



Università
Ca' Foscari
Venezia

Master's Degree Programme in
SCIENZE DEL LINGUAGGIO

Final Thesis

Translation proposal, analysis
and commentary on the
translation of the book *Venice:
Four Seasons of Home Cooking*
by Russell Norman.

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2020/2021

ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to provide a proposal for the translation from English into Italian of the book *Venice: Four Seasons of Home Cooking*, written by Russell Norman and published by Penguin UK in 2018. This cookbook deals with Venetian seasonal dishes and narrates stories related to the time the author spent in Venice together with some experiences he had in the Italian city on water.

The choice of the book was not accidental: this cookbook was chosen due to the fact that it does not simply show the typical dishes of Venetian cuisine, but rather it emphasises the cultural traditions and values of the region.

The thesis is divided into four chapters: in the first one, some considerations are made about the intercultural culinary relationship between Italy and UK, and their respective publishing scenes are outlined with a discussion on how the cultural environment may influence the translation process. In the second chapter, the author and the book are introduced and the source text is analysed lexically, morphosyntactically and stylistically. In the third chapter, a translation proposal of the introduction to each of the source book chapters is presented, followed by a sample of recipes from each of the chapters. The last chapter comments on the translation work carried out, analysing the lexical, morphosyntactic and stylistic problems encountered during the translation, showing how they were tackled and discussing the translation strategies and procedures that were implemented.

ABSTRACT (in italiano)

Lo scopo di questa tesi è quello di fornire una proposta di traduzione dall'inglese all'italiano del libro *Venice: Four Seasons of Home Cooking*, scritto da Russell Norman e pubblicato da Penguin UK nel 2018. Questo libro di cucina presenta molti piatti stagionali veneziani e narra storie legate al tempo che l'autore ha trascorso a Venezia e alle esperienze che egli stesso ha vissuto in questa città.

La scelta del libro non è stata casuale: questo libro di cucina è stato scelto in quanto non mostra semplicemente i piatti tipici della cucina veneziana, ma mette in risalto la cultura e le tradizioni della regione. La tesi è divisa in quattro capitoli: nel primo vengono fatte alcune considerazioni sul rapporto culinario interculturale tra Italia e Regno Unito, e sui rispettivi panorami editoriali, e si osserva come la cultura influenzi il processo di traduzione. Nel secondo capitolo vengono introdotti l'autore e il libro e si analizza il testo di partenza dal punto di vista lessicale, morfosintattico e stilistico. Nel terzo capitolo, viene presentata una proposta di traduzione dell'introduzione di tutti i capitoli e di alcune ricette. L'ultimo capitolo commenta il lavoro di traduzione realizzato, analizzando i problemi lessicali, morfosintattici e stilistici incontrati durante la traduzione, mostrando come sono stati risolti e indicando la strategia di traduzione utilizzata.

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation is to make a translation proposal of the cookbook *Venice: Four Seasons of Home Cooking*. The first idea was to translate a book about the English culinary tradition into Italian, but, after careful research and discussion with the supervisor, it was decided to opt for the translation of an Italian regional cookery book that was written in English. Although this editorial procedure is unusual, it is interesting to see how an English restaurateur interacts with the culinary traditions and customs of an Italian region. In addition, this book can be defined both as a food and a travel book, since it deals with the “culinary journey” that Russell Norman “made over the course of fourteen months” in Venice (Norman, 2018 : 15). As a matter of fact, during this period, the author explores not only the traditional dishes of Venetian home cooking, but he also interacts with locals, he visits different places in the lagoon, and fully experience the life of the city like a resident.

This book was published by Penguin in 2018 and is divided in four chapters, one for each season and they all start with a quotation about the food or about Venice. The division of the book in four chapters reflects, according to the author, the changing nature of Venetian home cooking, which depends on the seasonal ingredients that are available in the markets (*ibid.*: 15).

This dissertation is divided into four chapters. In the first chapter, the relation between food and culture will be analysed, as well as the importance of culture in the translation process. In addition, a comparison has been made between the context of publication in the UK and in Italy, and their relevance respectively for the source text and the target text. In the second chapter, the

life of the author and his book are presented, together with the analysis of the source text with regard to the lexicon, the morphosyntax and the style. In the third chapter, the translation proposal and its parallel text will be presented. For the translation, a selection of some parts of the book was made, namely: the prologue, the introduction, the beginning and the anecdote of each chapter, and four recipes, one for each season. As a matter of fact, considering that it would be more interesting, the author of this dissertation decided to focus more on the cultural aspects of the book. In the last chapter, I will comment on the translation and the main issues or interesting points encountered on three levels, morphosyntactic, lexical and stylistic.

In conclusion, this work started with an extensive research and investigation on the author and on the book, then, after several readings of the book, I identified the overall style of the book and some of the translating issues and, finally, I began translating this cookbook.

2. Translating food and culture

The present work stems from a reflection on the fact that nowadays great emphasis is placed on the cultural and social aspects of food. As a matter of fact, both in the professional and in the home culinary world there is a tendency to exalt traditional cuisine and to search for flavours with a specific cultural identity. As Delia Chiaro (2008: 196) states:

The consumption of food in Western society is no longer simply a human function carried out for reasons of physiological sustenance. Nowadays, food represents a series of complex social and psychological factors. [...] Thus, not only are we what we eat, but we have also become selective consumers of what we *think* will help us achieve a certain status or condition.

The widespread interest in foreign culinary traditions and culture resulted in an increase in the volume of translated food-related texts such as TV series cookbooks and food blogs (Chiaro, Rossato, 2015: 239). The next paragraph will reflect on some of the most thorny issues of intercultural translation and their implications in choosing the right translation approach. Before introducing the subject of culture, I would like to quote David Katan who sees culture as a “system for making sense of experience” (Katan, 2004: 3):

A basic presupposition is that the organization of experience is not “reality”, but is a simplification and distortion which changes from culture to culture. Each culture acts as a frame within which external signs or “reality” are interpreted. (*ibid.*: 3)

Since, the message, which is conveyed in a text, may be interpreted in different ways depending on the culture of the addressees, the translator should become a mediator between different cultures in order to explain “one culture’s way to another”. Nevertheless, to make an efficient translation, in this respect, s/he also needs to have a good knowledge of both the source and

the target text culture. As a matter of fact, translation can be seen as a predominantly social activity and the translator as a predominantly social being, and according to Halliday, “the equivalence¹ between two texts varies according to the context, and the translator “is a mediator between the author of the source text and the readers of the target text” (Scarpa, 2010: 94). Thus, the semantic equivalence between source text and target text corresponds to their functional equivalence in a certain context. Contextual information becomes fundamental for the success of a translation and help the translator to overcome the issues he encounters during his/her work. From this perspective, the original text and its translated version have the same importance, and the target text is considered a reformulation of the information conveyed in the source text (*ibid.*: 94). As a consequence, the translator needs to take into consideration different factors, such as: his/her own communicative intention and that of the commissioner of the translation, the expectations of the target readers, the situation of the publishing scene in the target culture, as well as the intention, the style, the writing quality and the perspective of the author of the original text. In other words, the translator should clarify the aspects of the source text, which will be eventually sacrificed in order to satisfy the requests of the commissioner and the expectations of the target audience.

[...]Translation equivalence can therefore be defined as a dynamic concept, in other words, the maximum semantic, functional and socio-cultural correspondence that can be achieved between the target and source texts within the specific communicative situation in which the translation

¹ Haas states that “two text segments are semantically equivalent at the sentence level if there is a correspondence between their ‘use’, or function” (Scarpa, 2010: 90).

activity takes place (client's instructions and target readers' expectations).
(Scarpa, 2010: 94)²

In order to achieve the communicative objectives set of a translation, in an efficient and economical way, the translator should possess an intercultural awareness that allows him/her to engage, within the target text, the experience most suitable to the situation and the topic, which lies inside the mind of the addressee.

In contrast with most of the “specialised texts”,³ which are not so much influenced by national cultures and even less by regional culture, when translating a cookbook or a single recipe, an extensive knowledge of stylistic and cultural aspects both of the source and the target language is required. Nevertheless, for a better understanding of the wider cultural context in the specialised translation, a distinction has to be made between different kinds of culture, following the “iceberg” theory, elaborated by Hall. According to this theory, which has been emphasised by David Katan (2004), there are three level of culture: technical, which is the tip of the iceberg and represents “the communication at the level of science”, formal, which is the level of traditions, rules, customs, procedures and so on, and informal, that is the culture “acquired informally and, even more importantly, out-of-awareness” (2004: 44-46). As far as *Venice: Four Seasons of Home Cooking* is concerned, it could be argued that this book works on two levels of culture, namely the technical and the formal one. As a matter of fact, many parts of the text are characterised by specific terms and language structures related to food or architecture (*radicchio, pumpkins, altar, canal, calle*), which have a

² If not otherwise stated, the translation into English of Italian original extracts have been made by the author of this dissertation.

³ Specialised text: is a text that use a special language, that is a functional variation of the natural language, depending on a field of knowledge or on a sphere of specialist activities, and it is employed by a restricted group of speakers.

denotative meaning. In other parts of the text, there are instead descriptions of typical traditions, customs and procedures of the Venetian culture, which need to be explained in order to be more easily *digestible* to someone who is not acquainted with the way of life in Venice.

Since the intention of the author of the original text seems to be promoting and preserving Venetian cultural identity, it should be the responsibility of the translator to maintain the same purpose in the target text. As a matter of fact, food can be seen as a “cultural mediation and a semiotic system that translates minority and marginalized life styles” and it is “linked to ethnic identity and differences” (Welsh, 2017: 209).

Therefore, reassessing the functional model of “functionality and loyalty” elaborated by Nord, which is a more balanced theory in comparison to the *skopostheorie* (Reiss and Vermeer), the translator will have to pay attention both to the communicative intentions of the author of the source text and to the expectations of the addressees of the translation.

Functionality + loyalty means, then, that the translator should aim at producing a functional target text which conforms to the requirements of the translation scopos fixed by the initiator, respecting, at the same time, if necessary, the legitimate interests of both the author of the original and the readers of the translation. [...] The model of “functionality + loyalty” represents a kind of intermediate position in which the source text is restored to, at least, part of its former influence [...]. In the translation process, the translator has to take account of both the source text-in-situation and the translation scopos (Nord, 1991: 40).

In order to remain “loyal” to the intentions of Norman Russell and to produce an effective translation, the translator should produce a text which presents the same meaning and the same communicative function of the original. At the same time though, in order to satisfy the expectations of the target readers

and of a possible prospective commissioner of the translation, the target text should produce in its receptors “a response similar to that of the original receptors” (Nida, 2000: 133). By choosing this path, the translator will have to operate some difficult choices, changing or even deleting certain elements of the source text, due to the requirements of the target culture.

In conclusion, the culinary text is a difficult genre to categorise and it is not easy to establish fixed criteria for its translation. This thesis will examine the main difficulties encountered by the translator in conveying the message of the source text in the target culture.

2.1 Cultural conception of food

In order to understand how the food and travel books became so popular in the Western society and their context of publication, in particular in Italy and UK, the relation between food and culture must be clarified beforehand. As Massimo Montanari (2010: XI) states:

The idea of Food can be easily linked to that of Nature, but the connection is ambiguous and fundamentally improper. In human experience, in fact, the core values of the food system are not defined in terms of "naturalness" but as the outcome and representation of cultural processes that involve the domestication, transformation and reinterpretation of Nature.⁴

According to this definition of food given by Massimo Montanari, one of the leading specialists in nutrition history, the idea of nourishment is not related to those aspects of life that belong to the “natural order”, but to those that belong to the “artificial constructs”.⁵ In other words, food is an essential part

⁴ My translation.

⁵ My translation.

of the culture, which is built and organised by mankind. (Montanari, 2010: XI)

As a matter of fact, all human actions revolving around food, namely its production, cooking and consumption, contribute to make it *culture*, since, by means of these processes, nutrition appears to be a fundamental element of the human identity and an efficient instrument of communication.

2.2 Context of publication in Italy and UK

In contrast to the increasing trend of eating fast food and of “the re-heating of ready-made products and meals” (Chiaro: 198) in the UK during the 1990s and the 2000s, in the last decade a sensational effort has been made by various media and by some individual celebrity chefs, such as Jamie Oliver, in order to promote healthier eating and cooking habits as well as the use of fresh ingredients. In this respect, many TV cookery series produced and a huge quantity of cookbooks is published every year in the UK. It is well known that Italian chefs gave their contribution in this process of promoting both the concept of slow healthy food and their homeland culture by hosting some of these TV cookery series and by writing several books about Italian or regional cuisine. Three professional cooks that are worth mentioning for having contributed to promote the image of Italy in the UK are Giorgio Locatelli, Gennaro Contaldo and Antonio Carluccio (Rossato, 2020: 52). Their “travelogue cooking shows”, *Italy Unpacked* presented by Locatelli and *Two Greedy Italians* hosted by Contaldo and Carluccio (*ibid.*: 52), were set in Italy and allowed the viewers to get a better picture of the cultural background of the Italian cuisine.

In this respect, travelogue-cooking shows are the ideal television space to go beyond one's culinary tradition in favour of an exploration of the gastronomic traditions of different, distant cultures. (*ibid.*: 53)

As a consequence, the pervasive presence of cookery-devoted products have generated a growing interest among the British audience in the Italian cultural specificity and authenticity.

This is the context in which the book chosen for this dissertation, *Venice: Four Seasons of Home Cooking* by British restaurateur Norman Russell, was published. As a matter of fact, the author of this book spent 14 months living and cooking in Venice like a real Venetian. His cookbook focuses mainly on cultural aspects, customs and traditions of Venetian citizens and their home cuisine. As Russell himself states in the book, all the recipes come from the culinary knowledge of some “ninety-year-old great-grandmothers”, “enthusiastic amateur and professional chefs” with all the “idiosyncrasies and aberrations” which are typical of the home cooking. This makes his work not only original and genuine, in the sense that it complies with the traditional cooking of the city, but it also reflects modern ideals of the Slow Food movement, which promotes the naturalness and the freshness of local ingredients.

