

3 cups self-rising flour  
1 Tablespoon baking powder  
1 Teaspoon Cream of Tarter  
3/4 cup shortening (Crisco)

Butter milk to make soft dough  
mix well. Put on to a floured  
surface and kneed until firm  
enough to roll out. Cut with  
bliscuit cutter, brush tops with

# Recipe Books and the Structure of Recipes

Gianfranco Marrone

## 1. LEARNING AND TEACHING TO COOK

Learning to cook is no easy task. It takes time and patience, hard work and plenty of passion. Sometimes it can take years and a certain predisposition is necessary. As a result, many give up and few are truly successful.

But teaching to cook is equally difficult.

In the kitchen, when the teacher and their apprentices are in direct contact working together, things are relatively simple. The teacher carefully demonstrates the various steps to follow when preparing a particular dish or stock or sauce. The apprentices listen and, most importantly, pay close attention. Then, slowly, tasting as they go, and - most importantly - imitating the teacher's movements and gesture, they are able to attain the same results. A similar process happens in families and domestic settings where the mother, grandmother or the old aunt prepare the lunch and dinner every day; and where the children, especially the daughters, observe their actions and learn, by reproducing the steps, to cook too.

Often, in both a professional and a domestic setting, doing is more important than talking. If you ask your grandmother for explanations or advice, she will almost certainly struggle to

respond, managing to answer only vaguely, imprecisely. This is certainly not because she does not know, but because she does not know how to explain that which she does very well. In the same way, it is not a given that an acclaimed chef has the necessary communicative skills to explain, using words, what they have created. In fact, the chef does not ask their staff to listen to them, but to watch them carefully whilst they work, in order to reproduce the gestures, the skills, the *savoir faire*.

This is because cooking is something that *is done* even before it is something that *is known*. The act of cooking is, in fact, more a practical *savoir faire* than a form of theoretical knowledge. Much like swimming, driving a car or riding a bike. These are all things that are not learned from books or lessons, but by doing, by putting them into practice with dedication, courage and persistence, until the body itself has learned the techniques and the rules. Of course, scientific and technical knowledge counts a great deal, as do history, culture and traditions. This entire book is dedicated to these very subjects. But when it comes to making fresh pasta, turning an omelette or kneading pizza dough (to limit ourselves to very basic techniques), what counts is manual skill, a careful eye and control over one's movements, perhaps even one's entire body. And no words will ever be able to fully communicate this.

## 2. THE HISTORY OF THE RECIPE

However, when all of this does have to be written down – drawing up a recipe illustrating the necessary ingredients and quantities for preparing a dish, as well as the series of actions needed to make and serve it – things are very different; more complex in some aspects, more simple in others. Writing a recipe is no easy task. It is not nearly as obvious or immediate as people often think. It requires great care to render those various steps clearly, placing them in order, explaining the reasons for their importance in achieving the final result. However, over time the technique for writing a recipe, and consequently for composing an entire recipe book, has not just been perfected, but has reached fairly stable standards that, when reproduced, make teaching others to cook using the written word a fairly common practice. The format for a recipe has been used for a long time and in many different countries.

### 2.1. A SERIES OF NOTES

What is the origin of the recipe? The answer to this question is lost in the sands of time. We can imagine that recipes were originally little more than a note to remind cooks how to prepare a particular dish, to remember the necessary ingredients and their quantities, and the order of the various preparatory steps. The great recipe books of aristocratic families were collections of notes made over time by the family cook in order to remind – themselves and, in particular, the person who took their place – how to satisfy their clients' taste buds. Indirectly, this constituted a taste map not just of a single

household but an entire era. A map that allows to understand the rules of a social class and its transformations throughout history. Reading old recipe books today allows us to reconstruct how and what was eaten at a particular time, to discover which cooking techniques were used at that time, and which raw materials were most commonly used.

For example, the recipes from the English courts of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries were very specific, and they could be considered a precursor to the current form of recipe books. It contained a quadruple inventory. On one side were a shopping list (which later became the list of ingredients needed to make the dish) and a list of tasks that the kitchen staff had to carry out to prepare a particular meal (which later became the recipe we now recognise). On the other side, were another two lists: the menu that the diner would find on the table when they sat down, and the series of ways of eating the food, which was also placed on the table to help that day's guest. In both cases, the recipe was not just a recipe but was part of a highly complex ritual. It represented a very different social ritual from that of traditional farming societies in which food – both its preparation and its consumption – was managed in a collective, shared manner, with profoundly different cultural forms.

