

RECIPE FOR ITALIANS

THE IMPORTANCE OF FOOD IN THE MAKING OF ITALIANS

By

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## **Abstract**

My thesis topic is on the formation of Italian identity through the lens of food in literature. I look specifically at four different works: three literary works, and one film. I demonstrate that Italy is a relatively young nation and it is still divided among its different regions, however, because food is such a deeply rooted piece of the Italian culture it has been an instrumental tool in forming their identity. I analyze how the idea of food has succeeded in forming an Italian identity, while other ideas have failed. I look at the use of food as a tool to shape the Italian's mind over time, starting from before Italy was a nation, working through its tumultuous history, up until present day.

# Recipe for Italians

The importance of food in the making of Italians

*Italy is made, now let us make Italians*  
- Massimo d'Azeglio<sup>1</sup>

Before delving into the matter at hand, we should begin by asking ourselves what an identity is. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, identity is defined as “the qualities, beliefs, etc., that make a particular person or group different from others” or “the relation established by psychological identification.”<sup>2</sup> To develop an identity, one must be different from others, and yet be the same as some, if that sense of identity refers to a family, community, or other group. One must have a niche in which he finds communion with his fellow man over specific qualities or beliefs that they share, while simultaneously excluding him from another group.

The formation of an identity is somewhat similar to the development of a friendship. One must have commonalities with an individual to develop a relationship that is a sort of psychological identification. This idea of a psychological identification goes beyond person-to-person relationships and extends into the realm of communities and countries. Furthermore, it is a *psychological* experience. There is no way to force the formation of an identity, whether it be political, geographical, or social. It is a personal experience that happens through thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and time.

Then how does a nation develop an identity? It surely cannot be as simple as an individual gaining his identity, can it? Is it solely an idea, or is it something more? Is it nothing but a social construct to warm the cockles of our hearts and imbue our soles with an unparalleled

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<sup>1</sup> Massimo d'Azeglio (1778-1866) was a distinguished statesman, writer, and prime minister to Victor Emmanuel, king of Piedmont-Sardinia.

<sup>2</sup> "Identity." *Merriam-Webster.com*. 2016. <http://www.merriam-webster.com> (12 February 2016).

camaraderie towards our fellow man? The concept of identity in and of itself is elusive enough, but to then extrapolate that to a people - to a nation - is something tantamount to defining the very people themselves. And how exactly does one go about proving, or disproving, whether or not an identity is found within a people? Is history used? Perhaps technology, or literature, or cinema, or even food is used. Perhaps the answer is all of the above. All of these factors can illuminate where identity is found, or lack thereof, in a synergistic manner, that is, together they have a greater impact than they would alone.

It is still about an experience that is felt, a psychological identification, but it is on a much larger scale. A people may cultivate an identity surrounding a single thought, idea, or image, such as a flag. The American people have cultivated an identity surrounding the idea of freedom, and the image of a striped flag. Their hearts swell with pride and they have the sense that they are American; not only that, but the whole history of this unified nation contributes to the development of such a feeling of patriotism, of identity. There is no tried and true method for developing a national identity as each identity is inherently different, but one piece of the identity puzzle remains the same: it takes time to develop. This idea is nicely summarized by Beth Archer Brombert:

...identity...is not inscribed in the genes of a people or in ancient history of their origin, but is constructed historically through the day-to-day dynamic exchanges between individuals, experiences, and different cultures.<sup>3</sup>

If we consider all of this, and if we take into account the ideas that people have surrounding the idea of what it is to be “Italian,” it should be a given that Italians feel strongly about their national identity. To most, Italy is an old nation, one on par with the Greeks. The old

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<sup>3</sup> M. Montanari, *Identità italiana in cucina*. Bari; Laterza, 1949. For this work I refer to the English translation with an introduction by Beth Archer Brombert: M. Montanari, *Italian identity in the kitchen, or Food and the nation*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013, p. xiv.

buildings and the millennia of history within seem to divulge that there was seemingly no beginning to the Italy we know, only that it was and is.

However, Italy is a nation of contradictions that has been through a tumultuous, traumatic past. Most do not realize that Italy is in fact a relatively new country, with its current national history dating back to 1861, the same year the American Civil War began, and even then Italy was still geographically, politically, and economically divided. Before 1861, the last time the Italian peninsula was unified was under the Roman Empire in 218 B.C. The so-called unification under the Roman Empire was, however, only geographical because the Romans allowed their territories to maintain their individual customs and language. Italy stayed united until the fall of the Roman Empire, which led to the gradual loss of control in Italy throughout the 5th century A.D. From that time until its unification in 1861, Italy remained fragmented and bereft of the possibility for the development of a national identity.

