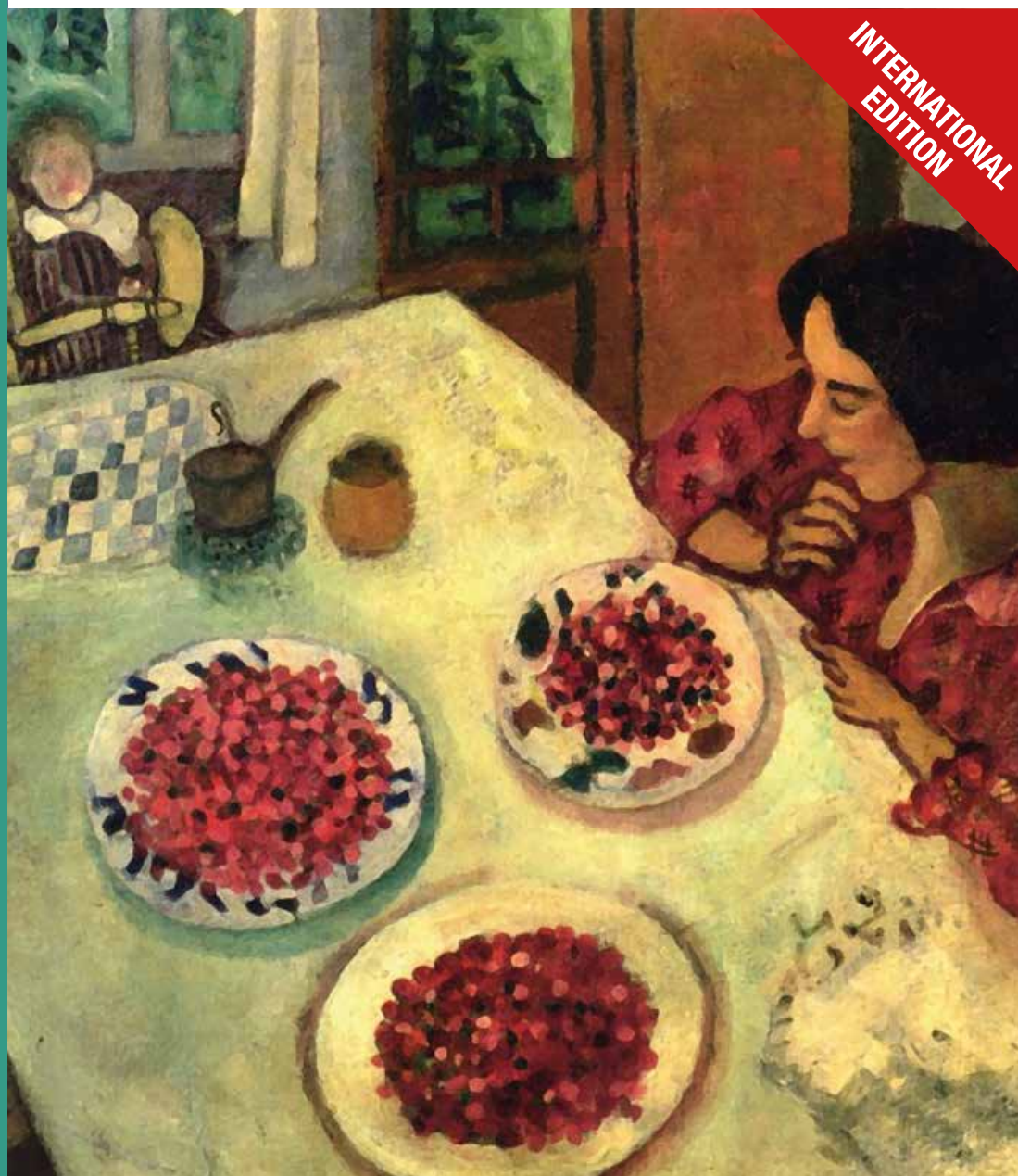


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CON MASSIMO ALBERINI E VINCENZO BUONASSISI.



On the cover: graphic elaboration of *Strawberries. Bella and Ida at the Table* (1916) by Marc Chagall; private collection

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Carbonara: the world's favourite Italian dish

Loved, discussed, vilified, sublimated, it is the recipe which has undergone the greatest changes over time.

