, to a cuisine that does not exist, for example a house in which they eat only prepackaged foods. It means instead a cuisine lacking an identity, therefore it is anonymous, with no relationship to a region, and no social, traditional or historical context.

French anthropologist Marc Augé was the first person to coin the term "non-place" in 1992. The expression became extremely successful in Italian as well, and starting in 2003 "*non luogo*" officially entered our vocabulary. The phrase non-place derives from airports, highway restaurants, malls, train stations - all places that possess a certain anonymity and are environmentally and architecturally similar on the inside. Among non-places today we find many chain restaurants, which basically depend on foods that are partially or completely pre-packaged. Even home kitchens are becoming non-places that utilize industrially prepared ready-to-eat foods, consumed after thawing followed by a brief warming-up, often in a microwave oven. This type of cuisine is reminiscent of the Lego toys, in which a limited series of anonymous blocks, in different shapes and colors, are used to create a variety of structures. Alimentary "common places" are like Lego blocks and the meals that they make up, while generally safe and good tast-



ing, are always standard and homogenized, with the typical anonymity of non-places. A pasta served with canned sauce or a pre-constituted *risotto* that is assembled according to an industrial logic and cooked in the microwave, followed by a pre-cooked chop and frozen vegetables and mass produced dessert are typical examples of an assemblage that can be executed in any non-place, from chain restaurants to post-modern homes.

This non-place cuisine promotes and propels itself through a claim of belonging to a false “common place”. We find the ultimate expression of non-place cuisine with vending machines, which have given rise to an “automatic cuisine”. It began with liquids, with

beverages like soft drinks, and moved to solids like sandwiches and ice cream. Today coffee machines that offer a wide variety of styles and flavors are very popular. We have, in a fairly short time, evolved to the automatic distribution of fresh foods. Today we already have machines that purvey fresh fruit salads, green salads, fresh fruit, and yogurt. These are the kinds of foods that are preferred by many consumers today over the usual industrially produced snacks that are hyper-publicized and full of calories. Following a diet based on this nutrition represents a new life style that allows us to appreciate local fruit and vegetable products. Today, one-fourth of the Italian population has reduced their food con-

sumption or altered their eating habits as a result of the economic crisis, but only 6.8 percent have reduced their purchases from vending machines, which are used by 40 percent of our citizens. At least 15 million people occasionally or regularly purchase food from vending machines. Lately 42 percent of the Italian population, in particular those from 18 to 64 years of age, have acquired food and beverages automatically and one-quarter of them do so on a daily basis. It seems that the stereotype of kicking the money-eating machine is long gone, but it has been replaced by a “common place” cuisine in a non-place that is advancing day by day.

GIOVANNI BALLARINI



INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY OF GASTRONOMY GIOVANNI BALLARINI CONFIRMED AS VICE PRESIDENT



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Georges Husni (*Honorary President*); **Maciej Dobrzyniecki**; **Gérard Aït-Saïd**, *Head Waiter*.

The first meeting of the new President's Council will take place in May in Colorno, on the occasion of the presentation of the awards that the AIG has conferred on Italy.

Great cuisine today is far from local

The world's great chefs operate in wealthy cities that are a long way from their popular traditions.

BY PAOLO PETRONI

Secretary General of the Academy

When we speak of the history of gastronomy, or even simply the history of cuisine, we imagine sumptuous banquets, potent libations, dusty manuscripts, tomes of recipes, wise advice on tools, equipment and healthy eating. Those who wrote about such things were employed by the rich and powerful of the time; kings, grand dukes, prelates, the nobility and later, wealthy members of the bourgeoisie. They had ample raw materials at their disposal and a large and ready workforce. It was a far cry from the popular and peasant cuisine, or that of our grandmothers that is so widely touted and sought out today. The “grand cuisine” of the past was seldom local or regional; rather it was associated with a great chef who carried his wisdom and skills from court to court. Just like today. To judge from the success of the great chefs of the world, it is clear that one’s link with his territory of origin counts for nothing. Great cuisine can be created at the top of a Manhattan skyscraper, in a Scandinavian chalet or at a Japanese country inn. Where does one need to live to make great lobster ravioli, shrimp or salmon or lobster tails in tomato sauce? In Sardinia? In Maine? Scotland? Naples? Let’s be frank: the great cuisine of the world lives and prospers where there is wealth, not where the raw materials come from. Tokyo is the world capital of Michelin 3-star restaurants: it boasts 12! Paris has 9, Kyoto and Hong Kong each 7. Once upon a time great cuisine could be found only in Florence, Venice, Ferrara, Milan, and Turin, where there was plenty of money to pay carvers and cupbearers. Today chefs work in places where the clientele can afford luxurious and expensive meals. Even the great innovator Ferran Adrià certainly did not have to go back to the remote Cala Montjoi to develop and create his celebrated dishes.