The liberal rule under the Roman Empire helped to create various traditions and cultures that were only becoming more and more distinct as individual; rather than an identity common to all the people living in what we call now Italy, the Roman Empire helped create a sense of belonging to a specific area. The people throughout the peninsula had formed localized, regional identities. After the fall of the Romans, Italy was conquered and influenced by Celtic, Germanic, Spanish, French, Arabic, and Austrian cultures, just to name a few. These different conquests led to different influences that left their mark in culture, folklore, and spoken language. These influences are still part of Italy today and it should not come as a surprise if a dialect based on Catalan is spoken in Sardinia, and German and French are used in regions such as Trentino Alto Adige and Valle d'Aosta.

The Italy we know today is a result of a long process, at the center of which are three wars known as the Wars of Independence. The first Independence war was preceded by civil unrest in 1848. There were several different revolts including the declaration of Sicily as a kingdom and Tuscany's and the Papal State's revolts resulting in being granted their own constitutions, and revolts in Austrian held Italian cities. At this time the king of Sardinia decided, along with the kingdoms of Sicily and Naples, and the Papal States, that they would attack the weakened Austrian kingdom in its occupied Italian territory. This first war led to no changes, as the Austrian kingdom was the victor in early 1849. This, however, did show that there was a desire for the end of a foreign ruling and it led to the commencement of the second Independence War.

In the later part of 1849, the second Independence War took place, lasting only three months. The Kingdom of Sardinia, led by Victor Emmanuel II and Giuseppe Garibaldi, assisted by France, was able to drive back the Austrian kingdom and gain control of Lombardy. France's backing was not free, however. The kingdom of Sardinia had to gift France control over Savoy and Nice in exchange for its aid.

By 1860 only six states remained in Italy: San Marino, the kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia, the Austrian controlled Veneto region, the Papal States, and the Kingdom of the two Sicilies. Giuseppe Garibaldi sailed from Liguria to Sicily, in a campaign known as *Spedizione dei Mille*, the Expedition of the Thousand, and swiftly conquered Sicily in the name of Victor Emmanuel II. Garibaldi was held from advancing in the Kingdom of Naples, and thus required the assistance of the Piedmontese army, which marched from the north and conquered the Papal States, save Rome, to assist Garibaldi, at which time Victor Emmanuel II took control of the army. At this point only Rome and the Austrian controlled Veneto remained. In February of

1861, the first Italian parliament was held in Turin and in March Victor Emmanuel II was declared King of Italy with Turin as its capital. Rome became the capital in 1871 after Napoleon III's grip was loosened due to his loss of the Franco-Prussian war.

The third Independence War began in June of 1866. It is also known as the Austro-Prussian war. Austria was in the midst of warring with Prussia, and was thus weakened. Austria offered to give Italy the Veneto region in exchange for non-intervention, however Italy signed a pact with Prussia and attacked Austria in June of 1866. Italy performed poorly in its war with Austria, however Prussia had won. The Veneto region joined Italy in 1866.

Despite these wars that unified Italy, it was not a unification for the common man, that is to say the wars did not help to create a sense of national identity. The various regions in the new Italy still spoke their original dialects and continued in their usual customs. The only thing that had truly changed was the flag they flew; they were still divided. Language is a powerful tool of unification and there are other countries in which the process of unification was facilitated through language. France is one of them. Paris was the center of everything for France and this allowed its influence to spread throughout France, unifying the language. Italy did not truly possess this unified language, other than literary language, prior to the 1960s. A first step toward a unified language was taken during World War I; the Italian citizens were drafted into the Italian army but the soldiers were often unable to understand one another because they did not speak the same language. This facilitated the formation of a more standardized language, which was still far from the Italian spoken today. The widespread use of the standard Italian language did not take place until the late 1950s and early 1960s, with the advent of the television.

The major legacy of the division into small states and of the influences brought about by the occupiers is that rather than a national sense of identity, Italians express a strong sense of

*campanilismo*, patriotism towards a city. To make matters worse the passage from monarchy to a republican government in 1946 happened through a traumatic civil war with fascists on one side and partisans on the other.