Since *Venice: Four Seasons of Home Cooking* is a book which deals not only with home cooking, but also with Venetian art, culture, architecture and everyday habits, this dissertation will address the topic of culinary and cultural translation and the issues that a translator may have to face during this process.

Considering what has been said so far, a hypothesis of placement for the translation of this book within the Italian publishing scene has been formulated. After a research of publishing houses, which may be interested

in launching a translation into Italian of this book, Marsilio Editori has been selected on the basis of two considerations. The first is that, among its publications, it includes several cookbooks and one of these in particular, *L'arte di vivere a Venezia. Architettura e cucina* by Toto Bergamo Rossi and Lydia Fasoli (2018), is to some respects similar to the one presented in this dissertation, but it is written by Italian authors. The other reason is the history of the publishing house, which is based in Venice and is led by a Venetian family, namely De Michelis, which shows great interest in promoting its territory and culture.

Far libri, stamparli, leggerli, scriverli, raccogliarli, venderli, recensirli, nella mia vita mi sembra di non aver fatto altro, come se un'ossessiva passione mi avesse travolto appena ragazzo. Eppure da sempre mi è sembrato non privo di significato farli qua, dov'ero cresciuto, nella nostra terra, magari a Venezia.⁶

After having considered the British and the Italian context of publication, a briefly explanation of what is a cookbook and what it represents will be given.

[...]cookery books, real user manuals for the preparation of food, [...] which are artefacts containing not only practices and techniques but also indications relating to ingredients, dosages, times, temperatures, processes, procedures, finishes, all aspects that make them more similar to technical manuals than to books of culinary literature, or perhaps as mentioned earlier they are just books with a dual identity that incorporate within their pages both technical-scientific and purely narrative natures.⁷

⁶ De Michelis, C. "La Casa Editrice". <https://www.marsilioeditori.it/marsilio-editori> (last accessed 30 August 2021)

⁷ My translation from: Ferrara, C. 2019. "Manuali di cucina. Spazi narrativi e istruzioni per l'uso". <http://www.progettograficomagazine.it/manuali-di-cucina-spazi-narrativi-e-istruzioni-per-luso/> (last accessed 31 August 2021).

With regard to the book *Venice: Four Seasons of Home Cooking*, this dual nature, technical and narrative, is quite evident. As a matter of fact, the author focus on the cultural aspects of the Venetian cuisine and the recipes described in the book are always associated with a story or an anecdote. In addition, most of the pictures that are published in the book, neither portray dishes nor their making thereof; conversely, they focus on everyday scenes, showing people who live in Venice and remarkable parts of the city which are off the beaten track.

According to Barthes, connotation plays a significant role in culture-bound books, since it “is used to refer to the socio-cultural and ‘personal’ associations (ideological, emotional, etc.) of the sign” (Katan, 2004: 46). As a matter of fact, the author of the book discussed here describes the architecture, the tradition and the culture of Venice, since his main objective is to inform the British audience about the beauties of the city. Thus, this cookbook may be considered an informative text, but, in fact, Russell Norman gives a personal touch to what he writes and his love and appreciation of Venice and its citizens transpire from his words. Therefore, this book has two goals: to display traditional recipes of Venetian cuisine and its cultural background (informative function), and to express the feelings of the author toward the city, to entertain and to convince (expressive function)⁸. In conclusion, this cookbook presents a dual nature, since it describes situations, events and objects and at the same time it gives information about the author’s emotional state. It can be said that this book is both a cookbook and a travel book, since it presents a first-person narrative

⁸ According to Jakobson’s functional model of language, texts differ in “expressive”, when the communicative emphasis is on the addresser, “conative”, when it is on the addressee, “poetic”, when it is on the message, “informative”, when it is on the context, etc. (Scarpa, 2010: 12).

in all the parts of the text where the author tells stories and the use of the imperative and of technical language in relation to the preparation of dishes.

3. Analysis of the book: *Venice: Four Seasons of Home Cooking*

3.1 The author: Norman Russell

“Russell Norman is an award-winning restaurateur, writer and broadcaster. He operates several restaurants in London and beyond.”⁹

Russell Norman was born in Ealing, a borough in the western part of London, and he was brought up in Whitton, a residential area of Richmond upon Thames in southwest London. His father was a toolmaker and he was one of six brothers. After school, he attended an English course at the Sunderland Polytechnic and he put a certain distance between his family and himself. As soon as he finished his studies he went back to London and started teaching English and drama at a girls school in Stanmore. At the same time, on weekends, he worked as a waiter and as a maître d’hôtel at Joe Allen, an American restaurant in Covent Garden, and eventually end up working there full time. After several years of working as a waiter, a bartender, a maître d’hôtel in many of London’s landmark restaurants he became general manager at the Blue Print Café, a Conran restaurant, then at Circus, in Soho, and Zuma, in Knightsbridge. Eventually he received a call from Mark Hix, the chef-director of the Caprice Holdings in 2005, who offered him the position of operations director. There, he covered front-of-house¹⁰ tasks for the entire group, but what he actually loved doing was developing new businesses and he contributed to open some restaurants. After the outbreak

⁹ “Russell’s Biography”. <http://russellnorman.net/> (last accessed 21 August 2021).

¹⁰ The expression “front of house” is used by R. Cooke in her article to refer to the activities related to reception and customer service. Cooke, R. 2012. “Russell Norman: the new king of Soho dining”. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2012/jun/17/polpo-russell-norman-interview> (last accessed 21 August 2021).

of the financial crisis in 2007, which was followed by the great recession, Russell Norman decided to quit his job and make a new business plan. He convinced his best friend, Richard Beatty, to invest in this idea and together they opened their first restaurant Polpo in 2009. He designed Polpo himself and since he turned out to be very good at designing, he did that also for his other restaurants. As reported by Rachel Cooke in her article *Russell Norman: the new king of Soho dining* (*The Guardian*, June 17th, 2012)¹¹, Russell Norman has “an eye for detail” and “he likes quirky buildings, with features that must be discovered. He could never open in some glass box shopping centre”. Nonetheless, it appears that both for his taste in design and for his cuisine he took inspiration from Venice. As a matter of fact, in the same article he says:

“I went to Venice as a student. Then I went back as a hopelessly romantic Englishman, a man who loved the architecture and the decrepitude... Byron, Mahler and Thomas Mann. Then I met my wife [...], and we had our honeymoon there.” It was only then that he started thinking about its cooking. “I realised that, away from all the tourists, it was a living, breathing city. I also noticed that the locals don’t really eat in restaurants; they spend most of the day gossiping in wine bars. I thought: would this work in London?”¹²

Starting from Polpo, which was born as a reinvention of the Venetian *bacaro* and where the menu consisted of *cicchetti*, all of his restaurants are inspired by Venetian culture.

His first cookery book *POLPO – A Venetian Cookbook (of Sorts)* was published by Bloomsbury and was voted Waterstones Book of the Year in

¹¹ Cooke, R. 2012. “Russell Norman: the new king of Soho dining” (last accessed 21 August 2021).

¹² *Ibidem*. (last accessed 21 August 2021).

2012. In 2014, he presented *The Restaurant Man*, a prime-time documentary consisting of 6 episodes for BBC2. A year later, his second book *SPUNTINO: Comfort Food (New York Style)* was published by Bloomsbury and then it won the 2016 Guild of Food Writers Award for best food and travel book. In 2018, after having spent more than a year living and cooking like a Venetian, his book *Venice: Four seasons of Home cooking* was published by Penguin. Russell Norman is also a copy editor for Esquire Magazine and he writes a monthly column named “The Accidental Cook”.

At present, Russell Norman lives in an ancient farmhouse in Kent with his wife and their two daughters¹³, and he is in the process of opening a new restaurant in London: Trattoria Brutto.

3.2 The book: “*Venice: Four Seasons of Home Cooking*”

This book charts the culinary journey I made over the course of fourteen months in that scruffy apartment in Giardini. (Norman, 2018: 15)

After the great success of the book *POLPO – A Venetian Cookbook (of Sorts)*, Russell Norman decided to embark on an adventure for a period of fourteen months in the city that inspired him to open his first restaurant “Polpo” which is reminiscent of a Venetian *bacaro*. It was this long journey that allowed Norman to immerse himself “in the authentic recipes and culinary traditions of Venice and the Veneto”¹⁴ and eventually to write this book. Russell Norman decided to settle in the quiet neighbourhood of

¹³ “Home Truths: Restaurateur Russell Norman”. <https://thehomepage.co.uk/home-truths-russell-norman/> (last accessed 28 August 2021).

¹⁴ https://www.amazon.com/Venice-Four-Seasons-Home-Cooking/dp/0847863182?language=en_US (last accessed 6 September 2021).

Giardini, far from the tourist trail, in order to get acquainted with true Venetians and to experience their daily life and home cooking. As previously mentioned, the book *Venice: Four Seasons of Home Cooking* is both a cookbook and a travel book that presents not only the traditional dishes of the Venetian cuisine, but also its culture and customs. In addition, this cookbook “affords us a rare and intimate glimpse into the life of the city, its hidden architectural gems, its secrets places, the embedded history, the colour and vitality of daily life, and the food merchants and growers who make Venice so surprisingly vibrant.”¹⁵

As mentioned above, Russell Norman spent more than a year in Venice in order to fully experience all the products and ingredients that each season has to offer. For this reason, the author decided to divide the book into four main chapters, one for every season, in which he presented a series of recipes, from starters to desserts, using seasonal and fresh ingredients. In this cookbook, there are more than one hundred and twenty recipes, most of which come from the Venetian culinary tradition, although a few originated from other regions of Italy. In addition, many recipes are combined with pictures which capture either the making of a dish or the plating, how food is arranged on a plate to be served. In the final part of the book, there is a larder containing several basic preparations that, according to the author, anyone should know how to make. In that final section, there is also a list of the favourite restaurants, bars and shops, selected by Russell Norman and in his acknowledgements, he shows all his love for Venice and its people. Eventually, he points out some of the issues, which concern the preservation of the city, such as “rising sea levels, managing tourism, reversing the

¹⁵https://books.google.it/books/about/Venice.html?id=KdQ3DwAAQBAJ&source=kp_book_description&redir_esc=y (last accessed 6 September 2021)

population decline and banning multi-storey cruise ships”. (Norman, 2018: 319)

3.3 Analysis of the source text

The translator is first and foremost a reader, and indeed a very special reader, whose "in-depth" reading - at once global and detailed - can be effectively called "arch-reading". For special languages, the translation-oriented reading of the text should consist of two stages: a first "global" reading, aimed at defining the purpose, the textual typology and the main structure of the source text, and an "intensive" reading, totally translation-oriented, aimed at identifying the problematic issues in the source text and resolving them. (Scarpa, 2010: 126-127)

Having tried to identify, in the first chapter of this thesis, the purpose and the text typology of the source text, this section will focus on a detailed analysis thereof. This phase of analysis of the source text is a fundamental part of the translation process, since it is necessary to have a thorough knowledge of the text in order to obtain an efficient translation for the target reader. Hereunder, the analysis of the original text will be conducted on three different levels: lexical, morphosyntactic and stylistic.

3.3.1 Lexical analysis

The first lexical aspect which should be considered is the dominance of the culinary lexicon and of Venetian dialect terms used by the author. Hereunder, two separate lists of the main words identified respectively in the two areas of specialized language pertaining to cookery and regional or dialect terms will be reported:

1) Cookery lexicon:

- *acidulated water*: “Water to which a small quantity of an edible acid such as lemon juice or vinegar has been added, used to prevent discoloration of sliced or peeled fruit or vegetables”¹⁶, expression used by the author when he describes the extraction process of the heart of the artichokes.
- *batch*: word that indicates a quantity or a consignment of goods produced at one time.
- *batter*: can be translated into Italian as *pastella*, which is a mixture of flour, egg, milk, water, and is used for coating food before frying.
- *brown*: to cook something until it becomes brown
- *casserole*: can be both a large covered dish used for cooking food and a stew slowly cooked in the oven.
- *chopped*: usually, in a recipe, indicates the reduction of an ingredient into small pieces (e.g. *1 clove of garlic, chopped*; *2 celery stalks, chopped...*)
- *enoteca*: Italian word for a wine shop, where people can bring their empty bottles and have them filled.
- *gutted*: it means to remove the intestines and other internal organs from a fish or an animal before cooking it. It can be translated into Italian as “eviscerare”.
- *hogget*: “refers to animals between 1-2 years old, and is a delicious combination of tender lamb and full-flavoured mutton”¹⁷

¹⁶ https://www.lexico.com/definition/acidulated_water (last accessed 13 September 2021).

¹⁷ <https://www.salterandking.co.uk/blogs/news/lamb-hogget-or-mutton> (last accessed 10 September 2021).

- *innards*: organs inside the body of an animal or a person; sometimes the synonym *entrails* is also used.
- *ladleful*: this term derives from the combination of the words *ladle* and *full*. It is a unit of measure in the culinary world that indicates the amount that fills a ladle.
- *pat dry*: it can be translated into Italian as “asciugare tamponando”, which means to dry the food not by rubbing it, but by patting it with a paper towel.
- *pinch*: it refers to spices (e.g. *a pinch of salt...*) and it indicates as much of something as can be taken up between the finger and the thumb.
- *sauté*: it means to fry quickly in a pan containing a small quantity of butter or oil, usually over a medium-high heat.
- *scant twist*: it can be translated into Italian as *una macinata* and it refers to the kitchen tool known as grinder, which is used to grind spices such as pepper, coarse salt,...
- *seasoning*: salt, herbs or spices used on food in order to enhance the flavour; frequently this word is preceded by the verb *adjust*.
- *simmer*: it means to cook just below the boiling point, and it can be translated into Italian as “far sobbollire”. This technique is usually employed with dishes that requires long cooking times, such as stew, stocks, soups, and so on.
- *sizzle*: it refers to the hissing sound made by food when frying or cooking at a high temperature.
- *sprinkle*: it means to scatter or pour small drops or particles of a substance over an object or a surface, and it can be translated into Italian as “cospargere” or “spolverare”.