The eighth edition of **World Carbonara Day** was held this past 6th of April. This initiative was conceived by the **International Pasta Organisation (IPO)** and **Unione Italiana Food** to defend the culture of the traditional Carbonara recipe, one of the symbolic dishes of Roman and Italian cuisine acclaimed throughout the world. This beloved and much-discussed preparation has occasioned innumerable diatribes regarding its origin and the significance of its name. Furthermore, some argue that this year marks its seventieth birthday, since it was first printed in 1954 as a 'requested recipe' in the magazine *La Cucina Italiana*. Its ingredients were: spaghetti, pancetta, Gruyère cheese, garlic, eggs, pepper and salt. In fact, a Carbonara recipe had already appeared in 1952 in an American guide to restaurants in Chicago, where the restaurant **Armando's** was managed by two Italian owners, one from Lucca. Its version consisted of "tagliarini, mezzina (a Tuscan term for pancetta), parmesan and eggs". And here we should pause, because, though these recipes were published in the first half of the 1950s, it is just as true that in Rome and its region of Latium, the recipe had long been used, certainly at least since 1944.

Beyond its various origin stories, let us observe its evolution

Bypassing the plethora of often outlandish theories about its invention, let us rather turn to the pressing matter of its evolution. According to first-hand experience, in the 1960s **whole eggs were used in Rome and environs** (discarding the whites would have been unthinkable), alongside **pancetta** (*guanciale* appeared much later, being difficult to find outside Latium) and cheese: **half pecorino, half parmesan**. The result often resembled scrambled eggs: a visual horror excommunicated by exalted experts, but (age and memory make a difference) how delicious that Carbonara was! **Nowadays**, after many a tweak, we have eliminated garlic, parmesan, egg whites and pancetta; **tiny lakes and creaminess reign supreme**; and instead of spaghetti, *mezze maniche* and *rigatoni* are all the rage. This makes us wonder whenever the Academy proposes to enlist notaries and Chambers of Commerce to register traditional recipes which must be protected lest their value

by Paolo Petroni
President of the Accademia



be mangled by innovations. Probably other recipes have suffered, or are suffering, substantial alterations, but Carbonara is a unique phenomenon, so adored throughout the world as to be scrambled by the flair of cooks, whether talented or extemporaneous.



Artificial Intelligence and gastronomic tradition

by Eleonora Cannatelli

Vibo Valentia Delegate

How technology has elbowed its way even into local culinary traditions and beyond.

As we know, artificial intelligence (AI) has established itself in various fields, replacing human labour to obtain better results with less drudgery and effort.

Technology is everywhere by now, even in such specialised fields as gastronomy and the culinary arts, which need the emotional element brought by the human touch. Artificial intelligence has brought a revolution that has not only increased efficiency but also innovatively redefined culinary experience. **AI seems to be playing an increasing role in restaurant automation:** in commercial kitchens, it is used for optimising such processes as preparation, cooking and food storage. **Culinary robots** have been

invented; they can learn recipes, precisely control temperature and reduce waste, but also serve customers or clean kitchens. In short, they can be fast-learning human replacements.

An experiment at Cambridge University

Researchers at Cambridge University have **tested a robot's ability to follow recipes**. Like any foodie trying their hand at cookery, the robot not only reproduced the recipe for which it was programmed, but also **learned new skills on the job:** shown eight salad preparation videos,





the machine recognised and replicated the recipes depicted **and even invented its own version** using information gathered through those videos. The experiment showed that the robot correctly recognised recipes 93% of the time and accurately identified 83% of human chefs' actions and their possible variations.

On the positive side, as robots lack the emotions that affect human activities, they **do not suffer stress**, making for a uniformly pleasant atmosphere and reliable performance.

The world's first fully automated restaurant has opened in California: customers order through an account, can personalise their orders, making use of recommendations based on their preferences, and can pay quickly and easily.

In December 2023, the McDonald's Corporation and Google announced a new global partnership to integrate a vast array of technologies into thousands of restaurants worldwide, aiming to facilitate management and improve equipment and platforms to reduce malfunctions.

The many examples of technology and AI in food include generating **food pairings, which can be defined as the art**

of judiciously combining ingredients and aromas to create a taste synergy.

This emerged from the desire to find new flavour combinations by associating two or more ingredients according to similarity or contrast in taste nuance.

Can we use AI while still protecting traditional food products?

Yet we risk de-humanising a sector where in the rapport between restaurateur and customer is perceived, worldwide and particularly in Italy, as one of humanity's irreplaceable treasures. **We cannot neglect the protection of Italy's culinary heritage** in the face of growing demands, in terms of both quantity and quality, for production of our planet's nourishing resources. For example, in the past decade Calabria has obtained laudable results and recognitions of excellence for several of its typical gastronomic products: bergamot, Pizzo truffle, Tropea onions, chilli peppers, liquorice, Monte Poro cheeses, cured meats and citrus fruits. **To**

compete on the world stage, all these products need better use of artificial intelligence. It is a global challenge requiring ever more refined scientific and technological solutions harmonising with greater awareness of sustainable food production.