To sum it up, long-term regional division made even worse by the rivalry between cities of the same region (in some cases dating back to the middle ages), a still clear presence of dialects, a strong cultural separation between north and south (even today the Lega Nord political party dreams of building a wall along the Po river to separate the northern part of Italy from the rest of the peninsula), the legacy of the World War II civil war, make it still very problematic to talk about national identity in Italy. Much more evident is *campanilismo*, and it is more common to hear an Italian say that his/her sense of identity, his/her sense of belonging is associated with a particular city, sometimes with a specific region, rather than with the nation itself, unless one speaks about an Italian that lives abroad. This is exemplified by Beth Archer Brombert when she says:

...I soon learned that Italian identity was not singular but decidedly plural, unless an Italian was outside the country's borders. Within Italy what counts is the region or the city of origin: one is Lombard, Tuscan, Emilian, Sicilian; or Roman, Florentine, Milanese, Neapolitan; or, even more precisely, the inhabitant of a village, a *paese*. Someone from Castellina in Chianti...is Italian if, say, he goes to Paris; in Italy he is Tuscan, in Tuscany he his Chiantigiano; and in Chianti he is Castellinese.<sup>4</sup>

In light of all of this, is there anything that gives Italians a sense of identity? Is there anything that makes Italians feel proud for their nation? Is there anything that they feel represents them as a nation?

Maybe you will not see Italians stand up when the national anthem is played or sung. It is very likely that they will express a dislike for their government, distancing themselves from their politicians, but surely there are things for which they would stand, things that make them feel

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<sup>4</sup> In M. Montanari, *Italian identity in the kitchen, or Food and the nation*, cit., p. x.

proud to be Italian; some of the more meaningful ones being architecture, art, their ancient history, certainly soccer, and perhaps the most conspicuous, food.

Not that it is easy to talk about a national Italian cuisine because there are as many types of food as there are villages in Italy. Differences can be seen on a macroscopic level due to different foreign influences, local agriculture, production, and the configuration of the landscape that is conducive for raising a certain type of livestock. For example, in Sicily there exists couscous, and Arabic food<sup>5</sup> that is not found elsewhere in Italy, and throughout the southern region olive oil and pasta are more favored in meals<sup>6</sup>, while in the north they have a predilection for butter and rice. This can also be seen at a microscopic level in one of Montanari's passages about pasta:

The multiple forms of pasta and the unlimited variants of the torte are almost a metaphor of Italian cuisine and its basic character: general recognizability, common elements that define a powerful and specific cultural identity; local differences deeply rooted in the customs of the territories and cities where such identities arise and decline; the dissemination of information and the possibility of comparing the variants; the absolute legitimacy of each variant within the overall context; and the impossibility of (or rather, the indifference to) deducing a uniform model from those variants.<sup>7</sup>

No, Italians do not find their identity in the type of food because it varies so greatly throughout the peninsula, but we can say that Italians are proud of their food, regardless of where in Italy it originates. Italians feel very strongly about the quality of their food and they would react, even disproportionately, to anything which might threaten its legacy.

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<sup>5</sup> "Arabs and Saracens introduced the West to oriental taste for spices - for the bittersweet, the sweet, and the salty. They relaunched models of farming and cooking previously practiced by Roman gastronomy, but now expressed in different and less exclusive forms. They also brought to Europe the planting and culture of rice. In Sicily they introduced the use of dried pasta, a kind of food the Hebrews were also spreading throughout Europe and that was to become enormously popular, especially in Italian regions. So, in this example as well, *tradition* asserted itself and developed very far from its places of *origin*." In M. Montanari, *Food Is Culture*, cit., p. 135.

<sup>6</sup> "The people of Romagna use butter and animal fat for frying and are partial to pasta dishes and meats, reflecting a tradition that has Celtic origins. Tuscans, on the other hand, use oil for frying and favor soups and vegetables, preferences considered 'quintessentially Mediterranean,' as we have fallen into the somewhat mysterious habit of saying." in P. Artusi, *La scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiar bene*. P. Artusi, 1891. In this case I refer to the English translation with an introduction by Luigi Ballerini: P. Artusi, *Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well*. Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2003, p. lii.

<sup>7</sup> In M. Montanari, *Italian identity in the kitchen, or Food and the nation*, cit., p. 11.