- *Spritz*: it literally means to “squirt or spray a liquid at or on to something in quick, short bursts”¹⁸. In this case, it refers to the popular Venetian drink based on Aperol, Prosecco and soda.
- *stir*: it means to mix an ingredient into a liquid or other substance with a continuous and circular movement of a spoon, or other implement.
- *Vignole*: it is a vegetable soup, typical of the regions of Lazio and Umbria, based on peas, artichokes and chard.
- *zingy*: it derives from the word *zing*, which means energy, enthusiasm or liveliness. Used in a cooking context it can mean spicy, vibrant or flavourful.

2) Venetian dialect lexicon:

- *batellina*: “it is an antique wooden boat in which the rider stands, facing forwards, with two long oars practicing the local rowing technique known as the *voga*”. (Norman, 2018: 104)
- *bovoletti*: these are small land snails, which the Venetians use to prepare a dish.
- *campo*: it is the equivalent of a square, usually with a well at the centre, and it can be translated into English as “field”.
- *Castradina*: it is a traditional dish, eaten almost exclusively on 21 November for the festival of Maria della Salute, and it is made with castrated lamb.
- *folpo*: it is the Venetian word for octopus.
- *fondamenta*: it is the stretch of street bordering a canal.

¹⁸ <https://www.lexico.com/definition/spritz> (last accessed 10 September 2021)

- *fondo*: it is the word used by Venetians to indicate the heart of an artichoke, which is obtained through a long process of cleaning of this vegetable.
- *fritole*: this is the name of the Venetian doughnuts, usually made during the winter season.
- *in saor*: it refers to the recipe used by Venetians as a dressing for the soles, and it is based on three ingredients: onion, raisin and pine nut.
- *latteria*: it can be translated into English as “dairy”.
- *maségni*: these are the Istrian stone paving slabs that make up most of the streets of Venice.
- *moeche*: literally it means “soft”, but in Venice this word indicates the soft-shell crabs caught during the moult of the shell.
- *nizioléti*: these are the traditional Venetian signs with black letters on a large white rectangle.
- *ombra*: it is the word used by Venetians to indicate a small glass of wine.
- *osteria*: it is an Italian restaurant, usually a simple or inexpensive one that presents a menu based on the regional or local cuisine.
- *rio terra*: it is a canal that has been paved over.
- *risi e bisi*: in English it literally means “rice and peas. This is a famous Venetian recipe of a risotto made with peas and pancetta.
- *traghetto*: it is a manually oared ferry used by Venetians to cross the Grand Canal.

In the analysis of the lexicon used by Russell Norman in this book, it is interesting to see how frequently he reports the Venetian terms of dishes, ingredients and customs. This is an indicator of his intentions of promoting the cultural specificity of Venice and its people and of explaining that to the English audience. As a matter of fact, even though there is not a glossary of the Venetian dialect terms within the book, most of the times the author gives a short definition for those words, and in doing so, he tries to bring the British closer to the Venetian culture.

3.3.2 Morphosyntactic analysis

As far as the morphosyntactic aspect of the source text is concerned, it is appropriate to make a starting consideration: it is common knowledge that the English language is characterized by simple syntactic structures. Unlike Italian, which is based on complex syntactic structure and of very long sentences, English prefers the use of rather simple morphosyntactic structures (with the exception of some specific cases). As Decuypère states:

In English the phrase is constructed more rigidly than in Italian, the sentence is structured more paratactically than hypotactically, and these are conventions in which the two languages differ, so it is good to intervene here. The use of complex sentences with numerous subordinate clauses is not acceptable in English but it can be functional. (Decuypère, 2002: 37)

However, Decuypère (*Ibid.*) also specifies that the English sentence is constructed more rigidly than the Italian one; this is due to the fact that the English language has considerable structural constraints.

It is also important to consider that this cookbook, because of the way it has been conceived and the textual genre it belongs to, aims to communicate with its readers in a rather immediate way. It follows that paratactic structures prevail over hypotactic structures, in other words sentences proceed by coordination rather than subordination. There are, however, a few examples of subordinate sentences, mainly causal, temporal and final. It is worth mentioning, in this regard, the use of a very important verbal mode, the gerund, which is often used in English to create links of subordination with sentences preceding it. Some examples of different types of non-finite *ing*-clauses are listed hereunder:

- “lights from boats reflected on the surface of the lagoon, the sound of water *lapping* on the ‘fondamenta’”;
- “Not *being* a professional chef myself, I have always had a preference for home cooking, *holding* gingham-aproned grandmothers in far higher esteem than white-jacketed pros”;
- “After *spending* an hour or two with Michel, I went for a very long walk”;
- “I follow them to the markets, *ambushing* them with questions in my pidgin Italian”.

In English, the gerund is also often employed to introduce relative sentences, obviously, in an implicit form. A few examples:

- “the markets are at that beguiling threshold between summer and autumn, *meaning* you can still get wonderful tomatoes but you also see the first radicchio and pumpkins *coming* from Chioggia and rural Veneto”;
- “The vineyards gave way to fields of purple artichokes, allotments *growing* zucchini, peas, asparagus, chard”;

- “There is a particularly beautiful example outside the Academia Gallery, and a rather austere one in Campo Sta Maria Formosa *displaying* an unambiguous message for any tourists who are even thinking about asking for directions”;
- “neighbours *gossiping* and *catching up*, *complaining* and *remonstrating*”;
- “ [...] find yourself in a silent, deserted courtyard, bedsheets *flapping* from a washing line and a stray cat *rubbing* against your leg”.

Regarding the use of verb tenses, the simple present and simple past prevail in this cookbook. As a matter of fact, the present simple is widely employed, whether for instructions given in a recipe or as a historical present. In addition, the book mainly talks about what happened in the past, during the fourteen months of the author’s stay in Venice, so the simple past is also employed. The two verb tenses, however, have very different uses in English. Simple past refers to actions which started in the past, had a certain duration and also ended in the past; the present simple, on the other hand, may refer to actions which happen habitually, or to a single completed action, as in recounting the events of a story. In any case, the final chapter will show how the two verbal tenses have been translated in the target text. Some examples of the present simple used as historical present will be given hereunder:

- “I *spend* much of my time in search of the simple, and my day *will* usually *begin* with thoughts of food”;
- “A short trip on the number 13 vaporetto takes me over the most peaceful part of the lagoon to the island of Sant’Erasmus”;

- “It’s one of the reasons I choose to live at the Giardini end of Castello”.

The last morphosyntactic aspect I would like to mention in this analysis is punctuation. It is interesting to observe the very different use of punctuation by the author depending on its collocation inside the book. Although, in the narrative and descriptive parts of the book, sentences tend to be long and punctuation generally follows the "standard" rules of the English language, within the recipes and in the parts of the book where the author lists ingredients, shops, actions, and so on, there is a wider use of punctuation. A few examples:

- “I follow them to the markets, ambushing them with questions in my pidgin Italian (‘Mi scusi, signora, cosa farai con questi ingredienti?’)”, here the quotation marks respects the English rule that requires the single quote.
- “I have never been able to go to the markets in the morning, engage with the stallholders, choose the inkiest cuttlefish or the plumpest peaches, the brightest sardines or the purplest artichokes, and march home to prepare the evening meal.”
- “Leave to sizzle for another 4 minutes. Now add the wine and capers, cover, and simmer for a further 4 minutes, until the fish is cooked through. You can check by piercing the flesh at the thickest part of the body. The eyes will have turned white, too.” This excess of punctuation and the prevalence of paratactic structures are significant for the sequentiality of the instructions given in the recipes.

3.3.3 Stylistic analysis

The author of a cookery book is to all intents and purposes a writer. After all, as mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the style of this type of book is a rather personal one. Due to this particular characteristic of this cookbook and because of the "hybrid" genre that this textual category represents, we can say with certainty that the type of text is "open" (Eco, 1997: 33-34). According to the Italian semiotician Umberto Eco, a text can be defined as open when there are endless possibilities of interpretation. The text is "open" when the author decides to what extent he needs to control the cooperation of the reader, where this cooperation should be aroused, where it should be directed, where it should turn into a free interpretative adventure (*ibid.*: 34).

As a matter of fact, the style that characterises this book is at times informative, at times expressive and at times persuasive. The register and tone, however, remain predominantly informal, with traits of colloquial language. The author is direct and often ironic. In some cases, the author addresses the reader directly, by using the pronoun "you" and there is a first-person narrator, which tells his stories and experiences in the city of Venice. The informal register is also marked by the presence of numerous idioms (including many phrasal verbs), while irony is especially evident in the use of certain rhetorical figures. The fourth chapter of this dissertation will analyse these aspects more in depth and translation strategies will be illustrated and discussed.

It must be said that the author is really accurate when he quotes words from Italian and Venetian dialect, but one mistake has been detected in reporting

the name of “Campo Santa Maria Formosa”, that Russell Norman reported as “Campo Sta Maria Formosa” (Norman 2018: 37). This is probably a typing error or an oversight, since in the English language Sainte is some time shortened as *Ste*.

The last stylistic aspect I would like to examine in this analysis is the great amount of adjectives and other features which are typical of descriptive language in travelbooks, which represent the point of view of the author and give a personal touch to the book. Here are a few examples of adjectives:

- “My hotel of choice for several years has been a *small, humble* and *dilapidated* 'pensione', [...]. It is *beautiful* in the manner of so much of Venice, having a *faded* elegance and an *easy* charm that has certainly helped me to feel at one with my surroundings.”;
- “I have never been able to go to the markets in the morning, engage with the stallholders, choose the *inkiest* cuttlefish or the *plumpest* peaches, the *brightest* sardines or the *purplest* artichokes, [...]”, it is interesting to see how the author emphasize the beauty of the Venetian market by using the absolute superlative with all the words related to the products, even in an erroneous way with the colour *purple*;
- “A short trip on the number 13 vaporetto takes me over the *most peaceful* part of the lagoon to the island of Sant’Erasmus, a place of *surprising calm* and *tranquillity*. It is a *geographical* miracle – a *long, narrow* stretch of land with the Adriatic along one flank and the *brackish* lagoon on the other.”;

- “The streets are *impassable* because of the *sheer* quantity of tourists, [...]. In addition, the heat is *stifling* and the air is *heavy* and *thick* with humidity and mosquitoes.”;
- “Winter also brings *bright* days, when the air is *cold* and *crisp* and the skies *wide* and *blue*. Winter light seems *sharper*, the low angle of the sun means it bounces off pale terracotta walls and floods squares and courtyards with a *bright, pink* glow. The reflection of the sun on the lagoon creates a remarkable sheen with a *milky* shimmer”.

Among the features that characterize the descriptive language in travelbooks, I would like to mention figures of speech and idiomatic expressions. Some examples will be given below:

- “Additionally, knowing what I did about the way Venetians *celebrate* seasonal ingredients and the dramatically changing nature of the markets, month to month”; in this case there is a metaphor that express how solemnly Venetians treat the seasonal ingredients;
- “And how apt that *the birthplace of Antonio Vivaldi* should also be the scene for my own Quattro Stagioni”; this is a metonymy that the author uses to refer to the city of Venice;
- “The shop is a tiny *time capsule*”; this expression refers to an old Venetian shop, and the author of the book feels like going back in time when he goes there;
- “I bought two kilos *on the spot*”; this expression literally means “in that place”, but the meaning in this case is “immediately” or “at that moment”.

The translation proposal will be presented hereunder, together with the parallel text.

4. Translation proposal

4.1 Source text: *Venice: Four Seasons of Home Cooking*

VENICE: FOUR SEASONS OF HOME COOKING

PROLOGUE

Venice, August 1986

It is late. I am sitting with friends outside a restaurant in Giardini, a residential neighbourhood on the eastern edge of Venice. The night sky still glows pink from the dying day, and swifts wheel and chirp in the warm air above us.

I catch the waiter's eye and hold up our empty wine jug. I really don't want this night to end. It is my last day in the city. I have spent three weeks here and tomorrow I must travel back to England.

Venice bewitches. Like many before me, I have been seduced by its art, architecture, poetry and beauty. But there is something else. As I pack my bags and prepare to catch the waterbus to the train station, I sense unfinished business: it's the neighbourhood that's got me, not the city.

Travelling along the Grand Canal, I know I will be back. But what I don't realize is that, despite many trips to Venice over the coming decades, it will take me thirty years to return to Giardini.

INTRODUCTION

One of the great pleasures of foreign travel is exploring food markets, ogling butchers' windows, marvelling at the variety of ingredients and produce. One of the great frustrations, however, is not being able to buy it all, take it home and cook. Hotels, as convenient and pleasurable as they are, do not have ensuite kitchens, so my natural instincts as an amateur chef and jobbing restaurateur are continually thwarted.

Nowhere have I felt this more keenly than in Venice. My connection with the city is both personal and professional, and in recent years the frequency of my visits has increased. This has only served to emphasize the frustration. My hotel of choice for several years has been a small, humble and dilapidated *pensione*, a guesthouse on the southern tip of Dorsoduro, perched on the edge of the Giudecca Canal. It is beautiful in the manner of so much of Venice, having a faded elegance and an easy charm that has certainly helped me to feel at one with my surroundings. But, apart from eating in restaurants and, when I am particularly fortunate, in friends' houses, my culinary connectedness has faltered. I have only ever been able to eat in the city like a tourist or as a house-guest. I have never been able to go to the markets in the morning, engage with the stallholders, choose the inkiest cuttlefish or the plumpest peaches, the brightest sardines or the purplest artichokes, and march home to prepare the evening meal. In other words, I've never been able to cook like a Venetian.