Talent occurs regardless of place; the raw materials can be found anywhere, easily gotten from any part of the world in just a few hours. So it is useless to babble about close ties to one’s roots. One can cook well any-

where, just as one can paint or write a novel anywhere. What matters is the author of the work. Emilio Salgari never left his hometown and yet he wrote *The Pirates of Malaysia*. But what is it about the *bollito* that is so good when eaten in Piedmont? Crawfish in Venice? *Ribollita* in Florence? *Spaghetti alla carbonara* in Rome? *Caponata* in Sicily? Are they all mere illusions? Tricks of the mind? Not at all. While it may be true that some things can be invented and reproduced anywhere, others acquire value and substance, I might even say perfection, only in the places where they were born because only there do we find the wisdom and refinement of many generations. This is the greatness of cuisine, which always has two faces: great international cuisine, made with the head, and great popular cuisine, made with the heart. Nonetheless, cuisine is always synonymous with love for the good table; a love that expresses itself in two worlds that must coexist.



Ferran Adrià in Cala Montjoi



Anchovy “*colatura*” from Cetara

A traditional way of salting anchovies, handed down from generation to generation.

BY GIUSEPPE ANASTASIO
Salerno Delegate

As the late lamented journalist Gaetano Afeltra affirmed, cuisine is the history of a country and of its regions, and reveals fundamental facts about the national character. As we know, Italy is a country of infinite resources, a gold mine of art, culture and multifaceted natural and environmental facets that lie along the entire boot. Its diversity is not only geographic, and the people of its regions express themselves through their folklore and customs: a variety that is wholly reflected in Italy’s great gastronomic tradition. The desire to protect this great patrimony stems not only from awareness that such a heritage is an indispensable quality for anyone who loves good cuisine and wants to appreciate it in all its gradations, but also in the recognition that traditional

gastronomy is an extremely important factor in the national economy.

And it is this premise that brings to mind the “anchovy *colatura*” that is a product of the oldest culinary traditions of the Amalfi region. The Amalfi coast is so precious that Unesco declared it “World Heritage Site”. *Colatura* was invented in Cetara, a maritime town noted not only for its environmental and architectural beauty but also for its primary activity: fishing.

The inhabitants of Cetara, whose name probably derives from the Latin *cetarii* (place of the fishermen) or from *cetarium* (place where fish are processed), have always practiced one of mankind’s oldest economic activities. Historical sources date the origin of the fishing village to the 8th century. In addition to fishing





for anchovies, over the centuries the people of Cetara have handed down from generation to generation a traditional method of salting them. Today Cetara is the seat of the Tyrrhenian's major tuna fishing fleet, which focuses on the valuable "red tuna" that is largely destined for export to Asian markets. But its inhabitants still practice the deeply historically and traditionally rooted fishing for anchovies, the majority of which are destined for the production of "colatura".

The rules for its production are simple and have precise time requirements. The raw material with which we start is constituted by the anchovies fished with the "cianciolo", or purse seine technique using a round-haul net. This type of fishing is practiced exclusively in the gulf of Salerno from the end of March through the beginning of July. Owing to the effect of the unique condition of the waters of the gulf during this period, and the phase in the life cycle of the fish, the anchovies have a low fat content and are particularly suited to the salting process. As soon as they are caught, the anchovies are decapitated and eviscerated by hand and laid out in the classical head-to-tail style in layers alternating

with salt in oaken containers known as "terzigno" (one-third of a barrel). Once the layers have been completed, the container is covered with a wooden disk ("tompagno") that is weighted down with rocks from the sea.