## 2.2. ORALITY AND WRITING

Originally, recipes were not written down but passed down orally, from generation to generation, using only the spoken word and with no additional way of fixing its principle characteristics. Traditional farming communities maintained this tradition for a long time. The same dish, whilst keeping the same name, could use ingredients and methods of preparation that varied greatly, simply because there was not one single version and, most importantly, certified, written down. From which comes the great many ways in which the same dish can be prepared, and its continual transformation over time and distance. Without a written memory, there was no standardised way of preparing a dish, but only the uses that oral memory recreated in its own, unique way.

As recipe books slowly came into being, the ways of preparing various dishes became stable, and the world's various culinary traditions were able to lay claim to reference texts that were relatively long lasting. This is how real gastronomy, both local and national, came about: through the simple act of being written down, or rather, transcribed. At the same time, however, something is lost through the act of writing, caused by the unbridgeable gap between the persistent, knowing gestures in actual culinary operations, and the written word that attempts to communicate them and, as a result, impoverishes them. Recipes, when seen from this perspective, tend to fossilise the silent 'knowledge of the hand', which is never spoken because it is unspeakable, reducing it to the 'strictly necessary', to a few stereotypical features, to technical formulas that are always the same – rehydrate, soften, sauté, etc. – and that do

not recognise what actually happens every day in home kitchens. This brings us to another difference, one between cooking as carried out by women, practised every day in families with a centuries-old continuity, and that carried out by men, which takes on an exceptional character (including the very idea of a chef) and requires recipe books in order to lay claim their role as authors and artists.

### 2.3. THE DOMESTIC COOKERY BOOK

The big step forward was made during the 1800s with the middle-class recipe book, which started to become part of the didactic literature linked to home economics, enabling the woman, or her staff, to run the household perfectly. These books might contain information on issues such as correct table etiquette, brushing teeth and the prudent use of gaslight. The recipe book presented itself as a guarantee of domestic bliss, as a metaphorical substitute for the most precious of all wedding gifts. In France in the 1500s, successful texts such as *Le Viandier* were already not just teaching culinary techniques, but the 'art of living', connecting collections of recipes to the old tradition of books on medicinal plants and, more generally, on pharmacopeia and dietetics. As such, the cookery book ended up becoming, alongside the saucepans and frying pans, knives and other various tools, a fundamental component in the domestic kitchen. Every family had their cookery book, at the end of which the publishing house wisely inserted a number of blank pages where the housewife could note down her own variations on the recipes, her own culinary 'inventions' - those enjoyed by her family members.

### 2.4. THE UPSURGE IN COOKERY BOOKS

Today, cookery books have transformed themselves significantly, both because they want to appeal to a very different reader (no longer just the housewife, but potentially anybody), and because there is no longer simply the book, but a whole series of mass media, such as radio and television, print media and cinema, as well as new media, the Internet, social media and Youtube.

As such, collections of recipes tend to be particularly diverse. They had long been texts with the sole communicative aim of transmitting a precise *savoir-faire*, real instruction manuals, dispensing advice and suggestions on what to do, when and how to do it. So, for example, in France the book by Henri-Paul Pellaprat, *Modern French Culinary Art* (1935) has long dominated, and continues today to be the model for every professional recipe book. Similarly in Italy, the most obvious example of a practical recipe book is the *Talismano della felicità [Talisman of Happiness]* by Ada Boni (1927), the cookery book *par excellence*, which was a staple in the kitchens of Italian housewives in the 1950s and 1960s, a typical recipe book aimed at teaching women to cook so that they could serve their families good food every day. Its American counterpart, *The Joy of Cooking* by Irma

Rombauer (1931), is one of the bestselling middle-class recipe books of all time.

But things have slowly changed. Recipe books no longer have a purely practical\* value. Their function is no longer to teach a way of cooking aimed at 'serving the table'. If we look at current trends in gastronomy, we can find other forms of valorisation\* in culinary practice.

For example, there are recipe books that tend to be valorised in a critical\* way, as in the case of those that promote so-called 'poor' cookery, the 'clever' ways of using leftovers or the quick preparation of delicious delicacies. In truth, the historical-literary nexus between recipe books and home economics manuals already existed. For example, it is well known that the book *L'arte di utilizzare gli avanzi* [*The Art of Using Leftovers*] by Olindo Guerrini (1918) was a kind of response, both low-cost and cunning, to the book *Scienza* by Artusi [See table]. There is also the recent *Good and Cheap: Eat Well on \$4 a Day* by Leanne Brown, a great book of cheap recipes, which was successful because it is *cheap* both in name and deed: it can be downloaded for free in pdf.