A couple of years ago I found myself back in the residential neighbourhood of Giardini. It was one of those glorious evenings that only Venice can deliver: expansive bruised skies with silhouetted bell towers on the horizon, lights from boats reflected on the surface of the lagoon, the sound of water

lapping on the *fondamenta*. I was transported back thirty years and was overcome with a disorientating sense of déjà vu.

Later, over a simple supper of risotto in a Venetian friend's kitchen, I had a bit of an epiphany. What would it be like to live and write in one of the most visited cities in the world and experience it like a local? Go to the same markets, buy the same cuts of meat, choose the same fish and seafood, carry home the same vegetables, and effectively immerse oneself in the gastronomic heart of one of the least known and most misunderstood food cultures in Europe? Additionally, knowing what I did about the way Venetians celebrate seasonal ingredients and the dramatically changing nature of the markets, month to month, I reckoned that if I were to take on the challenge I would need to write about buying, preparing, cooking and eating *in real time*, over the course of four seasons, in a real Venetian kitchen.

The location of this realization was significant. Much has been written about those Venetian classics found in the city's handful of excellent restaurants (and even in many of the poor ones, too) and in the growing number of cookery books that champion the food of the region. Fewer column inches, however, have been devoted to the genuine *home cooking* of Venice, the sort I was experiencing that evening in Giardini.

The difference between home cooking and restaurant food is often just a question of attitude. The former is heartfelt and generous, born of love, warmth, tradition and a sense of abundance. The latter counts precision, consistency and expertise among its virtues. Not being a professional chef myself, I have always had a preference for home cooking, holding gingham-aproned grandmothers in far higher esteem than white-jacketed pros. Along with the honesty you find in a domestic kitchen, you will often discover a startling absence of written recipes, many existing only in the memory of the

home cook. It is this oral tradition, with family favourites passed down verbally from generation to generation, that I hoped would form the basis of my exploration, too.

So, my adventure begins in October, a beautiful month in Venice when the days can still be as warm as toast and the markets are at that beguiling threshold between summer and autumn, meaning you can still get wonderful tomatoes but you also see the first radicchio and pumpkins coming from Chioggia and rural Veneto. I have rented a small apartment in a narrow street that forms part of the residential grid just north of the gardens at Giardini. There is a communal altar in the tiny open courtyard where brightly painted mannequins of Jesus Christ and the Virgin keep an eye on the close-knit community. Candles are lit in the evenings and sometimes my new neighbours come out of their houses and sing songs of thanks and praise.

The apartment is humble and sparsely furnished but has a glorious terrazzo floor, bare brick walls in the kitchen and a balcony wide enough to take a single chair. What more could I ask for? As long as I have an outside spot to sit in the sun and shell fresh peas, I know I will be happy. Importantly, I am very close to Via Garibaldi, the main shopping street of the neighbourhood. In my immediate vicinity, there are three greengrocers (one of whom trades from a floating barge), three butchers, two fishmongers, a bakery, an *enoteca* and a domestic hardware store specializing in plastic buckets, pegs and discounted shampoo. Further afield are a small supermarket, a couple of spritz bars and the local communist club.

Via Garibaldi is simply beautiful. It runs north-east to south-west, so from mid-morning to late afternoon the sun has nowhere to go other than directly along its tall terraced sides and across the chambered Istrian paving stones. It is a *rio terra*, in other words, a canal that has been paved over. You can

still see the shape of the original waterway and only a small leap of imagination is required to picture it as it once was, gondolas sailing past, sunlight glinting.

As far as the traders and stallholders are concerned, I quickly identify my allies. For fish you go to Delfino, located close to where the Sant'Anna Canal starts. It's a lively place with a permanent backdrop of reggae music playing on a tinny beatbox, but the seafood is good. Maurizio and Nicola are the unlikeliest fishmongers and you get a good dose of banter with everything you buy. For fruit and vegetables it's Stefano, in Campiello Caboto. He employs a couple of cheeky chaps who flirt outrageously with the (mostly) elderly female clientele. Not only do they get away with it but, judging by the crowds, they are as popular as the *piselli* and *puntarelle*. The *enoteca*, like many across the city, simply fills your empty plastic water bottles with the wine of your choice for a few euros. Stefania, a local character with a big voice, runs the place with the efficiency of a sergeant-major. And for meat, I head back to the *macelleria* on the corner of Calle de le Ancore. It is the butcher's shop with the longest queues – always an encouraging sign. One could argue that Italian cooking is more about good shopping than good technique. Of course, you need to have a certain level of competence in the kitchen, but if the ingredients are excellent to start with, then you have to do less to them.

With my base established and my kitchen kitted out with only the most rudimentary equipment, I am able to begin the serious business of stalking my neighbours. I follow them to the markets, ambushing them with questions in my pidgin Italian ('Mi scusi, signora, cosa farai con questi ingredienti?'), and then I go home to make the dish myself. It is a particularly rewarding way to get to know a region's food culture and its traditions. What I also

discover, of course, as well as the fastidious seasonal discipline of these home cooks, is that they borrow freely from other parts of Italy. Dishes from Puglia, Sicily, Tuscany, Lombardy and Emilia-Romagna appear with frequency and with no sense of disloyalty nor any less pride. In fact, it transpires that some locals believe recipes made famous in other regions were originally stolen from Venice in the first place. (Mrs Povinelli in particular insists that the meat *ragù* the world associates so closely with Bologna was ripped off from the ancient Venetian recipe for *secoe*.)

This book charts the culinary journey I made over the course of fourteen months in that scruffy apartment in Giardini. Some of the recipes are traditional, some put together from fragmented conversations with ninety-year-old-grandmothers, some given to me by professional Venetian chefs whom I have befriended, others from enthusiastic amateurs who, once they got wind of my project, would collar me and tell me I absolutely *must* include their mother's recipe for *this* or their grandfather's version of *that*. A few of the dishes in these pages are regional impostors, and I make no excuse for that. This is home cooking, with all the idiosyncrasies and aberrations that come with it. Venice has, over the centuries, occupied and been occupied, and the influences of other regions on its cuisine are there to see and taste at every turn.

There was, for me, a compelling reason to follow the seasons and to divide the recipes into those four categories. They are so distinct, and the markets so different at the four meteorological junctions of the year, that the food on family tables reflect that. Since I was living, shopping, cooking and writing in real time, it seemed only sensible to shape the book in real time, too. And how apt that the birthplace of Antonio Vivaldi should also be the scene for my own *Quattro Stagioni*.

But, above all else, I believe this collection is a snapshot of the food cooked and eaten by real Venetians, a population that is dwindling at a rate of 1,000 inhabitants a year. No one really knows the true consequences for Venice if this decline continues, but as long as those remaining residents continue to cook and eat with such passion and sense of pride, there is a small part of the unique character and culture of the city that will always survive.

SPRING

'The way to happiness is to think no further ahead than lunch or dinner.'

Stephen Bayley (after Sydney Smith)

I spend much of my time in search of the simple, and my day will usually begin with thoughts of food. I am often drawn to the market, as if in the embrace of a powerful tractor beam, by the promise of a new ingredient, or the delivery of a particularly splendid batch of some familiar ones.

To say that Italian cooking starts with the ingredient would be a significant under-statement. Italian cooking *is* the ingredient. From Sicily in the hot, dry south to Alto Adige in the verdant, temperate north, the food philosophy is the same: less is more. I find regional differences are not so much about technique in the kitchen, but rather to do with variations in what's available. Generally speaking, it is the peasant tradition of simplicity that pervades and persists. And necessity tends to be mother of invention with many of Italy's iconic dishes: panzanella, the vibrant Tuscan salad, is a thrillingly simple and delicious way to deal with a glut of tomatoes and a stash of stale bread.

Vignole, from Lazio and Umbria, is a riot of springtime greenery, the only sensible way to cope with the abundance of peas, artichokes and chard at that time of year.

Spring takes me out of the house earlier every day and on a much more frequent basis. It's a cliché, I know, but the sense of new life and rebirth is visible everywhere, even in a city made of marble and stone. But often I crave more bucolic surroundings, and as lovely as the generous grassy square in front of the church of San Pietro di Castello is, my English sensibilities get the better of me and I start planning my first visit of the year to my favourite Venetian island.

A short trip on the number 13 vaporetto takes me over the most peaceful part of the lagoon to the island of Sant'Erasmus, a place of surprising calm and tranquillity. It is a geographical miracle – a long, narrow stretch of land with the Adriatic along one flank and the brackish lagoon on the other. How anything survives here is a wonder, yet much of the greengrocery you find in Rialto Market and on the fruit and veg barges across the city comes from the island. Furthermore, the fruit produce grown in its farms and gardens is revered above anything from other areas of Italy. This is partly a matter of local pride and partly because the quality is superb.

I remember the first time I visited. I was going to see Michel Thoulouze, a French ex-pat who bought a house and land on Sant'Erasmus several decades ago and decided to plant Malvasia and Vermentino vines. He now makes one of the only wines produced entirely in the lagoon. He also keeps Padovana chickens, those peculiar poultry with heads like elaborate feather dusters. After spending an hour or two with Michel, I went for a very long walk. The vineyards gave way to fields of purple artichokes, allotments growing

zucchini, peas, asparagus, chard. The sense of lush fertility is quite remarkable.

As I sailed back to Venice on an almost empty vaporetto, I did so with a renewed sense of admiration for a city that has evolved with a substantial degree of self-sufficiency, using available resources in a very similar manner to the kitchen philosophy of its home cooks.

While Sant'Erasmus is characterized by silence and serenity, Rialto Market could not be more different. It is raucous, brash, frenetic and noisy. But it is a thrilling place that makes you feel you are in the beating cultural and culinary heart of the city. On busy mornings, it really can be difficult to move, and even when you are able to dodge the tourists, traders and shoppers, you'll not get up a pace much faster than the *bovoletti* snails that crawl out of the overflowing buckets near the fish stalls.

I experienced quite a commotion one early spring day, 8 March, as it happens, when the first soft-shell crabs of the season arrived. With such a small window of opportunity to catch these *moeche* as they are moulting, they are rare and eye-wateringly expensive. But I feel just as much excitement when I spot a newcomer of any ilk. I remember seeing *telline* clams for the first time, tiny smooth bivalves no bigger than your fingernail. I bought two kilos on the spot without much of an idea what I was going to do with them. I needn't have worried. They were perfect briefly sautéed with olive oil, salt, garlic and chopped parsley.

I love the sideshows around the market, too. There's big Tomas, a broad-shouldered fellow who spends hours every day cutting the leaves from artichokes, trimming the stalk back and carving out the heart, or *fondo*, before throwing it into a huge tub of acidulated water with the hundreds of

others. These are then sold at a premium, all the hard work done for you. And there's the silent, brooding chap who finds shade to set up his table where he decapitates, disembowels and butterflies one tiny sardine after another, using only his thumbnails, neatly laying them out on a sheet in front of him, his hands and forearms drenched in blood up to the elbow. These little spatchcocked fish are known as sardine 'tongues' and they are delicious in a light batter, swiftly fried (recipe on page 22).

Spring is the season when Venice leaps out of the dark, cold months of January and February and seems to say, 'Life is here, let's rejoice'. That sense of celebration and rebirth is nowhere more evident than in the markets, in the ingredients, in recipes and in the city's home cooking.

Shopping – a morning ritual

Venice's bells are a reassuring daily soundtrack, their surprising harmonics often rooting me to the spot as I try to pick out the musical notes. One warm April day a few years ago, I went for a long walk with a digital tuning fork and compiled a short catalogue of churches and their bells. (I try to make my own fun.) After a cup of coffee from my battered, stove-top Bialetti, I set out to Via Garibaldi, my local shopping street.

Most residents pull standard-issue wheeled shopping baskets behind them when they shop. They are perfect for navigating narrow alleyways and small bridges and easily hold all the groceries needed for a day's cooking for a large family. Mine is dark red with black wheels and a brown plastic handle, and I'm very fond of it.

The first thing I do is head for Alla Rampa for my second coffee of the day. I am always bemused by the unwritten rules and the way locals do things one way while tourists do them another. One should always drink coffee standing '*al banco*' – at the bar. Only tourists sit. Never order a milky coffee, and certainly not after 12 noon. If you ask for a 'latte' you'll get a glass of milk. *Caffè macchiato* is the normal form, maybe with a little biscuit or, in January and February, *fritole* – Venetian doughnuts.

Just outside Alla Rampa is the greengrocer's barge, a neighbourhood meeting point as well as the place you buy your vegetables. (I usually head 100 metres to Campiello Caboto and buy my produce from Stefano Tommasi, but the gossip is better at the barge.) It is here that I will often hold back and look at what the locals are buying before I make up my mind. It's an excellent tactic and a great way to learn from those genuine home cooks.

I have, on many occasions, followed a particular neighbour to see exactly what she buys and then quizzed her about what she's going to make. This way I have made friends with Mrs Povinelli and Mrs Scarpa, both inspirational home cooks with a wide and varied repertoire of dishes from Venice, the Veneto and beyond.

After visiting the fishmonger and the butcher, there is only time to perhaps buy a newspaper before getting home to refrigerate the morning's hoard.

The newsagent is an important social hub, too. In other parts of Venice you will still find the glorious nineteenth-century circular steel and zinc booths selling magazines, newspaper and maps for tourists. (There is a particularly beautiful example outside the Academia Gallery, and a rather austere one in Campo Sta Maria Formosa displaying an unambiguous message for any tourists who are even thinking about asking for directions – see page 6.)

Here on Via Garibaldi it's the tobacconist and lotto shop that serve a

similar purpose, and you will often witness a morning version of the *passaggiata* – neighbours gossiping and catching up, complaining and remonstrating – all part of the Venetian way.

VENETIAN RICE and PEAS

For 4

The morning of 25 April begins with mass at the Basilica. It is the beginning of a day of celebrations to honour the city's patron saint, St Mark. The traditional gondola race, the *regata di traghetti*, starts very close to my apartment and I walk along the embankment, following it to the Doge's Palace. This represents a very rare trip into the historic centre for me, but it is a special day in the Venetian calendar. It also coincides with the Festa del Bocolo (Festival of the Blooming Rose), during which gentlemen offer a single red rose to their wives, lovers or girlfriends to commemorate the time a hapless soldier named Tancredi died on the battlefield, bled all over a nearby bloom, and insisted his friend Orlando took it back to his betrothed in Venice. Orlando did exactly that on 25 April.