The world's major contemporary issues are population increase, climate change, scarce drinkable water, the need for more farmland, obesity, increased protein consumption, and micronutrient deficiencies (half a million children worldwide suffer from vitamin A deficiency and 30% of humans consume insufficient iron). **What will be the food of the future?** Will technology succeed in satisfying the world's new needs? What excellent foods, in harmony with tradition, will remain? Will food be medicine or poison for our bodies? What will be our new foods (algae, proteins from microorganisms, insects etc)? In conclusion, the European Union and international law must systematically reconstruct the interplay between technological and scientific development and health protection, heralding a wondrous blend of tradition and innovation.

Eleonora Cannatelli



The drink that wakes the world

by **Morello Pecchioli**

Honorary Academician for Verona

The recipe for perfect coffee according to Talleyrand: "Black as the devil, hot as hell, pure as an angel, sweet as love".

It was the Ethiopian goats of mountainous Kaffa who discovered coffee. According to legend, the drink that wakes the world was discovered when a shepherd noticed that his horned bleaters, normally mellow browsers, began frisking around as if dancing the twist after nibbling the reddish berries of certain bushes. The curious youth picked some, chewed them and became similarly agitated. He told a Sufi sage who also munched some of those berries and noticed their effects during his nocturnal prayers: he felt spry as a sparrow, praying

without the usual cyclopean yawns. And so, narrates the legend, coffee entered the stage, taking that highland region's name, and conquered the world. Initially, the fruits of the *Coffea arabica* plant were taken as medicinal pills. Later, an intoxicating juice was produced from their fermented pulp: almost a one-stop *caffè corretto* ('corrected coffee', to which alcohol, usually *grappa*, is added). Finally, some anonymous but saintly soul around the year 1200 discovered that a dark, invigorating beverage could be obtained by toasting the seeds of those





fruits, grinding them and infusing the resulting powder in boiling water. This advance is also shrouded in legend: **a fortuitous conflagration caused burning coffee bushes to release a delicious aroma.**

Mocha, in Yemen, is a home away from home for coffee bushes

Ethiopian soldiers in the 13th and 14th centuries **bore coffee from East Africa to the neighbouring Arabian Peninsula** across the Bab el-Mandeb strait. The plant found a new home in the Yemeni region of Mocha, a city which soon became the world's main coffee market-

place and **gave its name to a coffee variety strongly redolent of chocolate.** In the 17th century, the benefits of these toasted seeds gained widespread fame thanks to **physicians who prescribed coffee** to cure gout, eye ailments, and fever, strengthen the heart and kidneys, promote diuresis, defeat scurvy, and combat stomach ulcers, hypochondria, sore throat and halitosis.

Like all novelties that shake up established customs, coffee made enemies, who called it **'The Devil's Drink'**. Impervious to slander, coffee gradually won over the Old Continent thanks to merchants and ambassadors from the east who gifted it to European sovereigns and princes. **Luminaries also gave it good publicity:** coffee stimulates the mind and multiplies our eloquence.

'Coffee doubles the self,' say the Turks.

Intellectuals agreed, introducing Arabica into literary salons, artists' gatherings, and political and philosophical meetings. In the 19th century, **Artusi** enthused: "This precious beverage, which infuses the body with joyful excitement, **was called the scholar's drink, the friend of writers, of scientists and poets,** because, by shuffling the nerves, it clears our ideas, enlivens the imagination and quickens our thoughts". A French physician enamoured of the "chatty black beverage", viewing it as a panacea, advised patients to replace tobacco with roasted coffee powder, inhaling it nasally. Thank heavens, this advice was ignored.

Some friars, perceiving it as evil, urged Pope **Clement VIII** to excommunicate this diabolical potion as a hellish emanation bent on conquering Christendom. "Coffee is Mohammedan", they told the Pontifex, "and must be stopped before it rots our souls". Pope Aldobrandini heeded them but chose to find out for himself. Calling for a coffee, he appreciated its fragrance, and as the maligning monks droned incantations and spewed barrages of benedictions, he took a sip, then another and another. Still undecided, he asked for seconds, the better to judge the matter. At length, enlightened by caffeine and feeling physically vigorous, he decreed that such an excellent beverage could not be left for the Muslim infidels. **He blessed and christened coffee,** transforming it from an infidel, indeed a Mohammedan, into a Christian.