We then have the utopian\* valorisation of culinary practice. In this case, the recipe book plays no concrete role (to adequately 'serve' one's guests), but aims to construct the identity of the person who is cooking. For example, the recipe books that describe regional or local culinary traditions, like *Tasting Georgia* by Carla Capalbo, a food journalist from London with Italian roots, who, with this book, launched Georgia as a foodie destination. Or those that praise real culinary ideologies or dietetic regimes (vegetarianism, macrobiotic diets, etc.). The famous book by the Duke of Salaparuta, Enrico Allia-ta, *Cucina vegetariana e naturismo crudo* [*Vegetarian Cooking and Raw Naturism*] (1930), for example, paved the way for an entire genre of recipe books promoting this kind of dietetic trend, which later became fashionable, aimed at founding or reinforcing a value-based identity. In the Anglo-Saxon world we can cite the very famous case of the *Chez Panisse Menu Cookbook* by Alice Waters, the most famous 'slow food' cook in the world, whose restaurant, Chez Panisse, opened in San Francisco in the 1970s, was an antecedent of those restaurants serving purely 'local' food.

We then have ludic-aesthetic\* recipe books that tend to glorify the art of gastronomy. Those who read them do not cook in order to serve food, but in order to have fun while perhaps showing off to friends and relatives. Think of all those books that reveal the secrets of Michelin-starred chefs or those who aspire to that status, as well as those protagonists of television cookery programmes, some because they are already stars of the kitchen (i.e. Jamie Oliver), others because they are established TV stars (Gordon Ramsay, for example). An excellent example of this genre is undoubtedly *A Day at elBulli. An Insight into the Ideas, Techniques and Creativity of Ferran Adrià*, written by Adrià himself alongside Juli Soler and Al-

bert Adrià, and a key text for molecular cooking, the book is a triumph for its photography and various techniques.

Cookery is not, therefore, always cooking in the same way: food is not prepared with the single aim of feeding someone and perhaps impressing guests, but for many other reasons too.

## 2.5. THE MEDIATIZATION OF THE RECIPE

The promotion of recipes through other means of communication (as discussed in other chapters of this book) brings about various changes in the ways of communicating the art of cooking. The first is the introduction of images, which can be of great use to the reader in anticipating the dish they are trying to recreate. While a verbal text can only describe the dish and the steps necessary for its preparation, a magazine allows all this to be seen thanks to the pictures. On television and on the various tutorials available on the Internet, the recipe is rendered even more of a spectacle, allowing us to follow it step by step not just with our minds, but with our eyes.

On closer inspection, however, these changes are not as significant as is generally thought. Many of the prerogatives attributed to current cookery texts, and held up as a novelty, were already present in classical cookery books. For example, we know that, since the invention of the printing press, cookery books have been filled with images, with tables outside the text depicting the final result of the steps taken to prepare certain dishes, particularly sweet ones. Similarly, we should point out how the current trend towards the media glorification of cooks has ancient roots. Just think of how many photos of authors we find on the front pages or inside many books on cooking that end up creating a real cult of the personality and that we later find in the more contemporary star-chefs. Another significant aspect is the multiplication of media: the book was by no means the only one, because there were other paper media such as magazines, pamphlets, calendars, and so on, which worked for different audiences depending on their varying economic means, levels of education and culinary practice. It should also be pointed out how interactivity has been innate in very format of recipe books, well before Internet 2.0. There has never been any rivalry between the author's composition of a repertoire of recipes, and the individual writing down of domestic ways of preparing dishes collected in personal or family notebooks. Think of the periodical publication, from the 1800s onwards, of booklets filled with recipes to choose, cut out and stick into one's own notebook, or on the opposite side, those blank pages at the end of many cookery books, left for the user to write down their own variants of favourite dishes.

## FOCUS 1

# Pellegrino Artusi and Science in the Kitchen, and the Art of Eating Well

The Artusi cookery book is the most important recipe book in Italian cuisine, a reference point for housewives and cooks not just in Italy but the world over. It is the very definition of Italian cooking: a domestic, middle class way of cooking that is, most importantly, unanimous. Published at the author's expense in 1891, *Science in the Kitchen* met with unexpected success. The author would send it out by post to anyone who asked for it, housewives, estate managers and curious readers from all over Italy. In just twenty years 15 editions had been published, updated each time with new recipes, with the final edition from 1911 featuring 740. It is one of Italy's most famous books, beaten only by Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio*.