At lunchtime, I head to Alle Testiere, the tiny restaurant near Campo Santa Maria Formosa where Bruno, the chef, has prepared the traditional dish of St Mark's Day, *risi e bisi*, aka rice and peas. It is a vibrant celebration of the first young fresh peas of the spring, but Bruno's recipe is earthy and powerful, the addition of pancetta and a rich stock making it feel like a meal in itself.

2 litres chicken stock (see page 304)
150g pancetta, cut into small cubes
extra virgin olive oil
1 large white onion, finely chopped
flaky sea salt
320g Vialone Nano rice
a glass of dry vermouth
2kg fresh peas in their pods, podded to yield 1kg peas
a large knob of butter
120g Parmesan, grated
freshly ground black pepper

Heat the stock in a large pan and leave it at the back of the stove, simmering gently.

Place a frying pan over a medium flame and add the cubed pancetta. You do not need to use oil – the pancetta will quickly release its own and happily cook in that for the 3 or 4 minutes required to take on a golden, crispy appearance. Remove from the heat and set aside.

Heat a few glugs of olive oil in a large, heavy-based saucepan and gently sauté the chopped onion with a good pinch of salt. Stir, and after a few minutes, when the onion is beginning to turn glossy and translucent, add the rice. Make sure each grain is coated with oil, that the rice is starting to toast and is incorporated with the pearly chopped onions, then add the vermouth, stirring as it evaporates, which it will quite quickly. Without allowing the rice to dry out, add a ladleful of warm stock. Continue to cook gently, adding more stock as it is absorbed into the rice for the next 12 minutes. Add the peas and pancetta with another good ladleful of stock. Carry on stirring gently and adding more stock for the next 8 minutes, never letting the rice dry out but not flooding it either. Test a grain of rice

between your teeth – it should have a soft resistance to your bite – and adjust the seasoning if necessary.

Add a final half-ladle of stock and stir. This is important, since *risi e bisi* should be looser and wetter than a regular risotto. Stir in the butter until it has melted, then fold through most of the Parmesan. Serve in large shallow bowls, with a scattering of the remaining Parmesan and a scant twist of black pepper.

SUMMER

'It is the city of mirrors, the city of mirages, at once solid and liquid, at once air and stone.' *Erica Jong*

I have never asked for directions in Venice. This is not because I carry a map, or that I have a photographic memory (although now, after over thirty years, I know my way around reasonably well), nor is it because I am too proud. It is because I have always enjoyed getting lost. One of the most remarkable attributes of the city's topography is that you can be struggling against the tide of a huge crowd one minute on a busy thoroughfare and yet, after just two or three turns, find yourself in a silent, deserted courtyard, bedsheets flapping from a washing line and a stray cat rubbing against your leg. I once made a wrong turn on a fresh, early summer's morning only to chance upon a small *campo* filled with around eighty tiny children, all dressed in little tunics and aprons, playing ball, shouting, singing, skipping and laughing, chaperoned by two nuns in full habit and wimple.

Getting lost in Venice is a rite of passage. It is also the best way to discover the city. Where is the adventure in always going exactly where you need to be? If you know where you've left, and you know where you're going, there's little in between but the route, which you probably know too. Much

better to occasionally go off-piste and surprise yourself. There is little point in asking a Venetian for directions anyway. They always have a hand vaguely in front of them and say *sempre dritto* – 'straight ahead'. I suppose the implication is that you'll get where you need to eventually.

The street signs are another matter entirely. With the exception of the *nizioléti* (traditional Venetian signs with black stencilled lettering on a large white rectangle) that tell you where you are, the directional ones seem to be designed to deliberately confuse. Often you will come across an official sign for, say, San Marco, where the arrow points both left and right simultaneously (Schrödinger's directions?). At other times, the arrow will have been crossed out and a new one graffiti-ed in its place pointing somewhere else entirely.

In summer, the rule book is torn up completely, however. Venice becomes more challenging than in any other season. The streets are impassable because of the sheer quantity of tourists, and getting lost is no longer an option because it is impossible to move. In addition, the heat is stifling and the air is heavy and thick with humidity and mosquitoes. Most Venetians shut up shop and leave for the entire month of August, escaping to holiday homes on the mainland or decamping to airier parts of the world.

The smaller islands of the lagoon offer some relief. Those sandy beaches on the ocean side of the Lido are popular in the summer. Burano, although overrun with tourists between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. every day, is an oasis of calm and civility in the evening. Mazzorbo, with its skew-whiff bell tower and beautiful vineyards, is generally under-visited and peaceful. And Torcello, once the centre of the Republic, now appears like a dream, a memory of its former glory. Some of my Venetian friends have private

gardens on Torcello so that on hot days they can jump into their boats and spend the afternoon in peace beneath the shade of their fruit trees.

After the festival of Redentore in July, when the Giudecca Canal is lit up by the most spectacular firework display and Venetians give thanks to the Holy Redeemer for being delivered from the catastrophic plague of 1576, I tend to avoid the historic centre of the city entirely and travel to the outer islands, eat modestly, visit friends, or take a cycle ride along the Lido and swim in the Adriatic off the beaches of Pellestrina. It is at this time of the year that I seek out the simple. What could be better on a hot day than setting up a small table and chair on the balcony, cutting a few triangles of cheese, laying out a couple of slices of good Parma ham with some halved, salted cherry tomatoes and enjoying this simple spread with a glass of cold Soave, a crust and some olive oil? Might that just be the perfect lunch?

I make no apologies for the fact that this chapter relies less on traditional Venetian cooking and represents a more spontaneous response to the markets, and to the ingredients that summer has to offer. I could happily spend the full length of the season without once turning on the stove or lighting the oven. Raw food, salads, assembly rather than cooking tend to be the order of the day.

One day in June, I suppose just after the schools had broken up for the summer, I was told that the following afternoon there would be some sort of open-air feast. It seemed impromptu but immediately the atmosphere changed and all activity on the street was focused on the event. I prepared a few salads and sealed them in large Tupperware boxes. I made some store-cupboard crostini, too (mashed anchovy and chickpeas on toast) and began to get a little curious about the next day's street party.

As it transpired, it was more of a casual picnic than a formal outdoor feast, but it brought the community together and I got to try some of the wonderful home cooking of my neighbours: a large poached salmon with summer berries, tiny fried baby squid, garlicky *bovoletti* snails, plenty of salami and cheese, and a large tray of marinated slip soles *in saor* by which I loitered for a little too long (My recipe is on page 122.)

My favourite time of the day in the summer months is early morning. In July, the sun rises at around 5.30 a.m. but the sky starts to get light a good forty minutes beforehand. The first sound is the swifts, screeching in the skies above as they swirl and swoop to catch their breakfast of flying insects. After opening all the windows and the balcony doors, the symphony of the city floods the apartment: vaporetta engines, church bells, birds, seagulls, delivery men, the garbage collection, the postman, neighbours talking. It never gets routine, never ceases to thrill, always sounds exciting, and it helps me start every day with a spring in my step. It also presents me with an appetite and a question: What's for lunch?

San Pietro di Castello

There is a beautiful walk from the end of Via Garibaldi to the island of San Pietro di Castello. When I need solace, and want to feel grass and soil beneath my feet rather than the relentless *maségni* – those Istrian stone paving slabs that make up most of the city's streets – I will head to the church there, a little oasis of calm and greenery. The route passes through the easternmost tip of Castello, along the Sant'Anna Canal and over the Ponte di Quintavalle. Sometimes, I will take this route and not see a single soul.

Other times I will pause on the bridge and watch the scant activity at the boatyard where water taxis go for repair, or wait for a *batellina* to pass below – an antique wooden boat in which the rider stands, facing forwards, with two long oars, practising the local rowing technique known as the *voga*.

Once I'm on the small island of San Pietro, the atmosphere changes again and becomes even quieter and more serene. There are only fourteen interconnected streets and a handful of dwellings, some social housing, and a few medieval buildings, particularly around the church. I love the names of the streets and have memorized the *nizioléti*, the black and white signs painted directly on to the render of corner buildings, using the standard stencilled capital letters required by the commune of Venice. There is Corte Nova, Ramo del Zoccolo, Campiello dei Pomeri, Fondamenta Olivolo and, improbably, Calle del Casino. Was there really once a casino on this humble and chaste island? One sign that always catches my eye is the painted number above a rather grand, Moorish doorway on Calle Quintavalle. In Venice, door numbers are not geographically sequential, but tend to be allocated in a scattergun, hotchpotch manner. Additionally, they designate buildings in the entire district, not just the street. This place is number 1. You really don't see it that often. There are only six 'number one' in the whole city, the most famous of which is the Doge's Palace.

The church of San Pietro di Castello was Venice's cathedral up until 1807. (Before that, the current cathedral, the Basilica of St Mark, was a private chapel for the use of the Doge and his cohorts.) It sits in its own *campo*, a local word that describes a square, usually with a well at the centre. In the rest of Italy this would be called a *piazza*. (In Venice, there is only one *piazza* – St Mark's – and everything else is a *campo*.) The word literally translates as 'field' – they were originally small grass pastures with livestock. All have

now been paved over, with one exception: Campo San Pietro. This is my sanctuary, a place where I can sit on one of the red benches, read a book, or close my eyes and listen to the sparrows squabbling in the autumn or the swifts circling and squealing in the spring skies above. I find the rare abundance of grass and trees quite therapeutic; it's odd how we covet that which is scarce.

There is a beautiful hidden courtyard within the church with some crumbling façades, wonky doorways and an olive tree. It is so quiet that the only thing I can hear when I stand there is my own breathing. Outside, the impressive bell tower, like many in Venice, leans at an alarming angle, probably at 86° or 87° rather than a perpendicular 90°. This is the third tower to be built here – the other two collapsed. Curiously, on the paved path between the trees in the *campo*, there is a single white cobblestone. This is not an anomaly. It was placed there for a very good reason. When San Pietro was the city's cathedral, its patriarch would have received the Doge for special services and important religious occasions. For the Doge to be welcomed ceremoniously by the patriarch would have created certain hierarchical difficulties – neither wanted to be seen as less important than the other. A diplomatic compromise was reached and the two would meet discretely, and quite unceremoniously, on the precise spot designated by the white stone.

SEABASS IN CRAZY WATER

For 4

The term *acquapazza*, which translates as crazy water, refers to the poaching liquid in this dish, a combination of herbs, tomatoes, capers, chilli

and wine, lending a zingy, fresh piquancy to the soft white flesh of the seabass. If you can't get small fish, try cooking one very large bass in your biggest pan and simply putting it, lock stock and barrel, in the centre of the table. It makes for more of a visual centrepiece and helps the meal feel more like a feast.

4 small whole seabass, gutted (ask the fishmongers to do this)

extra virgin oil

1 clove of garlic, very finely sliced

1 red chilli, deseeded and finely chopped

flaky sea salt

500g ripe cherry tomatoes, halved

a glass of white wine

a full handful of capers

a small handful of flat parsley, chopped

a small handful of basil leaves, torn

Check that your gutted fish are free from remnants of their innards and wash thoroughly under cold running water. Pat them thoroughly dry.

In a very large, high-sided frying pan for which you have a lid, heat a good glug of olive oil over a medium flame and carefully lay the fish side by side. Sprinkle over the garlic, chilli and a good pinch or two of salt. After 4 minutes, gently turn the fish over and add the halved tomatoes, making sure they are nicely coated and incorporated into the cooking juices. Leave to sizzle for another 4 minutes. Now add the wine and capers, cover, and simmer for a further 4 minutes, until the fish is cooked through. You can check by piercing the flesh at the thickest part of the body. The eyes will have turned white, too.

Carefully lay the fish on four warmed plates. Add the chopped parsley and basil to the pan, turn up the heat for a minute or two to reduce the tomatoes, capers and sauce to a syrupy consistency, and spoon on to the four seabass.

AUTUMN

'Cauliflower is nothing but cabbage with a college education.'

Mark Twain

The Most Serene Republic of Venice was created by decree at 12 noon on 25 March 421 in the church of San Giacomo near Rialto Bridge. It became a maritime state in 1204, and a landed state in 1400. In the sixteenth century, Venice further asserted its presence on the world stage by resisting the combined efforts of feudal and monarchist Europe to subsume it and by sticking to its federal, republican roots. It had become a mighty city state.

La Serenissima ruled itself majestically for the next two centuries, a paragon of peace, effective governance, and a centre of art, music, theatre, craftsmanship and hard-earned wealth. That all came to an end with the arrival of Napoleon in 1797. Then began its loss of independence, its dissipation, the various Austrian and French occupations, its decline, and its fall. Finally, after the construction of the ironically named Liberty Bridge, connecting the island of Venice to mainland Italy in the middle of the nineteenth century, the once-great republic effectively became a region in the House of Savoy's Kingdom of Italy.

No wonder Venetians are proud.

In twenty-first-century Venice that pride is still fiercely evident in many ways. It manifests itself politically among the various separatist and isolationist groups who want to return Venice to its independent past with its own sovereignty. You can hear it every day in the distinct accent and impenetrable dialect that residents often use to speak to each other. You can even see it in the street signs, the *nizioléti*, which are frequently vandalized (or 'corrected') if sign writers use double hard consonants, Ts and Ds mostly, since those don't exist in Venetian dialect. The prominence of the gold and red flag depicting the winged lion of St Mark is a strong visual indicator as you walk around the city and frequent its bars and restaurants.