This idea can be seen throughout Italian culture and we can easily say that food plays a major role when we think about the “ingredients” that are part of the recipe to make Italians feel strongly about their nation. At this point, I would like to use just a few pieces of literature and cinema to validate this statement, beginning with a cookbook written by Pellegrino Artusi. He lived through the process of unification and witnessed first the enthusiasm it brought about, followed by the subsequent disillusionment. In the midst of the dismay Artusi unintentionally created a work that implied a quasi-unified state for Italians, as stated by Lorenza De’ Medici:

Although Artusi initially published it at his own expense and distributed it directly from his home in Piazza d’Azeglio, the book quickly became so popular that perhaps only the internationally acclaimed *Pinocchio* and *Cuore: Diary of a Schoolboy*, which were written a few years before, can claim an even greater success in the strenuous task of ‘unifying’ if not Italy at least that section of its population that constituted or aspired to constitute its middle class, its bourgeoisie.<sup>8</sup>

We are not yet at the point where one may begin talking about a sense of unity, but this work by Artusi is the first of its kind: one that presents recipes both from the north and the south, and could therefore be seen as an initial step towards some sort of unification, even if only through food.

The next literary work, written by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, moves us to the beginning of the twentieth century: a cookbook inspired by the futurist movement. The futurist movement was an important avant-gardist literary and artistic movement, but it did not stop there. The movement intended to revolutionize Italian society, and in order to do so it had to impact every aspect of life, including architecture, art, and even food. The futurists knew that in order to reach their goals they would need to strike at the heart of the Italians’ being, therefore food came into play.

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<sup>8</sup> P. Artusi, *La scienza in cucina e l’arte di mangiar bene*. P. Artusi, 1891. Unless otherwise stated I refer to the English translation with an introduction by Lorenza De’ Medici: P. Artusi, *Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well*. New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1997, p. xxxix.

The third piece is a cinematographic film in which the Italians' pride for food and how their defense of it is actually their defense for their identity is seen. The film shows the life of an Italian immigrant and how, though he cannot speak English well, the food he prepares speaks for him, and how he defends the little identity that he has left as it is found in food.

Though times change, the necessity felt by Italians to protect their food is still alive and well. The last literary piece that I will use is a modern work of fiction and perhaps the best example of the new ways that Italians have devised to protect their food. This is through legal methods that protect the quality of Italian food via a food "patent" of sorts. This patent allows Italians to protect their cuisine and the history that lies therein.

### **Science in the kitchen and the art of eating well by Pellegrino Artusi**

When the land is impoverished and the people eat solely to survive, what is more important: the quality of food, or the quantity of food? When food is no longer for enjoyment, but purely for the sake of nourishment, the last thing on one's mind is which method is used, or which recipe is better, or even what needs to be done in order to make the food look a certain way. Yet this is exactly the kind of book published by Pellegrino Artusi, as you might guess from its title *La scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiar bene*, or in English, *Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well*.

Artusi was born into a wealthy family from Emilia-Romagna in 1820. He had a career as a businessman and a writer after completing seminary school. After both of his parents died, Artusi received a sizeable inheritance. He was then able to purchase a house in the D'Azeglio square in Florence, where he then pursued his passions: writing and gastronomy. He promptly quit his job and began his literary and culinary journey.

Artusi wrote two different works before *Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating*

*Well*: a biography of Ugo Foscolo, an Italian writer, and a critique of letters written by Giuseppe Giusti. Both went primarily unnoticed. At his own expense Artusi then published his cookbook; he selected and eliminated recipes based on his own judgement, and that of his two home cooks in scientific process, thus the name of his book. Artusi grew up in a pre-unified Italy, and died in a unified one. He experienced this troubled time in Italy's history and his cookbook might be seen as the first step towards the establishment of a national cuisine. The recipes provided are filling meals that, by today's standards, might not be considered so healthy. Take, for example, the recipe for *Sformato di riso con rigaglie*<sup>9</sup>, Savory rice pudding with giblets. This recipe includes five ounces of rice, one ounce of parmesan cheese, two-thirds an ounce of butter, and three cups of milk. This meal is very high in saturated fat and would thus be bad for anyone with heart, and/or weight issues, but it would be a very filling meal. It is loaded with filling, tasty ingredients that would please any picky eater.

While this book *is* technically a cookbook, it is not *just* a cookbook, it is also an important historical document.