As a result of the combination of the weights and the ageing of the anchovies a liquid begins to bloom on the surface. During the normal process of preserving anchovies this liquid would be drawn off and discarded, but it constitutes the essential element in the production of colatura. It is continually collected and conserved, and with exposure to the direct light of the summer sun it undergoes a natural process of concentration. At the end of the maturation process (about 4-5 months) usually between the end of October and the beginning of November, everything is ready for the last phase of production. The collected liquid is put back in the *terzigno* in which the anchovies were aged. As the liquid slowly strains through the layers of anchovies, it takes on the best organoleptic characteristics. Finally it is collected through a hole made in the bottom of the *terzigno* with a tool known as a "vriale", and transferred to another container. The end result is a clear liquid of a deep am-

ber, almost mahogany color, with a strong and full bodied taste. It is an exceptionally flavorful distillate that preserves the aroma of the raw material: salted anchovies.

At the beginning of December the anchovy *colatura* - or *garum* as it was known by the ancient Romans - is ready to season the main dishes of the Christmas holidays. In almost an ancient ritual, each family obtains some *colatura* to add flavor to the spaghetti or linguine that are de rigueur at Christmas Eve dinners. It is a true and heartfelt annual tradition that reminds the people of Cetara of their history as a fishing population of the Amalfi coast, a kind of ritual that intimately celebrates the sea and those who live near it.

Much appreciated gastronomically, *colatura* is finally being utilized and prized as a unique ingredient in local cuisine. This typical and genuine condiment unlike any other, has finally achieved recognition. The anchovy *colatura* of Cetara has been included in the Ministry for Agricultural Policy's special listing of traditional agro-nutritional products that deserve to be protected and safeguarded.

Over the centuries the flavor of vegetables seasoned with *colatura* have been notably enriched by the addition of *sponzino*, or "piennolo" tomatoes cultivated in the muddy soil of Furore and Conca dei Marini. Today the *colatura* of Cetara is used to season linguine with the addition of some red or black pepper, green olives, capers, parsley, garlic, olive oil and a squirt of lemon all mixed together uncooked several hours before being served over freshly drained pasta that has been cooked without salt.

GIUSEPPE ANASTASIO





Casatiello: Neapolitan Easter bread

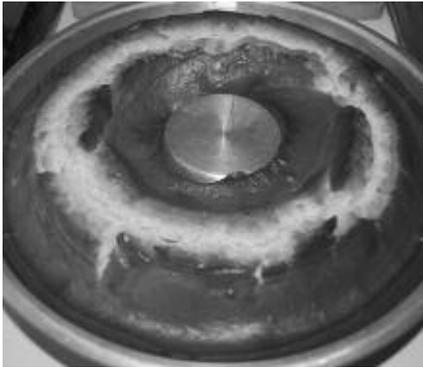
Prepared across many parts of Campania in two versions: sweet and rustic.

BY LEJLA MANCUSI SORRENTINO
Academician, Naples-Capri Delegation

There are two aromas that permeate the air in Campania during the week before Easter, both are penetrating and both are stimulating. The smell of the mouth-watering of the two make it nearly impossible to decide if you prefer the appetizing and exciting odor of *casatiello* that emanates from bread shops or the fragrant and delicate aroma of *pastiera* coming out of the pastry shops. Either way, both *casatiello* and *pastiera* contain ingredients that symbolize the reawakening of nature: wheat, eggs, and cheese. It is likely that both dishes were used as sacrificial offerings to the deities of the countryside, and have their roots in propitiatory rites honoring Demeter, the Great Mother, during

Spring rituals. With the spread of Christianity, these festivals were replaced by Easter traditions, which those foods also came to symbolize. It should also be recalled that Catholicism imposed strict fasting rules for many (170) days of the year, during which in addition to meat, all foods of animal origin, including eggs, milk and other dairy products, were banned. One of the longest and hardest of these fasts was Lent, and thus the people joyfully celebrated its end by indulging in rich and delicious dishes like *casatiello*, in which all the heretofore banned ingredients were included: eggs, cheese, lard and salami. The addition of plenty of pepper made accompanying the dish with a nice glass of full bodied red or sparkling





white wine indispensable. In fact, street vendors used to roam the streets of 19th century Naples selling fresh hot little *casatiello* breads to people returning from work: “A glass of wine goes down well with *casatiello*”, they would cry.