But the loveliest manifestation of pride is found in the markets. Here, traders display food from all over Italy: tomatoes from Sicily, tuna from the north Atlantic, seabass from the Adriatic. When fruit, vegetables, fish or seafood come from the lagoon, or the nearby island of Sant'Erasmus, or a farm just beyond Treviso, however, it's different. These items are marked *nostrani*: 'ours'. This is particularly evident when the seasons offer up an ingredient that has just come on to the market. The stallholders' pride isn't born of nationalism or regional prejudice, it is simply that they are proud to be selling local produce, farmed, harvested, reared or caught by local fishermen, farmers and artisans. Needless to say, it makes me want to buy all the produce that is *nostrani*, too.

There is another quirk in the market signs and labels that I rather enjoy and that is the use of dialect. Octopus, universally *polpo* in Italian, is *folpo* in Venice. Peas are *piselli* everywhere in the mainland, but *bisi* in Venice. Even the delicate softshell crabs from the lagoon are *moleche* in other parts of Veneto, but *moeche* here in Rialto.

In autumn, I delight at the arrival of radicchio, the knobbly acorn squash from Montebelluna and the exquisitely dappled pink and pale yellow lettuce from Castelfranco. This season is short in Venice because summer bleeds well into September and winter starts in earnest in November, but while autumn lasts, the markets glow with golden hues and ochre shades. The days may be shorter, but the change to the quality of light is remarkable. At the golden hour, those long moments before the sun sets, the light is almost liquid – molten and gilded – and time becomes elastic, seeming to stretch and play tricks on simple minds like mine, completely seduced by the magic this season conjures. There is a beautiful and dramatic effect on home cooking, too, as it takes on many of the season’s characteristics.

After a summer of vibrant salads and fresh flavours, autumn is also the time of the year when my thoughts turn to pasta making. There are many kitchen activities I find soothing and therapeutic (you can read about my meditative approach to *soffritto* on page 303), but I have to say, making pasta is at the top of that list. In Venice, pasta is always made on the kitchen work surface, never in a bowl, and I follow that approach, too. It tends to give the process a ceremonial feel, as if everything has to stop while this important ritual begins. Cracking eggs into a well made of flour and then bringing the flour in the middle with a fork feels more like playtime in the nursery than serious cookery, and I have found the freedom to spill, scatter and spread with abandon actually helps to make the pasta freer and looser. I tend to roll with a wooden pin rather than use a classic chrome pasta roller, and I would encourage you to try this traditional method – it is quite liberating.

The Doge's Palace and the fourth column

St Mark's Square, often described as Europe's drawing room, is one of the most beautiful architectural open spaces in the world. It is visited by tens of thousands of tourists daily. But Venetians hardly ever set foot in it. The combination of crowds, plastic souvenir stalls, pigeons and tour groups makes it, for the residents of Venice, one of the most unpleasant experiences in the city.

To be fair, it is not just St Mark's Square that Venetians avoid. The area around Rialto Bridge can get stiflingly congested, so much so that streets become impassable, and Strada Nova in Cannaregio, particularly in the summer months, resembles a kilometre-long rugby scrum. It's one of the reasons I choose to live at the Giardini end of Castello – there are no major tourist attractions, the tour groups don't venture much further east than the Bridge of Sighs, and the streets are mostly empty even in high season.

But there is a good reason to visit the area in front of St Mark's Square, known as the *piazzetta*. This apron of Istrian stone has an important historical significance for being the place where convicted criminals and enemies of the Republic were executed. There are two impressive columns, one holding aloft the winged lion of St Mark, the other supporting St Theodore and a rather sad-looking crocodile. It was between these two markers, in the early sixteenth century, that one of Venice's greatest villains met his death. A sausage maker named Biagio was caught after the gruesome discovery of a small finger in a bowl of soup made from his *muséto*. He confessed to abducting, murdering, mutilating and cooking several children who had disappeared in his neighbourhood. After being dragged through the city tied to a horse, flaying the serial killer alive, he was publicly tortured, had his

hand cut off, was then de-limbed at shoulder and thigh, and finally beheaded right here between the columns.

However, I sometimes come to this cheerful tourist hotspot for a different column. There are eighteen of them flanking the front of the Doge's Palace at ground level from the *piazzetta* on the left to the Bridge of Sighs on the right. If you look at the fourth column in from the left, you will notice that it protrudes just a little further from the front of the palace and that the ledge between column and paving stone is just a little narrower. For centuries, schoolchildren have played the following game: stand with your back hard against the column, and try to move from one side to the other without touching the pavement. It seems like an easy enough challenge but it is, as I have discovered myself on several attempts, impossible. Legend has it that condemned men were given this task as a final chance of salvation. The possibility of freedom and life must have seemed so tantalizingly close, but failure was inevitable. They were all executed anyway.

FRIED MEATBALLS

For 4, as a bar snack

In the Cannaregio district of the city, just off Strada Nova, there is an ancient *osteria* listed in guidebooks as Ca' d'Oro but known locally as Alla Vedova – 'The Widow's Place'. It is rather charming, particularly in its evocation of nineteenth-century Venice, principally because nothing much has changed for nearly 130 years: what you see really is what you get, and what you have got since 1891.

But while the tables in the two small rooms are popular with tourists, the locals always stand at the bar and order an *ombra* (a tiny glass of wine) and a meatball. It is the meatballs at Alla Vedova that keep me coming back; they are consistently and unfailingly delicious. The rate with which they are ordered and eaten means there is a constant supply coming from the kitchen, all day long, and that they are always hot. I have tried to persuade Mirella, the current proprietor, to share the recipe but she keeps it a closely guarded secret. This, after years of painstaking research and literally hundreds of tastings, is my version.

400g minced veal

3 medium eggs

75g grated Parmesan

1 clove of garlic, very finely chopped

2 tablespoons plain flour

a small handful of very finely chopped flat parsley leaves

300g breadcrumbs (100g soaked in a little milk, 200g for coating)

fine salt

ground white pepper

extra virgin oil, if needed

vegetable oil

Put the veal, eggs, Parmesan, garlic and flour into a very large mixing bowl. Using a fork, work all the ingredients together. Now add the chopped parsley leaves, the milk-soaked breadcrumbs, squeezed of excess liquid, a good pinch of salt and a good sprinkle of white pepper. Mix thoroughly. Cover the mixing bowl and leave to stand for about an hour to let the flavours develop.

Shape the mixture into small balls, adding more breadcrumbs if it is too moist or a little olive oil if it is too dry.

When formed, roll the balls in the remaining breadcrumbs to coat them fully.

In a large, deep-sided frying pan, heat about 3cm of vegetable oil until it is hot enough to turn a small piece of bread golden brown in about a minute. Add the meatballs to the hot oil and fry, turning frequently, until they are crispy and golden all round – about 3 to 4 minutes.

Remove with tongs and drain on several sheets of kitchen paper. Serve immediately, while hot.

WINTER

'Abhorrent, green, slippery city.'

D. H. Lawrence

In the winter months of November, December and January, I am acutely aware that Venice is a city built on water. The lagoon and the canals are a presence all year round, of course, but it is when the cold winds blow from the Dolomite mountains in the north and the chilly tides of the Adriatic push in from the south and east that water occupies a more prominent position in my consciousness.

Water is everywhere. The 177 canals are a permanent reminder of that. In the *campi* you will usually find a fountain, too, pumping drinking water all day long. The direct connection to the lagoon makes the two largest waterways, the Giudecca Canal and the Grand Canal, appear more like the sea, with visible tidal movement and choppy waves. And then there is Acqua Alta...

Acqua Alta (High Water) is the expression Venetians use to describe the winter phenomenon of a tide breaching parts of the city and flooding the squares and streets. The higher the tide, the more severe the floods, and the greater the chance of water entering homes, shops, businesses and hotels. It is, naturally, extremely distressing for residents but something they have become used to. There is a warning system that sounds several hours before the high tide arrives – an air-raid siren followed by a series of high-pitched beeps that indicate the height of the tide. Additionally, elevated walkways are placed in those parts of the city worst affected. Everyone puts on galoshes or, if it is a particularly bad one, rubber boots. Furniture is moved to upper floors.

Acqua Alta can be exacerbated by heavy rain and strong winds. Rain has a strange effect on Venice even at the best of times. In severe downpours, it can feel oppressive. In a city built of stone and marble, the rain has nowhere to go and moisture levels tip over the edge. The expression 'soaked to the bone' takes on an almost literal meaning – it really can feel like your bones are getting wet. In the period after a rainstorm, the slightly softened sounds of trolleys on bridges and vaporetti chugging along is actually quite pleasant, but it can take a long time to feel dry again.

On 4 November 1966, Venice suffered Acqua Alta of catastrophic proportions. The combination of two high tides, three days of rain, a powerful easterly wind and swollen mainland rivers discharging into the lagoon meant that parts of the city were submerged to a depth of around shoulder height for twenty-four hours.

Winter also brings bright days, when the air is cold and crisp and the skies wide and blue. Winter light seems sharper, the low angle of the sun means it bounces off pale terracotta walls and floods squares and courtyards with

a bright, pink glow. The reflection of the sun on the lagoon creates a remarkable sheen with a milky shimmer. It is on days like these that the elders of the city, rather than stay indoors sheltering from the harsh winter temperatures, come out in force, usually draped in their most impressive fur coats. With the addition of hats, scarves, gloves and sunglasses, it's impossible to tell who is who. When it's icy, or when it has snowed, it is not uncommon to see my neighbours walking arm-in-arm, men with women, women with women, and men with men. (In fact, Venice is the only city I know where it is quite normal to see elderly men walking arm-in-arm no matter what the weather, a practice I intend to adopt in my dotage.)

The nights are a different matter. Venice sleeps early all year round – by 9 or 10 p.m. everything is either closed or winding down – but in winter, the city goes to bed even earlier. Venice is the old lady of Europe. Walking the deserted streets at night, however, is something I rather enjoy. The sound of water lapping against the sides of the canals and the echo of footsteps on the hard paving stones have a dreamlike quality. The city's street lighting is so low it tends to drain away all the colours, and Venice transforms into a black and white version of itself.

Early winter mornings bring another delight. Because the waters of the canals and lagoon are a mere few centimetres beneath the stone paving slabs of the streets, squares and promenades, Venice gets its very own sea mist. This tends to hover at knee height until it dissipates as the day progresses, but while it lasts it is a beautiful special effect, worthy of any Hollywood horror movie.

The city is so much quieter in winter. I will often walk to Rialto Market on a fine morning in order to treat myself to produce I can't get locally, and

the normally packed streets will be blissfully empty. I take the *traghetto* from Strada Nova across the Grand Canal to the market. (A *traghetto* is a manually oared ferry used by locals to cut out the long distances required on foot if you stick to the four bridges of Rialto, Accademia, Scalzi and Costituzione.) There are six crossing points on the Grand Canal and these are sometimes referred to as the 'invisible' bridges. As you step in, the oarsman offers his forearm, which you take, and you pay a few coins for the ninety-second journey. There seems to be only one unwritten rule: ladies may sit, gentlemen should stand. The *traghetti* are decommissioned gondolas, no frills, no gold, always black (by city decree), no soft furnishings and quite often a bit bruised and battered.

Rialto Market in November and December is a treat. The feast of Maria della Salute on 21 November is an important date in the Venetian calendar and most of the city gears up for that by buying a castrated lamb, but at other times the fish stalls and vegetable stands here are as welcoming as any market I know. Much of the greengrocery – hearty cavolo nero and intense purple radicchio – comes from the mainland, from the farms and fields of Veneto. Winter is the time of the year when Venice connects most fully with the forests and mountains of northern Italy and the two cuisines find a meeting place.

It is this time of the year that the markets are easily navigable, too, and locals don't have to put up with tourists, photographers and tour groups. With my Venetian trolley and a shopping list, I fit in quite neatly and enjoy feeling like a local myself.

Ortis and the salt cod barrel

A short walk from home, just the other side of the Arsenale, Venice's historic and current naval headquarters, is one of my favourite *alimentari* (the Italian word for convenience store). It is called Ortis and the shopfront alone is reason enough to visit. It has such beautiful, and unique, lettering on its marble fascia that I've tried to imagine all the characters in full with the vague ambition of one day creating a typeface. It's also a dairy, a *latteria*, and the two 't's carved into the marble façade have such distinctive high bars that I first thought it said 'lalleria' – a nonsense word in Italian.

But the reason this place is such a mecca is that it is the only shop left in Venice where *baccalà mantecato* is made on the premises. Admittedly, the practice stops in warm weather, but from October to March, the barrels outside the shop contain salt cod in various stages of soaking and desalination. From what I have observed, the cod makes its way up the sections of the barrel as the white-coated shop assistants move it every few hours to cleaner water, softening and desalting the delicate flesh. Then, the old fellows (none can be much younger than seventy) whip the flaked cod with parsley, garlic and olive oil until it reaches that gorgeous, fluffy consistency so beloved in the region (see page 232).

Baccalà mantecato is such an important dish in the Venetian canon. Its history is almost as tasty as the dish itself. Pietro Querini, a Venetian nobleman of the fifteenth century, was sailing to Flanders when storms almost destroyed his ship. He reached a small island in the Norwegian archipelago of Lofoten, where he and his crew spent four months while the ship was repaired. During this time, he became so enamoured with the local

dried cod and the way it was softened and spiced that he began importing it when back in Venice.

At Ortis, it is the classic *mantecato* that is made, but the variation from Vicenza – *vicentina* – is equally popular (see page 233) and I've even come across a red version made with a tomato sauce. The shop is a tiny time capsule and I get the impression that not much has changed in the last eighty years or so.

CASTRADINA

For 4

As far as I can tell, this dish is eaten only once a year on 21 November for the festival of Maria della Salute. It is a celebration to commemorate the delivery of the city from a particularly prolonged and deadly episode of the plague. It's a beautiful occasion with a deep sense of local pride and custom, unlike the festival of Redentore in July, which feels more like a tourist event. The festivities in November include the building of a temporary bridge across the Grand Canal connecting the Basilica to the church of Salute.