Beyond its publishing success, the book's importance lies in two factors. The first is that it used a language that could be understood throughout Italy, something that was by no means a given in the late 1800s, just a few decades after the unification of Italy. The second was that it attempted to overcome the regionalism of Italian cuisine, collecting recipes from Piedmont to Campania, from Tuscany to Emilia, from the Veneto to Liguria, and so on. It could be said, therefore, that before Artusi, Italian cuisine did not actually exist. Prior to this there were dozens of local cuisines, but this book considered together culinary experiences and dishes from all over Italy. Most interest-

ingly, in his recipes Artusi managed to blend the Tuscan cuisine, which uses olive oil, with the North Italian use of butter, no longer opposing but, according to his tastes, entirely complementary.

Explaining the importance of Artusi's book to Italian culture, the author Giorgio Manganelli defined it thus: "the Artusi was a thing, not a person, perhaps it was not even a book. It was a domestic object, like a pan, a pot or a clay dish, though it was certainly not an electrical appliance. Like a pan, the domestic copies of Artusi were handled, tampered with, covered in notes, their spines broken by the aggressively affectionate hands of passionate housewives".

## FOCUS 2

### Julia Child, Mastering the Art of French Cooking



The American cook Julia Child (1912-2004) is a central figure in contemporary food culture. By bringing French cuisine to an American audience, she managed to eliminate the divide between refined European gastronomy and the coarse, offhand cuisine of the US. In order to do so she used two very important media tools. The first was the celebrated *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* (1961-70), written with French colleagues Simone Beck and Louisette Bertholle, in which she adapted 500 French recipes for an American market. The book met with great success and multiple editions



have been published; proof that the American public was, and still is, fascinated by refined tastes and elaborate cuisine. Julia Child then became even more famous thanks to her television cookery programmes [see the chapter xxx], in particular, *The French Chef*, first broadcast in 1963 and continued for many years, in which she presented recipes that used raw materials often cooked in rather bizarre ways. During her culinary presentations Child would change her tone of voice and talk directly, and rather amusingly, to the dishes. This had famously hilarious results, and gave rise to a great many parodies. Just to give a sense of her success, the television studio where her programmes were filmed is now on display at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington.

The story of Julia Child has been told in both her autobiography, and by the young author Julie Powell, in a novel entitled *Julie & Julia*, adapted into a film of the same name by Nora Ephron.

### 3. FORMATS AND USES OF RECIPES

One thing that characterises a recipe is that it is not a text to be read, but to be put into action. What is written is a condensed summary of what the reader must do if they want to prepare a particular dish. It is not therefore a description of the dish, but of how to prepare it, a description that the reader must follow carefully.

The recipe plays a similar role to a musical score or an architectural plan: it does not give all the information but provides advice, it gives indications as to what should be done and what not to do. The recipe does not offer rigid norms that have to be followed to the letter (the use of the imperative is a stylistic habit), but general rules to use as needed, to personalise as desired depending on the ingredients one has at one's disposal and depending on the patience one wishes to expend on preparing the dish. Some musical scores can be less restrictive, to the point of existing as abstract models of collective memory without having physically been written down on paper (as is the case with jazz). Similarly, the recipe can exist in both written and, as we have seen, oral forms in people's memory.

But the most important thing is that, like in music, it is acted upon, and this can be done more or less successfully. Essentially, the reader is left a margin of freedom in the dish's creation. So, faced with a recipe, and with their kitchen utensils in hand, the behaviour of the agent-cook can vary enormously. Some follow the recipe to the letter, step by step, doing exactly as they are told. This means starting by weighing all necessary ingredients, using every ingredient required and nothing more, and then using them in the stated order. On the contrary, there are those who use the recipe as a starting point to prepare what they want, can and know how to make, depending also on the ingredients to hand. The first model of

following recipes is a kind of 'engineer': first they plan, then they find the necessary materials, then, finally, they build. The second example is a kind of 'bricoleur': they make what they can with the materials at their disposal, using them according to the potential inscribed in their inherent properties. Half-way between these two examples, ideals and opposites, there is the reality of cooking and the relationship with the recipe text. Recipes are open texts, ready to be accepted, and used, according to the reader/ agent's needs, without prescribing a rigid canon nor diminishing their creativity. Today, for example, the vast number of recipe books in a single home means they are consulted in parallel. The cook consults all texts, jumping from the most classic texts to the latest food blog, ending up constructing a kind of *patchwork* dish, whose taste is the result of the overlapping of multiple sources.