Up to the middle of the last century the popular traditions of Campania held that newly engaged couples should exchange gifts of food. The man would bring his beloved a chocolate egg and some flowers, and she in turn would give him a *casatiello* she made with her own hands. Even today for Easter outings tradition calls for a *casatiello* with a whole egg in its shell placed on

top and held in place with thin strips of dough. It almost seems that the function of the supporting ring of bread is simply to hold up the egg, a symbol of the Spring awakening of nature that coincides with Easter and the Resurrection. It is highly likely that the diminutive Neapolitan name *casatiello* is related to the presence of cheese and derives from the Latin adjective *caseatus*, or “made with *cacio* cheese”. The first literary reference to *casatiello* dates back to the end of the 1500s, even though a custom of preparing a similar bread in honor of the rites of spring is much older. Far from his beloved Naples and nostalgic for the flavors of his city, Giovan Battista Del Tufo was the first to write an elegy to *casatiello* in his *Portrait or Model of the Grandness, the Delights and the Marvels of the Noble City of Naples*: “At Easter there is nothing sweeter than that/ called *casatiello* cooked with egg, *cacio* and provolone/fine sugar, rosewater and flowers/and with other concoctions/everyone cries out for these/late on night on Easter Saturday”.

An old nursery rhyme was also devoted

to *casatiello* “I hide them in my clothes so that they will not get cold. Run little boy, come and eat! I made the dough tonight. They’re very fresh! Look here! They are hot and ready - come and enjoy a feast”. Thus we see that *casatiello* is a very old food that has been passed down to us in a version that is both rustic and sweet. It is prepared in many parts of Campania, but Sant’Arpino, a large town in the province of Caserta boasts of being its birthplace and is trying to obtain the DOC designation as a typical specialty of its master bakers. Here the ritual of *casatiello* is more than simply a tradition. It is considered an historic and cultural patrimony of the its citizens, the heirs to the Atelian people who gave birth to the famous *Atelian Fables* from which *Commedia dell’Arte* is derived. Every year the local tourist office organizes the festival of the *casatiello* that culminates with the preparation of the worlds largest one, cited even by the Guinness Book of World Records. But each year Sant’Aprino manages to outdo itself.

LEJLA MANCUSI SORRENTINO

2015 ECUMENICAL DINNER

The convivial ecumenical meeting that brings together all the Academicians in Italy and around the world at the virtual table, will take place on October 15 at 8:30 pm. This year’s theme will be Condiments: Sauces and Gravies that characterize regional cuisine. This topic, chosen by the “Franco Marengi” Study Center and approved by the President’s Council, is aimed at recapturing, through cuisine, traditions that are undergoing great changes today owing to our passage from home and family cooking to artisanal and finally industrial foods. And if at one time the use of condiments was determined by neighboring cultures, today the field is a global one and is in a state of constant and rapid change. Delegates are entrusted with ensuring that the ecumenical dinner is accompanied by an appropriate presentation of a cultural character that illustrates this important theme and that the dishes served are relevant to the topic.





The language of food

Longer words are found on the more prestigious menus with higher prices; on the lower cost menus, adjectives fill up the plate.

BY CLAUDIO TARCHI
San Francisco Delegate



Stanford University (California) Professor of linguistics and computer science Dan Jurafsky recently published a wonderful book entitled *The Language of Food*. Known for his research in applied linguistics in the world of food, Jurafsky accompanies the reader on a voyage through a world that many people think they know well, but that in reality very few understand in terms of the historical and linguistic details presented in the book. After analyzing the description of dishes in 6,500 menus Jurafsky's primary observation is that the most expensive restaurants offer half the number of dishes as low cost restaurants. Unlike fifty years ago when French vocabulary prevailed in menus, today those of the high end restaurants contain words from many other foreign languages. As far as Italian is concerned, he refers to "tonnarelli" which are often linked

with Peruvian, Japanese and Arab terms, especially in menus in the United States. In addition, the length of the words used in upscale restaurants was also the object of careful study. The longest, least comprehensible words are associated with the more prestigious menus, and consequently, the prices are higher. For every extra letter used in the description of a dish the price goes up by 18 cents. If the restaurant uses words that are on average three letters longer, the chicken or pasta will cost 54 cents more per portion. And be careful of descriptions that use terms such as "exotic" or "spices": the increase is automatic even if the costs are not too elevated. On lower cost menus we often find recourse to extra words that "fill" the dish: delicious, sublime, and marvelous are just a few examples. After having verified the type of cuisine and the location of the restaurant, the study revealed that for each one of these additional words the cost goes down by 9 percent. When they do not include expensive or high quality ingredients such as beef tenderloin or crab, they make up the difference by filling the menu with words like "fantastic" and "tasty", thereby essentially using words to compensate for the lack of taste.