Venice was the first European city to host a coffee shop

Venice was the first European city to host a coffee shop, which opened in **1645 thanks to one Pietro della Valle. The merchants of St Mark**, men of commerce and refinement, traded the black gold throughout Europe, **selling it in painted wooden boxes, ornate silver coffers or vessels of Murano glass.** Coffee shops mushroomed in capital cities, large towns and ports throughout Europe. A census in London in the mid-17th century, before England converted to tea, listed over 3000 establishments that served coffee.

Coffee inspires. Voltaire confessed: "I drink 40 coffees a day to be well awake and think about how to keep tyrants and imbeciles at bay". Warned that it was a poison, he allegedly replied: "Slow it must be indeed, for I have sipped it for seventy-five years". **Honoré de Balzac** echoed him: "This coffee plunges into the stomach, and straight away there is a general commotion. The mind is aroused, and ideas pour forth like the battalions of the Grand Army on the field of battle". This may be how he wrote *La Comédie humaine*, spanning tens of thousands of pages, without falling asleep. He calculated that after 137 publications including books, stories, essays and studies, he had consumed 50 thousand cups of coffee. **Beethoven** also appreciated coffee. Extremely punctilious, he ground 60 beans, no more and no less, for every cup that he prepared. The great statesman **Tall-**

eyrand, who laid the grounds for post-Napoleonic France at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, decreed the parameters for perfect coffee: "Black as the devil, hot as hell, pure as an angel, sweet as love". Apocryphally, when the Turks retreated from Vienna following their defeat in 1683, **Jerzy Franciszek Kulczycki, the legendary pioneer of Viennese cafés**, entered their hastily abandoned encampment and found several sacks of greenish seeds in a tent. Nobody else knew what to do with them, but he did: he took them home and opened the Austrian capital's first café. As the bitterness of coffee was unappealing to Viennese palates, Kulczycki solved the problem by sweetening the coffee with honey.

The first recognisable modern-style café opened in Paris in the early 18th century

The first modern café, as we would understand it, opened in Paris in the early 18th century thanks to an Italian, **Procopio dei Coltelli**. The *Café Procope* had a long life and exceedingly illustrious customers: **Voltaire, Diderot, Marat, Robespierre, Théophile Gautier, Balzac, Musset, Anatole France, Verlaine and Oscar Wilde**. The elegant, mirror-lined Procope, which offered not only coffee but also hot chocolate, liqueurs, biscuits and ice creams, paved the way for other iconic Parisian cafés.

Several splendid cafés opened in Italy, many of which are still alive and kicking: in Venice, the *Florian* in Piazza San Marco

(1720), frequented by **Casanova, Goethe, Byron** and innumerable other VIPs; in Rome, the *Greco*; in Naples, the *Gran Caffè Gambrinus*; the *Dante* in Verona; the *Camparino* in Milan; the *Michelangiolo* in Florence; and the *Fiorio* (1780) in Turin.

Coffee found a second home in Italy.

It was exalted, sublimated, elevated into espresso. Nobody doubts in all the world that our planet's best coffee is prepared here. Italians have created a liquid monument for it. **They play it in myriad variations:** *espresso, lungo, ristretto*, decaffeinated, *cappuccino, caffelatte, caffè macchiato, latte macchiato, macchiatone*, Neapolitan-style, moka, *gocciato, marocchino, mokaccino*, cold, shaken, with sugar, without, with honey, 'corrected' with *grappa, sambuca* or brandy, Venetian-style *resentin*, with cinnamon, ginseng, lemon, mint, ice cream or whipped cream, coffee cream, *affogato*...

The acknowledged capital of Italian-style coffee is Naples. Admittedly, coffee is good, excellent, throughout Italy, but in Naples it reaches another level. Perhaps thanks to that immense, perpetually piping coffee pot called Vesuvius, or to the locals' devotion, coffee truly is a different beast there. Indeed, in Parthenope even love can be doused in coffee. The lovelorn poet **Giuseppe Capaldo**, pining for Brigida, the cantankerous cashier at the café where he worked as a waiter, dedicated the splendid song 'A tazza 'é caffè' ("The cup of coffee") to her: "You carry on, Brigida, like a cup of coffee: sugar concealed beneath, and bitter on the surface". The metaphor is clear: she is heavenly but bitter, like a coffee.