#### 4. SKILLS

These differences in the way recipes are used are a result of the fact that the recipe, like every text giving a set of instructions, is also subject to the inevitable discrepancy between what the writer knows (and knows how to do) and what the reader knows (and knows how to do). We could say that the recipe attempts to negotiate between these two disparate levels of culinary competence\*: that of the author, hyper-competent by their very nature, and that of the reader, who is minimally competent. The recipe is not aimed at those who have no idea how to cook, but at those who, despite not knowing how to cook to the same degree as the author, nevertheless have a vague idea of what to do in the kitchen. The negotiation is this: managing the relative knowledge of the two subjects involved, regulating the quality and quantity of those things that are unsaid, the implicit references and allusions that the recipe text is filled with. It is the well-known problem with *as required*, 'a pinch of salt or pepper', 'a cup of sugar' or 'a drizzle of oil'. Many recipes, or perhaps all of them in different ways, delegate a series of operations to the reader, the person who is there to learn. Hence expressions such as 'season as required', 'add herbs according to taste', or throwaway enunciations such as 'sauté the garlic', 'soften the onion', 'prepare a roux', '*tirate*'<sup>1</sup> the risotto', etc., encompass in just a few words complex culinary manoeuvres, series of multiple actions that presume advanced forms of culinary knowledge. On the other hand, linguistic expressions that at first sight seem to be self-explanatory – 'peel', 'leave to dry', 'fry', and so on – actually require a certain amount of previous skill.

In both cases, therefore, the perfect recipe, the one that should explain *everything* that is necessary for the prepara-

---

<sup>1</sup> Translator's note: this is a term specific to the preparation of risotto and for which there is no English equivalent. It is the process of gradually adding boiling liquid to the rice, allowing it to be absorbed and then repeating these steps until the rice is cooked.

tion of a certain dish, does not exist, nor in fact can it. For example, the famous food writer Allan Bay has written a fitting recipe book with the title *Cuochi si diventa* (2003), in which he imagines an entirely incompetent reader, explaining with a legend created for the purpose, precisely what is meant by each vague 'as required'. But he too also comes up against previous knowledge, perhaps regarding things beyond the quantity of ingredients, which he references implicitly. In the *Encyclopedia della Cucina* (2010), which he edited, the problem seems to be resolved, with every term explained using corresponding definitions. If it says to 'emulsify oil with lemon juice', and you do not know what this means, under 'Emulsion' you will find an explanation of how to do it. It should be noted, however, that in the handbook found at the beginning of the volume, having meticulously explained what is meant by expressions such as 'a pinch' (=2.4g) or 'a drizzle of oil' (=20g), when it comes to 'a handful or small handful' he eventually admits 'this depends on the specific weight, use your common sense'.

If a meticulously detailed explanation of a recipe cannot be provided, it is not because of the descriptive ineptitude of the person writing, but for specifically communicative reasons linked to what I have said at the beginning of this chapter: there is always a discrepancy between culinary *savoir faire* and its verbal explanation, something that cannot be said. Nothing can be done about this, unless we follow the method that uses certain kitchen appliances [see the chapter on objects], whose recipe books tell us to follow a set of actions ('press the red button', 'hold down the green button for seven seconds') without explaining the reasons behind them. In this case it is the robot that is cooking, and we are reduced to servers. Every recipe book presupposes a different (tacit) 'contract' between the person writing and the person reading, subjects that negotiate what should be explained and what is evident, the explicit and the implicit. If the author takes various passages in the dish's preparation for granted- writing, for example, in the recipe for Greek Moussaka, 'make a roux' without explaining how - it is because they assume that the reader already knows how. If, in the preparation of *Stracotto al vino bianco*, the recipe explains that before putting it in the oven you must 'lard' the meat, without giving any more information, it is because it assumes that the reader knows what 'to lard' means. We can see, therefore, what makes a 'good' cookery book: a text in which the skills of both the author and the reader even each other out, so that the former states what they assume the latter does not know, and does not mention what they assume is already known. The reader, already in possession of previously acquired skills, (implicitly) asks the author to provide certain information, but to not mention what they already know.

In short, this is the great historical, geographical and cultural difference between the various cookery books. There are those that are more explicit, like those books that today proliferate in bookshops: they assume they have a reader who is

only barely competent in the kitchen, almost entirely ignorant. Conversely, there are texts that explain the least, like many of those written in centuries past: they know that their reader is not ignorant in culinary matters but actually knows quite a lot about them. There are then all the intermediate examples.

### FOCUS 3

## Different Versions of the Recipe for Risotto alla Milanese

With this series of recipes for the same dish, it is easy to grasp the progressive expansion of the recipe's text, which goes from the few words used by Artusi (who wrote for a rather skilled audience, familiar with what was meant by '*tirare a cottura*', for example), to the use of images on the website [giallozafferano.it](http://giallozafferano.it), required to illustrate the various phases of the risotto's preparation, including the necessary colour changes of the onion and the rice.