What if the restaurants of the future were to do away with menus? There are several in San Francisco that have already done so. The restaurant *Saison*, where a dinner lasts at least three hours and costs \$500 per person, not including wine, taxes and tip, the menu arrives as an email after dinner: it is purely a list of the ingredients used in each dish.

At *The Palace* restaurant in the Mission district, run by a Venezuelan cook and his Russian wife, the menu does not exist. The wife, who is in charge of service, asks each patron if they have food allergies or particular dislikes. She then proceeds to serve them five courses (\$50 per person, with \$10 extra for dessert). *The Palace* does not have a wine list. The selection, orally presented by the server contains three whites and 3 reds (priced between \$12 and \$20 per glass), chosen by an outside expert - David Lynch, ex-sommelier for the Mario Batalli group in New York. Best not to ask for a piece of bread or a cup of coffee: they are not part of the experience that the managers have designed just for you and therefore are not available!

In another chapter of the book Professor Jurafsky analyzes gastronomic criticism published on the Internet. Consumers often use restaurant reviews to help them decide where to eat or perhaps encourage them to try a new dish. Jurafsky and his colleagues analyzed one million reviews from seven US cities between 2005 and 2011 and discovered some interesting common elements of the human psyche. Negative reviews all have linguistic symptoms of trauma, even minor ones. Positive reviews often utilize sexual metaphors. Most often, the sexual connotations are used in reviews of the more expensive restaurants; conversely, modest restaurants are often reviewed using metaphors associated with the world of drugs: "if you need a fix, that fried chicken is just what you need". Or even "Be careful: you could become addicted to those wings".



To feed the Planet

According to the United Nation's Food and Agricultural Organization, among the many ideas and proposals to resolve the problem of world hunger, the production of insects for human nutrition could represent a concrete solution.

BY VITTORIO MARZI
Academician, Bari Delegation



In an interesting report Professor Romano Prodi demonstrated that thanks to technological progress in agriculture, the use of fertilizers, the elimination of many parasites and the mechanization of agriculture, we have seen a significant increase in the availability of agricultural products. The report, entitled *The Agricultural Revolution: Toward the End of Scarcity* was presented at the Academy of the Georgofili inauguration of their academic year.

The "Green Revolution" of the 1960s helped eliminate, at least among industrialized countries, the problem of food scarcity. Our own country had achieved the "satiation phase". Typical of advanced societies, this phase is characterized by a leveling off of alimentary consumption, both as a whole and in relation to the principal nutritional elements and the large individual categories of commodities following a growing homogenization of food products. Initially, with the achievement of the saturation of basic per capita requirements obtained through the consumption of simple products of vegetable origin, especially grains and legumes, followed by an enrichment of the diet with animal products until the point of "satiation" is achieved.

Over the course of the years we have witnessed a perceptible dynamism in consumption both within the large types of commodities (less milk; more yogurt, fresh cheeses, functional foods) as well as relative to the type of service used in making the food (time saving) and means of access (large scale distribution). A comparison of per capita

consumption between 1970 and 2000 reveals an increase of 50 percent in products of animal origin, while those of vegetable origin have remained stable, with a reduction in grains and potatoes and an increase in fruits and vegetables.

And yet this period of abundance cannot last forever. Many studies concur in their affirmation that the long era of plentiful low-cost food is over, to be replaced by a new era of scarcity. According to a recent book *Race for the Earth* by Professor Paolo De Castro (Collana Saggine, Donzelli Editors, 2012) "By the year 2050 the Earth will have more than 9 billion inhabitants - almost one-third more than today, and to satisfy the demand for food we will have to increase agricultural production by 70 percent with respect to today. What is more we will have to do so in a more sustainable way than in the past".

This extremely current question is the subject of conferences, debates, proposals and was the theme selected by the 2015 Universal Exposition in Milan: *To Feed the Planet: Energy for Life*.