Morello Pecchioli



Captain Nemo's diet

by Roberto Branconi

Viareggio Versilia Academician

*Refined nourishment
based on fish
and seaweed.*

Jules Verne, destined for a lawyer's life, became a writer instead; some consider him one of the first science-fiction authors. In the second half of the 19th century, the French publisher **Pierre-Jules Hetzel** was hunting for an author capable of depicting the technological and geographical discoveries of the day both imaginatively and informatively. When Hetzel read the manuscript for *Five Weeks in a Balloon*, Verne immediately obtained a 20-year contract for 3 volumes a year. Our author suffered from colitis, gastroenteritis and other

physical ailments including facial paralysis, but comforted himself, we are told, with food. Having reached a certain financial stability, **the writer, who loved Breton pork rinds and black pudding**, often organised parties with abundant food and drink. By necessity, he began eating **more frugally around the age of seventy**. He informed his publisher that he survived only on **milk, eggs and vegetables** (apparently eating even six artichokes at a time).

Meals aboard the Nautilus

Let us peruse **passages of *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas*** which mention cuisine, or rather, dishes. Here the protagonists, imprisoned aboard the Nautilus, are Professor Aronnax, a naturalist; his manservant Conseil; and the Canadian harpooner Ned Land. They have been thrown from the frigate *Abraham Lincoln* when it was damaged by the gigantic 'sea creature' that it was hunting (the submarine). They are being fed for the first time; I translate the following from the unabridged original, as later editors left out passages that they considered less relevant: "In the centre of the room was a table, richly laid; Captain Nemo indicated the place that I should occupy. 'Sit and help yourself', he said. The meal consisted of **a certain number of dishes whose content the sea alone had provided**, and others whose nature and provenance were unknown to me... These unusual victuals appeared to me to be rich in phosphorus, and thus I thought that they too must be of marine origin". When Nemo declares



that he does not use terrestrial animal flesh, Aronnax points out one of the dishes, but the captain replies: "It is none other than sea turtle fillet. And here too are some dolphin livers, which you would easily mistake for pork stew". In another passage: "I did honour to the repast, composed of **rare fish** and sliced holothuridae, excellent zoophytes [today we would say 'coelenterates'], **and seaweed**, such as *Porphyra laciniata* and *Laurencia primafetida*. **Our drink was pure water, mixed with a fermented liquor extracted from the seaweed** known as *Rhodomenia palmata*".

Verne was also a precursor in his respect for the biosphere and the environment

The algae mentioned by Verne are: *Porphyra laciniata*, one of the seaweeds known as 'laver', some of which yield the 'laverbread' eaten in parts of Britain and the 'nori' surrounding *maki* rolls in Japanese cuisine. It is cultivated and harvested on both sides of the Irish Sea and on Asiatic North Pacific shores. **Their flavour has something in common with olives and oysters**, as they are high in iodine as well as iron, protein and vitamins B and C.

Laminaria japonica, the type of kelp called *konbu* in Japan, is also **rich in iodine as well as glutamic acid**, whose flavour was later identified as the fifth basic taste, umami (meaning 'savoury'). **It is used for broths and soups**, sometimes with dried legumes which the kelp softens during soaking. Among several health benefits, **it contains anticoagulant substances** which prevent the formation of blood clots.

Captain Nemo's 'liquor' comes from *Rhodomenia palmata*, namely dulce, a soft, intensely savoury red seaweed. Sailors used it since at least the 17th century as a substitute for chewing tobacco and a defence against scurvy, thanks to its vitamin C content. Like many seaweeds, it is **rich in amino acids**, in this case lysine, as well as phosphorus, iodine, iron and magnesium.



And here, sadly, **the dugong, a sirenian mammal** still alas threatened with extinction by being hunted for its flesh in Malaysia, enters the menu. Nemo proclaims it "a delicious morsel; **its meat, and it is indeed real meat, is greatly prized, and reserved throughout Malaysia for princely tables. This animal is therefore hunted mercilessly, which will drive it into oblivion**". This elicits from the manservant of Professor Aronnax an observation which seems obvious today but was not so in 1860: **"if perchance this were the last specimen, would it not be better to spare it in the interests of science?"** But the Canadian harpooner counters: "Maybe it is better to capture it in the intere-

sts of cuisine!" Its flesh is then praised as exquisite and superior if not to beef, at least to veal.

We might conclude this brief gastronomic analysis of a science-fiction adventure novel written a century and a half ago by noting that its author had two merits: his preoccupation, to a degree, with the biosphere and its **exploitation by humans**, and his respect for the environment, **identifying the sea and even its resources beyond fish, such as algae, as a source of excellent nutrition** (undoubtedly drawing inspiration from practices and customs that had already existed for centuries in northern Europe and Asia).

Roberto Branconi