Traditionally, *castradina* is made with castrated lamb, but since that's not always available outside of Italy you could try it with hogget, which has a lot more intensity than lamb and tastes significantly heartier. The stew is a perfect slow-cooked winter warmer, and like many one-pot dishes it improves with age, so it is definitely worth making a large batch and reheating the leftovers next day.

3 litres beef stock

extra virgin olive oil
2 large onions, sliced
2 large waxy potatoes, peeled and cube
flaky sea salt
freshly ground black pepper
800g hogget or castrated lamb rump, cut into very large cubes
50g butter
2 celery stalks, chopped
1 clove of garlic, chopped
1 Savoy cabbage, de-cored and sliced

First, bring the beef stock up to the boil in a large saucepan, then reduce to a steady simmer.

Take a large casserole dish with a lid, heat a few glugs of olive oil and sauté half the sliced onions over a medium heat for 5 minutes. Add the potato pieces, a very good pinch of salt and a twist of pepper. Stir for a further couple of minutes. Add the pieces of rump and gently turn them around the casserole until they are starting to brown. Now add most of the stock, retaining a small cupful, bring to the boil, stir, then reduce to a low simmer and position the lid obliquely leaving a little space for the steam to escape. Simmer for 2½ hours, stirring once or twice.

Meanwhile, in a separate heavy pan, melt the butter over a medium heat and sauté the remaining onions until soft and glossy. Add the celery, garlic and cabbage, with a good pinch of salt, and continue to cook for a further 5 minutes. Add the retained cup of beef stock, cover, then reduce the heat and stew for 40 minutes.

Put the casserole of *castradina* on to a heatproof tile in the middle of the table, with a ladle, several warmed bowls and the stewed cabbage.

4.2 Translated text: “Le quattro stagioni nella cucina veneziana”

LE 4 STAGIONI NELLA CUCINA CASALINGA VENEZIANA

PROLOGO

Venezia, Agosto 1986

Si sta facendo tardi. Sono seduto con alcuni amici fuori da un ristorante ai Giardini, un quartiere residenziale che si trova sulla sponda orientale di Venezia. Il cielo notturno risplende ancora del rosa del tramonto, mentre i rondoni roteano e cinguettano nell'aria calda sopra di noi.

Incrocio lo sguardo del cameriere e sollevo la nostra brocca di vino vuota. Vorrei davvero che questa notte finisse mai. È il mio ultimo giorno in città. Ho trascorso tre settimane qui e domani devo tornare in Inghilterra.

Venezia è ammaliante. Come molti prima di me, sono stato sedotto dalla sua arte, architettura, poesia e bellezza. Ma c'è dell'altro. Mentre faccio le valigie e mi appresto a prendere il vaporetto per la stazione ferroviaria, ho la sensazione di aver lasciato qualcosa di incompiuto: è il quartiere che mi ha conquistato, non la città.

Mentre percorro il Canal Grande a bordo di un vaporetto, so già che tornerò. Ma ciò che non ho ancora realizzato è che, nonostante gli innumerevoli viaggi che mi vedranno a Venezia nel corso dei successivi decenni, mi ci vorranno trent'anni per tornare ai Giardini.

INTRODUZIONE

Uno dei più grandi piaceri che un viaggio all'estero offre sta nell'esplorare i mercati alimentari, osservare le vetrine delle macellerie, meravigliarsi della varietà di ingredienti e prodotti locali. Al contrario, una delle più grandi frustrazioni è quella di non poter acquistare tutto, portarlo a casa e mettersi ai fornelli. Per quanto comodo e piacevole possa essere un soggiorno in hotel, i miei istinti naturali di cuoco amatoriale e di ristoratore vengono continuamente vanificati, in quanto le camere non sono dotate di una cucina.

In nessun altro luogo ho avvertito questa sensazione così intensamente come a Venezia. Il mio legame con la città è sia personale che professionale, tanto che negli ultimi anni la frequenza delle mie visite è aumentata. Questo, ovviamente, non ha fatto altro che intensificare la mia frustrazione. Per diversi anni ho soggiornato in una piccola, umile e fatiscente pensione, ubicata sulla punta meridionale del quartiere di Dorsoduro e affacciata su di una sponda del Canale della Giudecca. Bella, come lo è gran parte di Venezia, per una sua eleganza sbiadita e una incantevole semplicità che mi hanno fatto sentire tutt'uno con l'ambiente circostante. Ma, a parte mangiare nei ristoranti e, quando sono particolarmente fortunato, a casa di amici, la mia connessione con la cucina è venuta a mancare. Mi è sempre stato possibile mangiare in città solo come turista o come ospite a casa di qualcuno. Non sono mai riuscito ad andare al mercato la mattina, ad interagire con i venditori ambulanti, a scegliere le seppie con più inchiostro o le pesche più grosse, le sardine più fresche o i carciofi più viola, per poi dirigermi verso casa e preparare la cena. In poche parole, non ho mai potuto cucinare come un vero veneziano.

Un paio di anni fa mi sono ritrovato di nuovo nel quartiere residenziale dei Giardini. Era una di quelle serate meravigliose che solo Venezia sa regalare: campanili che si stagliano all'orizzonte, sotto un cielo vasto e plumbeo, le luci delle barche che si riflettono sulla superficie della laguna, lo sciabordio dell'acqua contro la fondamenta. Sono tornato subito indietro di trent'anni e sono stato sopraffatto da uno strano senso di déjà vu.

Poco più tardi, mentre assaporavo per cena un semplice risotto a casa di un amico veneziano, ho avuto una sorta di illuminazione. Come sarebbe vivere e scrivere in una delle città più visitate al mondo e conoscerla come un vero veneziano? Andare negli stessi mercati, comprare gli stessi tagli di carne, scegliere lo stesso pesce e gli stessi frutti di mare, portare a casa le stesse verdure, e immergersi realmente nel cuore gastronomico di una delle culture alimentari meno conosciute e più sottovalutate d'Europa? Inoltre, dato che ero a conoscenza dell'importanza che i veneziani conferiscono agli ingredienti stagionali e della natura dei mercati, che muta radicalmente mese dopo mese, ho pensato che se avessi accettato la sfida, avrei dovuto raccontare in tempo reale come si fanno gli acquisti, si prepara il cibo, si cucina e si mangia in una vera cucina veneziana nell'arco delle quattro stagioni.

Il luogo in cui ho avuto questa rivelazione è stato determinante. Molto è stato scritto su quei piatti veneziani classici che si trovano in una manciata di ristoranti d'eccellenza della città (e anche in molti di quelli scadenti) e nel crescente numero di libri di cucina che promuovono le specialità della regione. Tuttavia, molto meno spazio è stato dedicato alla cucina casalinga e genuina di Venezia, proprio quella che stavo assaporando quella sera ai Giardini.

Spesso la differenza tra la cucina casalinga e quella dei ristoranti consiste unicamente nell'approccio. La prima è spontanea e generosa: nasce dall'amore, dal calore, dalla tradizione e da un sentimento di abbondanza. La seconda, invece, annovera tra le sue qualità la precisione, la coerenza e la competenza. Non essendo io stesso un cuoco professionista, ho sempre preferito la cucina casalinga e ho sempre avuto molta più stima per le nonne con il grembiule a quadretti che dei professionisti con la toque bianca. L'onestà che si trova nella cucina domestica spesso si associa sorprendentemente all'assenza di ricette scritte, molte delle quali risiedono solo nella memoria del cuoco di casa. Speravo proprio che questa tradizione orale, basata sui piatti della famiglia tramandati verbalmente di generazione in generazione, potesse costituire la base del mio esperimento.

Ed è così che ha inizio la mia avventura, in Ottobre, un mese meraviglioso per stare a Venezia, quando le giornate possono essere ancora piacevolmente calde e i mercati sono in quella fase incantevole di passaggio tra l'estate e l'autunno, per cui si possono ancora trovare degli ottimi pomodori ma allo stesso tempo si vedono anche il primo radicchio e le prime zucche in arrivo da Chioggia e dalla campagna veneta. Ho affittato un piccolo appartamento situato in una *calletta* che fa parte del quartiere residenziale poco più a nord dei giardini pubblici dei Giardini. Nel piccolo cortile aperto c'è un capitello votivo e ci sono anche delle statuette, dipinte con colori vivaci, di Gesù Cristo e della Vergine Maria che vegliano sull'affiatata comunità. La sera si accendono delle candele e, di tanto in tanto, i miei nuovi vicini escono dalle loro case e intonano canti di ringraziamento e di lode.

L'appartamento è umile e arredato in modo spartano, ma può vantare un magnifico pavimento in graniglia, muri di mattoni a vista in cucina e un balcone sufficientemente ampio da poter ospitare un'unica sedia. Cosa

potrei volere di più dalla vita? Basta che ci sia un posto all'aperto dove potermi sedere al sole e sbucciare piselli freschi, e so che sarò felice. Altra cosa importante, sono molto vicino a Via Garibaldi, la strada con il maggior numero di negozi di tutto il quartiere. Nelle mie immediate vicinanze, ci sono tre fruttivendoli (uno dei quali commercia da una chiatta), tre macellai, due pescivendoli, un panificio, un'enoteca e un negozio di ferramenta specializzato nella vendita di secchi di plastica, mollette e sciampo a buon prezzo. Poco più lontano ci sono un piccolo supermercato, un paio di *bàcari* e il locale circolo comunista.

Via Garibaldi è semplicemente incantevole. Si estende da nord-est a sud-ovest, quindi da metà mattina fino al tardo pomeriggio il sole non può far altro che splendere direttamente sulle sue alte facciate terrazzate e sulla pavimentazione in blocchi di pietra istriana. È un *rio terà*, ovvero, un canale che è stato completamente pavimentato. Si può ancora vedere la forma del corso d'acqua originale e con un pizzico di fantasia lo si può immaginare com'era una volta: con le gondole che lo percorrevano e lo scintillio del sole sulla superficie dell'acqua.

Per quanto riguarda le botteghe e le bancarelle, individuo subito i miei alleati. Per il pesce si va da Delfino, situato in prossimità dell'inizio del canale di Sant'Anna. È un luogo molto animato con un sottofondo musicale incessante di reggae riprodotta su un beatbox di metallo, ma il pescato è buono. Maurizio e Nicola sono i pescivendoli più improbabili che si possano trovare a Venezia e che aggiungono una bella porzione di battute a tutto ciò che si compra. Per la frutta e la verdura c'è Stefano, in Campiello Caboto, che si avvale della sfrontatezza di un paio di ragazzi, i quali sono soliti flirtare in modo scandaloso con la clientela femminile, per lo più anziana. Non solo riescono sempre a spuntarla, ma, a giudicare dalla folla, sono popolari come

i piselli e le puntarelle. L'enoteca, come fanno molte altre in tutta la città, per pochi euro vi riempie le bottiglie di plastica vuote con il vino di vostra scelta. Stefania, un personaggio locale con una bella parlantina, gestisce il negozio con l'efficienza di un sergente maggiore. Infine per la carne, al ritorno, mi fermo alla macelleria all'angolo di Calle de le Ancore. È la macelleria con le code più lunghe - sempre un segno promettente. Si potrebbe quasi sostenere che la cucina italiana si basi di più sulla qualità dei prodotti che non sulle tecniche culinarie. Naturalmente, è necessario avere un minimo di competenza in cucina, ma se gli ingredienti di partenza sono eccellenti, non serve lavorarli troppo.

Dopo aver stabilito la mia base operativa e aver equipaggiato la mia cucina esclusivamente con l'attrezzatura più rudimentale, posso dedicarmi al lavoro serio: il pedinamento dei miei vicini. Li seguo al mercato assalendoli con domande nel mio italiano un po' stentato ("Mi scusi, signora, cosa farai con questi ingredienti?"), e poi torno a casa per provare la ricetta io stesso. È un sistema davvero gratificante per conoscere la cultura alimentare di una regione e le sue tradizioni. Oltre a scoprire la rigorosa dedizione per la cucina stagionale di questi cuochi casalinghi, apprendo anche che essi si ispirano liberamente alle ricette di altre parti d'Italia. Piatti pugliesi, siciliani, toscani, lombardi e dell'Emilia-Romagna appaiono con frequenza e senza provocare alcun senso di tradimento delle proprie tradizioni o di mancanza di orgoglio. A dire il vero, sembra che alcuni veneziani siano convinti del fatto che le ricette divenute famose in altre regioni siano state originariamente rubate a Venezia. (In particolare, la signora Povinelli insiste nel dire che il ragù di carne che il mondo associa così strettamente a Bologna è stato strappato dall'antica ricetta veneziana delle *secoe*).

Questo libro ripercorre il viaggio culinario che ho fatto nel corso di quattordici mesi, trascorsi in quello sciatto appartamento ai Giardini. In questa raccolta di ricette, alcune sono tradizionali, altre sono state messe insieme grazie a frammenti di conversazioni con delle nonnine, altre ancora me le hanno suggerite alcuni cuochi veneziani professionisti con cui ho stretto amicizia e infine alcune provengono da entusiasti dilettanti che, una volta appreso del mio progetto, mi hanno approcciato e mi hanno detto che avrei dovuto *assolutamente* includere la ricetta della loro madre di *questo* o la variante del loro nonno di *quell'altro*. Alcuni dei piatti in queste pagine non sono autentici della regione, ma ho deciso di includerli comunque. Infatti questo è un libro di cucina casalinga, e contiene tutte le idiosincrasie e le aberrazioni che ne derivano. Venezia, nel corso dei secoli, ha conquistato ed è stata conquistata e le contaminazioni di altre regioni alla sua cucina possono essere ammirate e gustate in ogni momento.

Alla base della mia decisione di rispettare la stagionalità della cucina veneziana e di dividere le ricette in queste quattro categorie, c'è un valido motivo. Sono talmente distinte e i mercati talmente diversi durante i cambi di stagione, che il cibo sulle tavole delle famiglie rispecchia tutto ciò alla perfezione. Dal momento che vivevo, facevo la spesa, cucinavo e scrivevo in tempo reale, mi sembrava sensato dare forma anche al libro in tempo reale. Inoltre, mi è sembrato davvero appropriato che il luogo di nascita di Antonio Vivaldi fosse anche lo scenario delle mie *Quattro Stagioni*.