Should we worry, at this point, that above and beyond its writerly merits, the most celebrated cookbook that ever came out of Italy -- of a culture, this is, that is practically co-terminous with the notion of eating well -- is no cookbook at all? Quite the contrary, of course. But it takes no ordinary food lover to appreciate and cherish a book that offers so much more than a mere list of successful recipes, and can be read and enjoyed even by people who do not ordinarily spend a lot of time in the kitchen. I believe the best tribute a gastronome like myself can pay *Science in the Kitchen* is in fact to describe it as a historical document of the first magnitude, one that brings Italian history and society to the dinner table and makes them available and understandable, just as it makes plausible and affordable the exquisite artistry of Italy's legendary cuisine.<sup>10</sup>

Artusi uses a series of anecdotes to help place us in the correct mindset for creating a dish. He shapes the way we are thinking, in order to produce in us a sense of understanding, that is, we comprehend the cultural significance of whatever dish we might be preparing. These

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<sup>9</sup> "Savory rice pudding with giblets", in P. Artusi, *Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well*, cit., p. 263.

<sup>10</sup> In P. Artusi, *Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well*, cit., p. xxxvii-xxxviii.

anecdotes allow for anyone to see that despite the fact that someone may be from a different region, they still talk, act, and eat in a similar manner; that they share a common history; that they are not just Umbrian, or Sicilian, they are Italian.

In his book, Artusi gives this anecdote along with the recipe for *Maccheroni col Pangrattato*, Macaroni with bread crumbs:

One day in 1850, I found myself in the “Tre Re” (Three Kings) restaurant in Bologna in the company of several students and Felice Orsini, who was a friend of one of them. It was the season for politics and conspiracy in Romagna, and Orsini, who seemed practically born for that purpose, spoke enthusiastically about these subjects. In his passion he tirelessly strove to show us that an uprising was imminent, that he and another leader he mentioned would lead it, overrunning Bologna with an armed band of followers. Listening to him so imprudently discuss in a public place such dangerous subjects and an enterprise that seemed to me utter madness, I remained indifferent to his harangues and calmly continued to eat the plate of macaroni set before me. My demeanor stung Orsini’s *amour propre*, and thereafter, having felt humiliated at the time, whenever he remembered me he would ask his friends, “How’s the Macaroni-Eater doing?”<sup>11</sup>

The anecdotes that Artusi uses function as more than just a framing device, they allow the book to operate, not only as a cookbook, but also as a history book, as a source of news in a time where there was no news; the short stories make what were important events available to the people. Take for example the person mentioned in the previous quote: Felice Orsini. He was an important revolutionary during Artusi’s time and participated in the first Independence War. Orsini believed that Napoleon III was a barrier to Italian unification and undertook a personal mission to see him assassinated. His attempt ultimately failed and he was sentenced to death in 1858. Artusi showed, through his cookbook, that Orsini was brash and unafraid of plotting a revolt in public, offering a clear picture of this man, observed in a relaxed moment before the infamous notoriety derived by the assassination attempt.

He described important occurrences through his cookbook, which attempted to unite the different regions of Italy under one culinary roof as seen by the numerous recipes in his book from all different regions. The importance of this book cannot be understated. It was the

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<sup>11</sup> In P. Artusi, *Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well*, cit., p.187.

cookbook “heard ‘round the world.” This cookbook has been translated into at least six different languages; it has been reprinted thirteen times, and sold more than two-hundred thousand copies prior to Artusi’s death. This cookbook, by creating a national Italian cuisine, was the first tool for the creation of the Italian Identity. It was even more successful in achieving this than the political movement that forced every young Italian to read Alessandro Manzoni’s *The Betrothed* in hopes of achieving unity as explained by Luigi Ballerini:

It has also been observed that Artusi’s book, read over and over again at home, was much more effective in bringing about a modicum of social harmony than were the heavily logical and frequently high-brow novels - chief among them Alessandro Manzoni’s *I promessi sposi* (The Betrothed) - that thousands of young men and women were forced to read in school, in the vain hope that this exercise would transform them from the young Sicilians, Venetians, or Romans that they and their forebears had been into young Italians. Unlike those novels, which emphasize uniformity, Artusi showed how the preservation of diversity does not contradict collective interests. It is perhaps this validation of diversity operating within the boundaries of a nation both ancient and newly established that gave the book its most genuine political value.<sup>12</sup>