#### **Artusi, Risotto alla milanese II, Recipe no. 79**

*Rice, 500g*  
*Butter, 80g*  
*Beef bone marrow, 40g*  
*Half an onion*  
*Good white wine, two thirds of a glass*  
*Saffron, as required*  
*Parmesan, as required*

Chop the onion and place it in the pan with the marrow and half of the butter. When it is golden, pour in the rice, and after a few minutes add the wine and '*tiratelo*' with the broth until it is cooked. Before removing it from the heat, blend it with the rest of the butter and the parmesan, and serve with extra parmesan on the side.

#### **Pellaprat, p. 245 - Risotto alla milanese**

*For 6 people:*  
*500 g Rice Vialone or Maratelli*  
*80 g Parmesan*  
*120 g butter*  
*30 g beef bone marrow*  
*2g saffron*  
*20 g onion*  
*around 8 dl good quality broth, salted.*

*Cooking time: 15-18 minutes.*

Chop the onion finely and fry it gently with 30 g of butter and the marrow, both sieved. When it has taken on a light golden colour, add

the rice and allow it to cook for a few minutes, stirring frequently. Add half of the boiling broth and add the saffron, which must be dissolved in a little broth beforehand. During cooking, gradually add the rest of the broth. A few minutes before the rice is cooked, add grated parmesan and the butter. Stir, ensuring that the risotto is well thickened.

Note: do not use any lard or pancetta, oil or white wine.

[Recipe officially codified by the Associazione Italiana Cuochi (Venice, May 1963)]

**Allan Bay, Cuochi si diventa – Alla milanese**

(the phrases underlined refer to other parts of the recipe book, where they are explained separately)

*Serves 4*

Following the basic procedure, toast 360 g of Carnaroli rice and simmer with 1 glass of dry white wine until it is reduced, the alcohol will soften the taste of the marrow. Cook the rice using beef broth, which is particularly powerful, adding at the beginning 4 teaspoons of sautéed onion and 40g of finely chopped and sautéed marrow for 2 minutes in a small non-stick saucepan. When there is just 1 minute left for the rice, add salt and a generous amount of high-quality ground saffron (I do not like saffron threads, they never dissolve well), dissolved in a ladleful of broth. *Mantecare*<sup>2</sup> with 60g of butter and season with 40g of grated Parmigiano Reggiano, matured for at least 3 years. It must be rather dry: a spoon placed in the risotto should stand to attention.

Website [giallozafferano.it](http://giallozafferano.it)



To prepare *risotto allo zafferano* begin by finely chopping the onion (1), then melt 80g butter on a low heat (2) taking care not to brown it, then add the finely chopped onion and allow it to soften and turn golden, stirring continuously with a wooden spoon (3-4).



<sup>2</sup> Translator's note: Again *mantecare* is a specific term that refers to the adding of butter and parmesan to render the risotto creamy

Add the rice (5) and toast it, allowing it to absorb the butter properly (6), after this turn the heat up and add liquid to the rice,



first the wine (7), which must be allowed to evaporate, and then 2 ladles of boiling broth (8); keep stirring and when this liquid is almost completely absorbed, add the same amount again (9). This operation must be repeated until the rice is cooked.



Halfway through cooking, dissolve the saffron in a little broth (10) and pour it into the rice (11) taking care to combine well (12).



Once the rice is cooked, remove it from the heat and *mantecare* with the grated parmesan (13) and the rest of the butter (14). At this point, taste the rice and season accordingly. We advise you do this just before the rice is cooked, as the broth that is added to the rice is already salted, so it is best to check the flavour at the end to avoid any nasty surprises. Before serving, allow the *risotto alla milanese* to rest for a few moments (15) so that the flavours can develop further. Decorate by scattering saffron threads over the risotto on the serving plates.

## 5. STORIES

How are recipes structured? What order do they follow when describing a culinary procedure? Rather than a description, it would be better to call it a story, as like all stories recipes must also follow a sequence of actions, gestures and procedures that take place in order to achieve a final result – the dish. Such actions are carried out by different subjects: there

is the cook, but also their kitchen hands (who usually deal with more lowly tasks, such as peeling potatoes or washing the vegetables), and even (if not most importantly) kitchen utensils, the tools and technology that play a significant role in the culinary procedures enacted to prepare a particular dish. When we read 'cook on a high heat for ten minutes', 'leave it to cool under running water', 'place in the freezer for fifteen minutes', or 'place in the oven at 180 degrees', it is clear that the cook is not directly carrying out the act of cooking but delegates it, as it were, to others: the hob, the tap, the freezer, the oven. Strictly speaking, these are things that, in some of the preparatory steps, do the cooking. The act of cooking is, therefore, always a collective practice, in which there are human subjects (the cook and their helpers), and non human subjects (the tools), which pass the baton of what needs to be done accordingly.