Al di là di ogni altra considerazione, credo che questa raccolta sia uno spaccato veritiero del cibo cucinato e mangiato dai veri veneziani, una popolazione che sta diminuendo al ritmo di 1.000 abitanti all'anno. Nessuno conosce realmente le conseguenze per Venezia se questo declino dovesse protrarsi, ma finché i residenti rimasti continueranno a cucinare e mangiare

con questa passione e questo senso di orgoglio, c'è una piccola parte dell'unicità del carattere e della cultura della città, che sopravvivrà sempre.

PRIMAVERA

“La strada che porta alla felicità è quella di non pensare più in là del pranzo o della cena.” Stephen Bayley (da Sydney Smith)

Trascorro gran parte del mio tempo ricercando la semplicità, e, solitamente, la mia giornata inizia con riflessioni sul cibo. Spesso vengo attirato al mercato dalla speranza di trovare un nuovo ingrediente oppure una partita davvero splendida di prodotti locali, come se fossi sotto l'influenza di un potente raggio traente.

Dire che la cucina italiana inizia con l'ingrediente sarebbe decisamente un'eufemismo. La cucina italiana è l'ingrediente. Dalla Sicilia nel caldo e secco sud fino all'Alto Adige nel verdeggiante e mite nord, la filosofia culinaria è la stessa: la ricerca della semplicità, o come si direbbe in inglese: *“less is more”*. Ho scoperto che le differenze regionali non riguardano tanto la tecnica in cucina, quanto piuttosto la varietà di prodotti che si hanno a disposizione. In genere, la semplicità della tradizione contadina è particolarmente diffusa e persistente. Inoltre, la necessità sembra essere la fonte d'ispirazione per la creazione di molti dei piatti tipici italiani: la panzanella, la saporita insalata toscana, è un modo incredibilmente semplice e delizioso di trattare una quantità eccessiva di pomodori e una scorta di pane

raffermo. Le Vignole, tipiche del Lazio e dell'Umbria, sono un vero tripudio di verde primaverile, nonché l'unico modo sensato di far fronte all'abbondanza di piselli, carciofi e bietole in quel periodo dell'anno.

La primavera mi spinge ad uscire di casa ogni giorno sempre più presto e con una maggiore frequenza. So che è un cliché, ma la sensazione della vita che si rinnova si può percepire ovunque, persino in una città fatta di marmo e pietra. Tuttavia, sento spesso il bisogno di un ambiente più bucolico, e per quanto sia bella e accogliente la piazza ricca di verde che si trova davanti alla chiesa di San Pietro di Castello, la mia sensibilità inglese prende il sopravvento e inizio a organizzare la prima visita dell'anno alla mia isola veneziana preferita.

Un breve tragitto sulla linea 13 del vaporetto mi porta nella parte più silenziosa della laguna, ovvero l'isola di Sant'Erasmo, un luogo incredibilmente rilassante e tranquillo. Dal punto di vista geografico è un miracolo - una lunga e stretta striscia di terra, bagnata dall'Adriatico da un lato e dalla laguna salmastra dall'altro. È un mistero come qualsiasi cosa possa sopravvivere in un posto come questo, eppure gran parte della frutta e della verdura che si trova al mercato di Rialto e sulle chiatte dei fruttivendoli di tutta la città proviene da quest'isola. Inoltre, la frutta coltivata nei suoi frutteti e nei suoi orti viene preferita a qualunque altro prodotto proveniente da altre zone d'Italia. Questo è dovuto in parte ad una questione di orgoglio dei locali e in parte al fatto che la qualità è ottima.

Ricordo ancora la prima volta che ho visitato l'isola. Stavo andando a trovare Michel Thoulouze, un francese espatriato che ha acquistato una casa e un terreno a Sant'Erasmo diversi anni fa e ha deciso di piantare viti di Malvasia e Vermentino. Ora produce uno degli unici vini realizzati interamente all'interno della laguna. Inoltre, alleva galline padovane, un tipo particolare

di pollame con la testa simile ad un elaborato piumino . Dopo aver passato un paio d'ore con Michel, ho fatto una gran bella passeggiata. I vigneti si alternano a campi di carciofi viola, orti di zucchine, piselli, asparagi e bietole. La sensazione di fertilità rigogliosa che si percepisce è davvero straordinaria.

Mentre facevo ritorno a Venezia su un vaporetto praticamente deserto, ritrovai un rinnovato senso di ammirazione per una città che si è evoluta conservando un considerevole grado di autosufficienza, sfruttando esclusivamente le risorse a disposizione, in modo molto simile a quanto avviene nelle cucine dei cuochi casalinghi.

Mentre Sant'Erasmus è caratterizzata da silenzio e serenità, il mercato di Rialto non potrebbe essere più distante da questi due concetti. È chiassoso, sfacciato, frenetico e fastidioso. Tuttavia, è un luogo emozionante in cui percepisci di essere nel cuore pulsante della cultura e della cucina della città. Nelle mattine affollate, può essere davvero difficile riuscire a muoversi, e anche quando si riesce a schivare turisti, commercianti e acquirenti, il passo non è poi tanto più veloce di quello dei *bovoletti* che strisciano fuori dai secchi stracolmi vicino alle bancarelle del pesce.

In uno dei primi giorni di primavera, l'8 marzo per l'esattezza, quando sono apparsi i primi granchi a guscio molle della stagione, ho provato una certa eccitazione. C'è una finestra di opportunità molto ridotta per catturare queste *moeche* nel periodo della muta, in più sono rare e incredibilmente costose. Ma provo la medesima eccitazione ogni volta che individuo un nuovo arrivo di qualsiasi tipo. Ricordo quando vidi per la prima volta le telline, dei minuscoli bivalvi lisci non più grandi di un'unghia. Ne acquistai subito due chili senza avere la minima idea di cosa farne, ma non mi sarei dovuto preoccupare. Semplicemente saltate con un po' di olio d'oliva, sale, aglio e prezzemolo tritato, si sono rivelate perfette.

Adoro anche gli spettacoli di contorno al mercato. C'è il gigante Tomas, un personaggio imponente che ogni giorno passa ore a tagliare le foglie dei carciofi, rifilarne il gambo ed estrarne il cuore, detto anche fondo, per poi gettarlo in un'enorme vasca di acqua acidulata assieme ad altre centinaia di carciofi. Questi vengono poi venduti ad un prezzo maggiorato, poiché il grosso del lavoro sta proprio nel pulirli. Poi c'è il tizio silenzioso e pensieroso che cerca uno spazio all'ombra per allestire il suo banco. Una volta trovato, decapita, sventra e apre a ventaglio una piccola sardina dopo l'altra, usando solo le unghie dei pollici per poi disporre accuratamente i pesci su un foglio davanti a sé, con le mani e gli avambracci imbrattati di sangue fino al gomito. Questi piccoli pesci aperti a ventaglio sono conosciuti come "lingue" di sardine e sono deliziosi immersi in una pastella leggera e poi fritti per poco tempo (ricetta a pagina 22).

La primavera è la stagione in cui Venezia emerge dai cupi e freddi mesi di gennaio e febbraio e sembra dire: "La vita è qui, gioiamo". Questo senso di celebrazione e rinascita è tanto più evidente nei mercati, negli ingredienti, nelle ricette e nella cucina casalinga della città.

Fare la spesa – un rituale mattutino

Le campane di Venezia sono una melodia quotidiana rassicurante e la loro armonia spesso mi sorprende e mi trattiene fermo sul posto mentre cerco di riconoscere le note musicali. Alcuni anni fa, durante un caldo giorno d'aprile, feci una lunga passeggiata con un diapason digitale e mentre camminavo compilai un breve catalogo delle chiese e delle loro campane. (Ognuno si diverte come può.) Dopo una tazza di caffè della mia Bialetti malconcia, mi incamminai verso Via Garibaldi, la strada dei negozi vicina a casa mia.

La maggior parte dei residenti, quando va a fare la spesa, si porta dietro delle borse dotate di ruote che sono molto comuni a Venezia. Sono eccellenti per muoversi nelle strette calli e per attraversare i piccoli ponti, e contengono facilmente tutta la spesa che può servire a far da mangiare per una famiglia numerosa nell'arco di una giornata. Il mio è di colore rosso scuro con ruote nere e un manico di plastica marrone, e mi ci sono molto affezionato.

Per prima cosa mi dirigo alla Trattoria Alla Rampa per il secondo caffè della giornata. Rimango sempre sconcertato dalle regole non scritte e da come i locali facciano le cose in un modo e i turisti invariabilmente in un altro. Si dovrebbe sempre bere il caffè in piedi "al banco" - al bancone del bar. Solo i turisti si siedono. Non si deve mai ordinare un caffè macchiato, soprattutto non dopo mezzogiorno. Se ordinate un caffè macchiato, infatti, solitamente si accompagna con un biscottino oppure, nei mesi di gennaio e febbraio, con le *fritole* - ciambelle veneziane.

Appena fuori dalla Trattoria Alla Rampa si trova la chiatta del fruttivendolo, un punto di ritrovo del vicinato, nonché il luogo dove si compra la verdura. (Di solito mi dirigo 100 metri più avanti verso il Campiello Caboto e faccio la spesa da Stefano Tommasi, ma il gossip è migliore alla chiatta). È qui che spesso mi soffermo e osservo cosa compra la gente del posto prima di decidere. È una tattica eccellente e un ottimo metodo per apprendere direttamente dai cuochi casalinghi autoctoni.

Più volte ho seguito una vicina in particolare per vedere precisamente cosa comprasse e poi l'ho interrogata su cosa avrebbe preparato. In questo modo ho fatto amicizia con la signora Povinelli e con la signora Scarpa, entrambe cuoche casalinghe di grande ispirazione, dotate di un ampio e vario repertorio di piatti provenienti da Venezia, da tutto il Veneto e non solo.

Dopo aver fatto visita al pescivendolo e al macellaio, probabilmente mi resta tempo solo per comprare un giornale prima di tornare a casa per mettere in frigo la scorta del mattino. Anche l'edicola è un punto di incontro sociale molto importante. In altre parti di Venezia si trovano ancora quelle splendide bancarelle circolari ottocentesche in acciaio e zinco che vendono riviste, giornali e mappe per i turisti. (Se ne può ammirare un esempio particolarmente bello fuori dalla Galleria dell'Accademia, e un altro piuttosto austero in Campo Santa Maria Formosa con un messaggio inequivocabile per qualsiasi turista che stia anche solo pensando di chiedere indicazioni - vedi pagina 6.) Qui in Via Garibaldi il tabaccaio e il negozio del lotto hanno una funzione simile, e spesso potrete assistere ad una versione mattutina della passeggiata - vicini che spettegolano e si aggiornano, si lamentano e protestano – fa tutto parte del modo di essere veneziano.

RISI E BISI

Per 4 persone

La mattina del 25 aprile si apre con la messa nella Basilica. È così che ha inizio una giornata di celebrazioni in onore del santo patrono della città, San Marco. La tradizionale corsa delle gondole, la regata di traghetti, parte proprio vicino al mio appartamento e camminando lungo la fondamenta, la seguo fino al Palazzo Ducale. Questo è un percorso che faccio raramente per raggiungere il centro storico, ma è un giorno speciale nel calendario veneziano. Coincide anche con la Festa del Bocolo (bocciolo di rosa), durante la quale gli uomini regalano una sola rosa rossa alle loro mogli, amanti o fidanzate. Questa festa vuole commemorare la storia di uno

sfortunato soldato di nome Tancredi che morì in battaglia e, mentre sanguinava su una rosa accanto a lui, chiese al suo amico Orlando che la riportasse alla sua fidanzata a Venezia. E Orlando espresse questo desiderio proprio il 25 aprile.

A mezzogiorno, mi dirigo al ristorante Alle Testiere, un piccolo locale vicino a Campo Santa Maria Formosa dove Bruno, lo chef, ha preparato il piatto tradizionale del giorno di San Marco, *risi e bisi*, cioè riso e piselli. È una vivace celebrazione dei primi piselli freschi della primavera, ma la ricetta di Bruno è corposa e saporita; infatti, l'aggiunta della pancetta e di un ricco brodo lo fa sembrare un pasto completo.

2 litri di brodo di pollo (vedi pagina 304)

150g di pancetta a cubetti

5 cucchiaini di olio extravergine d'oliva

1 cipolla bianca grande, tagliata finemente

sale marino grosso

320g di riso Vialone Nano

un bicchiere di vermut secco

2kg di piselli freschi in baccello, 1kg di piselli sgranati

una grossa noce di burro

120g di parmigiano grattugiato

pepe nero appena macinato

Scaldare il brodo in una pentola capiente e lasciatelo sul fuoco più basso a sobbollire dolcemente.

Mettete una padella su un fuoco medio e aggiungete la pancetta a cubetti. Non è necessario usare l'olio – la pancetta rilascerà rapidamente il proprio grasso e cuocerà tranquillamente in quello per i 3 o 4 minuti necessari ad assumere un aspetto dorato e croccante. Togliete dal fuoco e mettete da parte. Scaldate l'olio d'oliva in una casseruola capiente e soffriggete delicatamente la cipolla tritata con un pizzico di sale. Mescolate e dopo qualche minuto,

quando la cipolla inizia ad appassire, aggiungete il riso. Assicuratevi che ogni chicco sia ricoperto d'olio, che il riso cominci a tostare e che sia incorporato al trito di cipolla perlato. In seguito, aggiungete il vermut, mescolando man mano che evapora, cosa che accadrà abbastanza rapidamente. Senza far asciugare il riso, aggiungete un mestolo di brodo caldo. Continuate a cuocere dolcemente, aggiungendo altro brodo man mano che viene assorbito dal riso per i successivi 12 minuti. Aggiungete i piselli e la pancetta con un altro mestolo di brodo abbondante. