

THE REBIRTH OF TASTE:  
*Italian Culinary Identity  
in the 19<sup>th</sup> century*

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**Smith College – Spring 2009**

Today we will discuss...

- **UNIFICATION OF ITALY**
- **ALESSANDRO MANZONI**  
("I Promessi Sposi" - "The Betrothed")
- **PELLEGRINO ARTUSI**  
("La Scienza in Cucina e l'Arte di Mangiare Bene" - "Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well")

# Risorgimento (1815-1861)

- The name indicates the series of political and military events that resulted in a unified Kingdom of Italy.
- In 1861, the Italian territory did not yet include Venice (1866) and Rome (voted for annexation in 1870 and was declared capital of Italy in 1871).
- Previously, also the cities of Turin (1861-1864) and Florence (1865-1870) had served as capitals of the kingdom.

# 1815: “Italy” was divided in 7 states:

- Lombardy-Venetia \*
- Piedmont-Sardinia
- Papal States
- Naples-Sicily
- Parma \*
- Modena \*
- Tuscany \*

\* under Austrian rule





# Physical map of Italy

3/4 of the peninsula are covered by mountains





# Dietary habits in the XIX c.

- Peasants in the North: corn, rye, millet used to make bread or polenta.
- Mountains (Alps/Apennines): chestnut flour used for bread and polenta
- Center-South: inferior cereals used (barley, oats, melic, rye, millet)





- Urban Lower Classes: similar to peasants' diet but with some occasional meat (sheep or pork)
- Upper Classes: pasta, rice, white and dark meat, seasonal fruit and vegetables

- Malnutrition caused lack of vitamins and proteins and was responsible for various deadly diseases. (*pellagra*)

# The Italian language

1861	demographics	illiterates	IT-speakers
Italy	22 million	77.7%	<b>1-2%</b> <b>Dialects were spoken, each having local variants.</b> <b>There are 12 language groups in the Italian language</b>
France	37 million	47%	
England	18 million	31%	
USA	31 million	20%	

# *Flavors of Modernity* (Biasin)

- In Italy [...] the **bourgeoisie** slowly asserts and consolidates itself and [...] a certain type of **gastronomy** and a certain **literary practice** (6)
- Gastronomy is characterized by a series of contrasting dichotomies, such as the opposing values of **tradition and innovation** (5)
- When the novel deals with food [...] it superimposes its own system of signs and meaning onto the signifying system [...] of cooking (3)
- The most immediate and effective way the novel has in dealing with culinary signs is the **mimetic** one (3)

# Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873)

- His most important literary productions are in poetry, drama and the novel.
- He was one of the most authoritative voices of Italian Romanticism.
- He spoke Milanese at home and French in public.



# I Promessi Sposi (1827-1840)

- Set in Lombardy (1628-1630). It deals with the thwarting of the love of two peasants (Renzo and Lucia) by a local tyrant (Don Rodrigo).
- It was rewritten several times so as to remove all traces of non-Tuscan idiom.



## Chapter XII: BREAD

- It is a **word-symbol** in the novel.
- It is associated with the famine and the restriction on wheat rations.
- It is juxtaposed to another w-s: *wine*.
- The opposition parallels the novel's architectural disposition of **good vs evil**.
- It centers on the traditional symbolism of bread as life and salvation (physical and spiritual).

# Pellegrino Artusi (1820-1911)

- He was born in Romagna but lived half of his life in Florence.
- He was a silk merchant and an appraiser of fine dining.
- He wrote his cookbook at 71 and self-financed its publication (1891).



## ***La Scienza in Cucina e l'Arte di Mangiare Bene.*** ***Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well.***

- It's a gastronomic map based on his frequent trips around Italy.
- The recipes (790) mainly derived from the rich Tuscan provinces (Romagna and Bologna).
- There is no mention of regions like the Marches, Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria.
- The South was only featured in 3 Sicilian recipes. Sardinia was unknown.

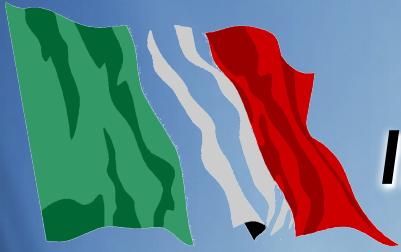


## ***La Scienza in Cucina e l'Arte di Mangiare Bene. Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well.***

- Artusi's "Italy" is incomplete and divided longitudinally by the Appennine mountains. [map](#)
- His cookbook essentially set a north-central model of Italian cuisine.
- This is evident in the choice of seasonings (no hot pepper) and in the types of fat used (oil in Tuscany; lard in Bologna; butter in Milan)

## ***How did such interregional recipe collection become a symbol of Italian cuisine?***

- 1st cookbook in Italian for the home cook.
- Others were written by French-trained cooks writing in French or on French cuisine.
- It appealed especially to the middle class.
- Its narrative and realistic style made it widely successful.
- Its gastronomic model is based on the cities, by then connected through roads/railway.
- It offered a type of cuisine that mediated between the excesses of elaborate aristocratic recipes (French cuisine) and the stark simplicity of peasants' cuisine.



## *Italian identity (in the kitchen)*



“After the unification of Italy, **it seemed logical to me that we should think about unifying the spoken language**, and yet [...] many are hostile to it, perhaps because of false pride and the ingrained habit that Italians have of speaking their regional dialect.”

“I would like to make it clear that names do not mean much in my kitchen, and I give no importance to high-sounding titles [...] **All I care is that my dishes be judged tasty.**”



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