The recipes must organise all of this, supplying practical and efficient advice that leads to a good end result. The recipes provide order, distributing roles, abilities, operations and results. Most importantly, they must decide on the chronology of the single actions. What should be said first and what should come after? The response might be obvious: you first say what needs to be done first, then you say what needs to be done next. However, very often, there are things that can be done before or after; mentioning them first therefore also means deciding on which order to follow during the preparation. Furthermore, the real problem is that, very often, in the kitchen many things are done simultaneously: whilst the sauce is reducing, the meat is cut into slices, the final touches are made to the peas, the potatoes are removed from the oven. Given that many actions take place at the same time in the kitchen, the most common phrases found in recipes are those such as 'whilst', 'during', 'in the meantime' and so on. Beyond succession (one action after the other), the recipe must also be able to manage concurrent actions (actions that happen at the same time). From the reader's point of view, this means that a recipe should never be attempted one phrase at a time, slavishly following the various operations only as they arise, as there will inevitably come a moment when you find an instruction like, 'whilst the stew cooks, you will have had enough time to peel and cut the potatoes in order to add them halfway through cooking', 'pour in the sauce that you have already prepared', which inevitably force you to start over.

Time in recipes is fundamental, not just for its chronology but for its modulation (what to do at the beginning, at the end, during, repeatedly), and its rhythm (actions to carry out slowly or quickly, speeding up or slowing down). To 'tirare' the risotto means: stir it slowly, adding the broth little by little, repeatedly, until the liquid is absorbed. The action is a single one, it is the modulation of its time that varies greatly.

Beyond the problem of time, recipes must manage a second logic: the way in which the various actions, whatever point at which they may be carried out, must be connected to one another in order to attain the desired result. For example, if I have to cook sole with vegetables, I will prepare the fish and the vegetables. They are two different 'programmes' that only meet at the end, at the moment of plating up. This does not take away from the fact that, in the kitchen, the actions taken to prepare the sole (removing the skin and the bones, filleting, boiling) and those to prepare the vegetables (wash, peel, cut) can – or in some cases must – overlap. I put the water on to boil, I wash the courgettes, I remove the fish skin, I peel the potatoes. In recipes, however, it would be best to keep these steps separate, distinguishing as far as possible between the 'programme for the preparation of the sole', and the 'programme for the preparation of the vegetables'. Well written recipes do this, many others, however, do not follow this logic, rendering the reader an automaton who carries out the various operations without properly understanding how they serve to create one part of a dish (the spaghetti, for example) or another (the sauce). Keeping the various preparatory steps for the dish's individual components separate in the recipe's text not only helps the reader better understand what they have to do, but allows them to divide the dish down into its main parts, in order to put it back together as best they can at the end.

## FOCUS 4

### Analysis of a Recipe

#### **Duck à l'alsacienne**

Pellaprat, p. 531, Italian edition

*Serves 8-10:*

1 3 kg duck;  
1 kg sausages;  
2 kg sauerkraut;  
1 kg smoked pancetta;  
50 g butter or sunflower oil.

*Cooking time: approx. 1 hour and 45 minutes.*

*Stuff the duck with the sausage, removing the sausagemeat from its casing. Place it in a large casserole dish and, with very little butter or oil, roast it in the oven, leaving it for at least an hour. When  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the cooking time has passed, remove it from the oven, add the sauerkraut and the lard, which you should have already lightly sautéed together with a little butter. Place it back in the oven and cook for a further 30 minutes at least, ensuring the sauerkraut entirely covers the duck. Serve on a very hot serving plate, presenting all the ingredients together.*



1. **Actions.** We can distinguish between *explicit actions* expressed by precise verbs (stuff, remove, place, roast, remove, add, sauté, ensure, cover, place, serve) and *implicit actions*, actions that are not expressed but that the text implies (prepare the duck to be stuffed [= clean it out], choose the size of the casserole dish, add oil or butter to it, wait, prepare the sauerkraut).
2. **Subjects.** Consequently, some subjects carry out the explicit actions (cook, casserole dish, oven, cook, sauerkraut, oven) and others carry out the implicit ones (butcher, cook, kitchen helper).
3. **Temporal organisation.** The sequence of actions present in the recipe, which does not correspond to the order in which they are spoken, is: clean out the duck → remove the casing from the sausages → stuff the duck → place it in the oven for  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the time stipulated → sauté the sauerkraut → add the sauerkraut and the lard → put back in the oven for 30 minutes → serve.
4. **Programmes.** The recipe provides two autonomous programmes (clean out the duck, remove the sausagemeat from its casing) that come together in a third (stuffing the duck with the sausage). These programmes are then joined by another two (sautéing the sauerkraut, adding it to the duck), and the final programmes (place it all on the same plate, serve).