Artusi helped create unity by highlighting the diversity, which worked through non-imposition, while the common thought of the day was to create unity by forcing uniformity, by pretending that the diversity did not exist. Artusi’s book allowed for people to find unity through seeking diversity within the boundary of what is Italian; he therefore succeeded where others had failed, as restated by Pietro Camporesi, in line with Ballerini’s idea:

...we must recognize, with Pietro Camporesi, “that *La scienza in cucina* did more for national unification than *I Promessi sposi*; that Artusi’s flavors succeeded in creating a code of national identity where Manzoni’s style and phonemes failed.”<sup>13</sup>

## **Big Night**

Imagine for a moment that you are going to dinner with your date. You have saved up your money to dine at a very fine restaurant for the night. You have put on your best clothes and your hair is just right. You are famished so you leave for the restaurant. To the general population, the Italian dining experience is one with red and white checkered tablecloths, bread

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<sup>12</sup> In P. Artusi, *Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well*, Toronto, cit., p. xxi.

<sup>13</sup> In M. Montanari, *Italian identity in the kitchen, or Food and the nation*, cit., p. 49.

sticks, red wine, and spaghetti with meatballs. There is an expectation that an Italian restaurant should be a certain way, even if that is not matched by reality. Once you have arrived you are greeted with an enthusiastic “Welcome!” which makes you feel at home. The restaurant only has one other customer. Maybe that should be a red flag. The manager pulls your chair out for you and hands you a menu that reads “Paradise.” You hear calm chatter coming from the kitchen as you decide on your meal. You order a dish called Risotto with seafood and anxiously await its completion, however it seems to take forever for the meal to finish cooking. When it finally arrives you are perturbed and disappointed because you do not see any of the seafood, so you decide to order a side of spaghetti. You seem to have caught the manager off guard when you order, and he tells you that spaghetti does not really go with rice because they are both starches. You decide to ignore him and order the spaghetti and confirm it has meatballs, at which point the manager tells you that it does not come with meatballs. You reluctantly concede and order a side of spaghetti with no meatballs. A few moments later you hear shouting in the kitchen. The manager and the chef appear to be arguing. Then abruptly the manager kicks open the kitchen door and says “Go ahead. Talk to her.”

This is a scene from the movie *Big Night*, directed by Campbell Scott and Stanley Tucci. This movie, which was released in 1996, relates the story of two brothers, Primo, played by Tony Shalhoub, and Secondo, played by Stanley Tucci, who moved from Abruzzo to America with the dream of being successful restaurateurs. It is clear that the restaurant is failing, due to the unreasonably high standards that Primo has for the food he prepares.

There is a reason that Primo, an Italian immigrant with poor English skills, is so obstinate when it comes to the food that he prepares. It is because the food *is* what remains of his Italian identity. Having left home, Primo feels detached from his family, from his friends, from his very

self; he finds solace in the food that he creates. The food allows him to communicate what he is passionate about and who he is, concepts he would otherwise be unable to convey. It is, among other important things, his way of establishing, and retaining, his Italian identity abroad, as was mentioned earlier in the quote from Beth Archer Brombert, and reinforced by Montanari when he says:

...the food system contains and conveys culture of its practitioner; it is the repository of traditions and of collective identity, It is therefore an extraordinary vehicle of self-represent and of cultural exchange - a means of establishing identity, to be sure, but also the first way of entering into contact with a different culture. Eating the food of the 'other' is easier, it would seem, than decoding the other's language. Far more than spoken language itself, food can serve as a mediator between different cultures,<sup>14</sup>

This movie follows, through sibling rivalry, stiff competition, and broken hearts, their efforts to save their failing business. Their chief rival, Pascal, the owner of another restaurant, under the guise of friendship, offers to help the two brothers save Paradise. He tells them that he will get Louis Prima, an Italian-American Jazz singer, to dine at their restaurant. In hopes that this will spread the word about their food, the brothers spend their life savings in preparation for the big night. They invite a slew of people, including a reporter, to the dinner. The brothers have one opportunity, one single night, to save their restaurant. They pull out all the stops. They use only the freshest ingredients, they have the best recipes, and they pour their very hearts into every dish.