Among the many ideas and proposals for solving the problem of world hunger, quite a bit of attention has been elicited by the possibility of using insects for food, as in the recent article *Insect Eaters* by Sandro Longo, published in the February 2015 *Georgofili* Info newsletter. "Some peoples of Central and North America, Africa, Asia, Australia and New Zealand supplement their protein requirements by eating almost 2,000 different species of edible insects. According to the UN Food and Agricultural



Organization, the production of insects for human and animal nutrition could represent a concrete response to this challenge posed by the heads of state and government of 189 countries who held a UN summit in New York in 2000: to cut in half the percentage of the world population suffering from hunger. Insects, which currently enhance the diet of about 2 billion people, were among the first foods consumed by humans. In addition to representing a more efficient source of protein and fats than farming other



animals, insects produce fewer greenhouse gases and can also be used to help break down refuse. Currently even the menus of some European restaurants contain dishes based on insects: skewered red beetle larvae are especially popular in France, while a Milan restaurant offers “focaccia with smoked provolone and crickets, black rice and insect larvae meatballs, and risotto with mountain cider, sausage and wasps”. At the same time, there is an answer to the worrisome problem of food waste, especially in industrialized countries: some recent publications illustrate recipes based on discarded food: tomato, eggplant, potato, pear and apple peelings, pea pods, fish bones, etc.

Clearly it is essential that we be prepared to face an uncertain future that threatens a return to times of scarcity. But even in a country like Italy that is rich in regional cuisine, with an immense patrimony built over time by diverse social classes from the richest to the poorest, the frugality of the peasant world and the bourgeois class of the past constitute a testament to a people who knew how to get by in difficult times. Unfortunately, wasted food is one negative aspect of a well-off society. In the past, poverty and the scarce availability of food elicited, in the peasant world, a search for any and every-

thing that could be eaten. We know that beginning in the 7th century the agro-pastoral system allowed rural populations not only to survive but also to grow. Their main foods were soups and vegetables, with the soup often serving as a way to utilize stale bread. Indeed, there are many regional recipes, from the plains to the mountains, for delicious soups based on various herbs and vegetables. One example is the Sardinian recipe for wild herb soup, which utilizes a good 18 varieties, cooked in broth with the addition of some aged *guanciale* bacon and some *pecorino* cheese. A characteristic of local markets, today all but extinct, was the sale of “*misticanze*” (mixed wild greens) or “mixed soup blend”, which varied in their composition depending on the place where they were gathered by hand. And even within the bourgeoisie of the 19th century we have examples of nutritional frugality documented in home economics books that included advice on how to create good food while spending as little as possible. It would be a great misfortune to lose such a vast patrimony of knowledge because of great societal changes. In reality, the major food problem of the future will be how to increase agricultural productivity as a basic fundamental of food security - that is, the access and availability of food at the

global level. The situation in our own country can be defined as a precarious one if we consider that Italy has been included among the “ecological debtor” countries, i.e., one that consumes more environmental resources than it produces. According to recent statistics, in the last 30 years over 5 million hectares of land have been destined to other (non-agricultural) uses, and the phenomenon will not stop without some new legislative measures. For some time now, Professor Franco Scaramuzzi, President of the Academy of the Georgofili has very incisively demonstrat-

ed our need to defend our agriculture, which is losing its strategic role for a series of social and economic reasons. This situation is aggravating and increasing our imports from the global market, which is often unreliable in addition to being contaminated by financial speculation. What is needed is a new Green Revolution, stepping up scientific research on advanced biotechnologies while at the same time reconciling the current differences in opinion.

There is no doubt that studies on edible insects have a prospective role to play in resolving the issue of world hunger, provided that the current situation does not become, as has been written “the willing and conscious consumption of insects by eccentric foodies motivated only by curiosity”.

The great patrimony of Italian cuisine must be bravely defended, just as Academy founder Orio Vergani insisted. At the same time, we should applaud the efforts of the FAO to ensure universal access to the food necessary to satisfy basic human nutritional requirements, and be grateful to all those who work to resolve this age-old problem.

Skewered red beetle larvae with onions may be a delicacy, but can also be seen as a fitting punishment for an insect that is destroying our palm trees.

VITTORIO MARZI