## 6. THE AUTHOR OF THE RECIPE

We have said that the recipe attempts to balance two different levels of culinary competency: that of the author (hyper-competent) and that of the reader (minimally competent). If the aim of the recipe is to increase the reader's expertise, then where does the author's great competence come from? The most obvious response is that they learned it in the field, in the kitchen, during their career as a cook. But, apart from the fact that not all recipe books are written by cooks but rather by 'amateurs' of a different type (just think of the great American cookery author Julia Child [see table]), very often in the recipe books themselves, or even in the text of a single recipe, the problem arises regarding how to highlight the author's skill in order to attract the reader's attention and maintain their trust. It is clear that in a recipe book, as with all didactic texts, the issue of the authority, and therefore the credibility, of the author is fundamental. It is as if the reader first asks themselves: "why should I do what this author is telling me to do?"; and at the same moment, the author is in turn asking themselves: "what can I do so my work will be read and listened to, to ensure that the reader does what I am suggesting?". Any recipe throws out, however ritualistically, a series of imperatives ("make", "slice", "crumble", "put on the boil"), therefore assuming some form of authority from the person writing. An authority that must be earned, on the one hand, and accepted, on the other. As such, the author must en-

sure they are trustworthy, constructing their own competency as that of someone who not only knows how to cook, but knows what is worth cooking. They know what they are saying, and must demonstrate it.

We often pay no attention to this aspect of the recipe, and yet it is fundamental. If a recipe must be followed, it is because, in the end, the author and the reader must share the same culinary values, the same interests, perhaps even the same culinary ideology, and most importantly, the same tastes. Taste is almost never mentioned in recipe books; it is taken for granted. But it is also something that, though it may remain implicit, must nevertheless be shared. This is where the author's need to be considered an authority figure comes from, someone who not only knows how to cook, but first and foremost, has taste, or at least, has the same taste as the reader.

In times such as ours, in which recipe books have become goods to be exchanged in the publishing market, objects to be sold, and therefore, of marketing, this aspect is even more important. And, in fact, it is emphasised in today's recipe books.

## FOCUS 5

### The Construction of Trust

Let's look at the following text:

*The soupe au pistou is the most beautiful gem of Provençal cooking. It is a masterstroke that will leave you foodies dazed with admiration. A dish fit for the Gods. We said dish, yes, because it is much more than just a soup.*

*I have long believed that the soupe au pistou was of Genovese origin, and that the provençals, adopting it as their own, had just noticeably improved it. But my friend Fernand Pouillon explained to me that the soupe au pistou was the Iranian national dish! It matters very little: as every person in Provence came to appreciate it, it became naturalised as their own.*

*Just to be clear, there is no single recipe for soupe au pistou, no definitive recipe used by people in Provence. I could cite at least a dozen and have tried them all. My favourite by a long shot is the one I am audacious enough to call 'my' soupe au pistou. It is with great shame that I confess that I did not invent the recipe. I was given it by a friend from Provence at whose home I enjoyed an extraordinary soupe au pistou for the first time, the same one I will share with you.*

These are the lines that introduce for the recipe for soupe a la provençal, or soupe au pistou in Henri Philippon's recipe book, *La cuisine provençale*. It is apparently a text that presents the dish whose recipe is about to be given, sharing a few pleasantries about it, almost as if to anticipate its discussion by the diners when it is served at the table. But there is much more to it. There is a very strong

valorisation of the dish itself ('fit for the Gods'), about which an imaginary story is constructed as if to justify the fact that this is one of the most typical identitary dishes of the South of France. By praising it, the author praises the regional cuisine to which it belongs in its entirety. But on closer inspection we can also see how the author's knowledge is called into play, his knowledge of Provençal cuisine in general, and the soupe au pistou in particular. It is no coincidence that in just a few lines we have met some unidentified characters – Fernand Pouillon and the anonymous Provençal cook – both of whom are friends of the author who provide him with two essential pieces of knowledge: the first tells him about the correct historic origin of the dish, whilst the second provides the steps required for its preparation. The author knows what he is talking about because he has been informed by experts in the field. Here we have a short implicit chain of enunciations that sounds more or less like this: 'someone told me what I am telling you, so believe me just as I believed them'. The aim of this chain of enunciations is, precisely, to achieve credibility by circulating expertise.