The evening drags on as all the guests, save Louis Prima, arrive. The brothers decide to serve the starting courses without Prima in hopes of appeasing the famished guests. Each course elicits unending praise for the chefs. However, Louis Prima appears to have stiffed the protagonists. They decide to serve the Timpano, an intricate layered pasta dish surrounded by a layer of pastry dough. Primo takes great care to make sure that it is absolutely perfect, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish. As it is served, the tension in the air is palpable; it could be

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<sup>14</sup> In M. Montanari, *Food Is Culture*, cit., p. 133.

cut with a dull butter knife. That is until Pascal slams his fists on the table the table and says “I should kill you. It’s so [...] good I should kill you.”

Louis Prima never shows up. It is later revealed that Pascal never called Prima. His hope was that the brothers would be forced to close down their business and either return to Italy, or work for him. After a long night of arguing and fistfights between Primo and Secondo, they quietly eat their breakfast as they come to terms with the situation in which they find themselves: Italians abroad who fought up until the last moment, with everything that they had, to protect what they believed to be their last shred of identity.

These two Italian immigrants worked their fingers to the bone in an attempt to save their restaurant. They gave everything that they had in order to save their failing business. Metaphorically, we can say that they worked so hard because they were protecting something more than just their business. They were ultimately protecting their very selves. The restaurant was not only their means for income, but primarily their home and their only outlet to express their identity.

### **The Futurist Cookbook**

With the futurist cookbook we face a different kind of scenario. Futurists recognized food as a sort of glue for Italians, and therefore connected food to their own revolutionary ideas. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti was born in Alexandria, Egypt in 1876 to two unwed parents. He began his education in Egypt, then earned his baccalaureate in France, and graduated with a law degree in Italy. Marinetti was a very well read and highly educated individual who chose to pursue his passion of literature rather than pursue a career in law. After experimenting with different types of literature, Marinetti progressed into the development of an ideology, one that

would attempt to fix societal problems by abandoning the old society and creating a new one. This ideology was called Futurism, borne out in the *Futurist Manifesto*, published in 1909.

The futurist movement started out as an artistic movement. It was the first of the historical avant-gardes (such as surrealism, postmodernism, etc.) interested in drastically changing literature, sculpture, music, and other art forms. Their ultimate goal was to rid the old, and supplant with the new. The literary futurist movement was focused on several key aspects of literature such as analogies, ridding unnecessary words, the use of irony, and onomatopoeias. They desired to shake things up, to change the status quo; little by little, however, the movement's objective expanded. The futurists wanted to change things more and more as time went on and this even led to the formation of a futurist political party.

Old ways of cooking, building, dressing, worshipping, and even cooking were all revitalized under this new futurism paradigm. The futurists loved new technology, the newness promised by youth, and human triumph over the world. Marinetti was quite outspoken about his feelings of abhorrence towards the things of old, stating that he wanted no part of it, so much so that the futurists wrote an entire cookbook to change the very way that Italians eat. His most famous slogan about Italians and food was “down with pasta,” in which he clearly attacked the most recognizable Italian food.

In his vehement attack against pasta, he claims that pasta makes the individual sluggish, lethargic, and unoriginal, thus pasta will not be found in his Italian “cookbook.” *The Futurist Cookbook*<sup>15</sup> includes a variety of bizarre recipes along with several discourses on the ideas behind the strange recipes. In order to exemplify the outrageous recipes in *The Futurist Cookbook*, we can take a look at what Futurists called Aerofood:

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<sup>15</sup> F.T. Marinetti, *La cucina futurista*. F.T. Marinetti, 1909. For this work I refer to the English translation translated by Suzanne Brill: F.T. Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*. San Francisco: Bedford Art Publishers, 1989.

The diner is served from the right with a plate containing some black olives, fennel hearts and kumquats. From the left he is served with a rectangle made of sandpaper, silk and velvet. The foods must be carried directly to the mouth with the right hand while the left hand lightly and repeatedly strokes the tactile rectangle. In the meantime the waiters spray the napes of the diners' necks with a *conprofumo* of carnations while from the kitchen comes contemporaneously a violent *conrumore* of an aeroplane motor and some *dismusica* by Bach.<sup>16</sup>

Marinetti felt that in order to change the Italian it was necessary to change the most deeply rooted traditions, the ones that could be seen at the base of a passatist idea of national identity: what the Italian eats. It was more than just an energy providing necessity; eating became a piece of art, in which the dinner was the centerpiece. This book is not just about the food itself. Marinetti uses food as the medium, with which he paints a new Italian culture. Marinetti understood that to attack Italy you needed to change the core of their identity: food.

### **American Parmesan by Wu Ming**

The idea of a brand is something that every individual understands, whether the “brand” is a person’s own name or the name of a big company like Hewlett-Packard. It does not matter whether it is something personal or whether it belongs to a big conglomerate, each entity desires to protect their name, their brand, as it is something that has intrinsic value to the entity. If a company in China were to all of a sudden start producing computers labeled as HP computers, there would be a lawsuit and an investigation into the production of these computers. It is not a small matter when this type of “plagiarism” takes place. It is the process of using an established name with a certain level of quality and pawning off something of lesser quality as an equal. There are rules and laws in place to prevent this action at the business level, scholastic level, and personal level, so would it not make sense to have the same sort of laws at the culinary level?

There are four different certifications in Italy given to food products in order to protect their identity. There is the DOP: *Denominazione di Origine Protetta* (protected designation of origin), DOC: *Denominazione di Origine Controllata* (controlled designation of origin), DOCG:

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<sup>16</sup> Aerofood, in F.T. Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, cit., p. 144.

*Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita* (controlled and guaranteed designation of origin), and IGT: *Indicazione geografica tipica* (typical geographical indication). If a food is labeled DOP it means that the food was produced in a manner that adheres to the traditional method of manufacturing the item in the traditional area of creation. Both the DOC and DOCG designations mean that the food, typically wine or cheese, was produced within a specific region, using traditional methods, and met specific quality standards; the DOCG simply denotes higher quality. IGT is a demarcation used on wines that were produced in the typical area, but do not meet the higher standards of a DOC or DOCG wine; it is considered to be a step above table wine.

To illustrate the gravitas the Italians place on these designations I have looked at the story “American Parmesan”<sup>17</sup> by Wu Ming. Wu Ming is not an individual, rather it is a group of five Italian writers who publish both fiction and nonfiction works under this pseudonym. They simply go by the names Wu Ming 1 through 5. They have written a number of different works including *Q*, *54*, and *Manituana*. “American Parmesan” is one of the short stories collected in *Outsiders*.

In this story an Italian historian, who specializes in American history, must travel to upstate New York in order to ascertain whether the parmesan cheese produced there can actually be called Parmigiano Reggiano, as is claimed in the story. The company in the story claims that over two hundred years ago Ben Franklin organized the production of Parmigiano Reggiano cheese with the use of the traditional methods and ingredients, including cows from Italy. If the cheese was actually produced, then the company in question would have a right to call the cheese Parmigiano Reggiano because it would have been made in a place where the cheese was historically made, albeit once. The story goes over the idea of DOP and that this world renowned

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<sup>17</sup> Wu Ming, “American Parmigiano.” Agenzia Letteraria Roberto Santachiara, 2008. For this work I refer to the English edition: Wu Ming, “American Parmesan.” In *Outsiders*. London: Maclehose press, 2013, pp. 148-206

product, Parmigiano Reggiano, can only be made in Italy; it is a matter of more than simply the recipe that creates the quality of the cheese. The two protagonists are discussing the impending case when one says:

“I’m sorry, but I can’t see how the recipe for making Parmigiano can be patented, or am I wrong?”  
He shakes his head.  
“The recipe doesn’t come into it. It’s the environmental factors that count. It’s what the cows eat, the air they breathe, the climate. And then the accumulated experience of the cheese-makers.”<sup>18</sup>

This pride over the quality and tradition of food is something that the Italians hold on to quite fiercely. One cannot produce Prosciutto di Parma outside of the Parma province, nor Aceto Balsamico di Modena outside of the province of Modena. The designations of DOP, DOC, DOCG, and IGT create a way for the Italians to protect their national products, to protect that which is truly Italian, and therefore to protect their identity.

## **Conclusion**

Food is, without a doubt, a source of enjoyment for all. However, as seen throughout this work, food can be much more than simply a source of gustatory enjoyment. It can bring families together, it can help spark new friendships, and it can even bridge gaps between different cultures and societies. This work focused on just a few of the seemingly infinite examples of the recurrences of food in literature, movies, art, and other forms of expression that are clear proof of the relevance of food in Italian society. The end of the matter is this: food is not just for pleasure, but it is also a tool used throughout different media to cultivate distinctive ideas and somehow shape the reader's mind.

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<sup>18</sup> In Wu Ming, “American Parmesan,” cit., p. 162.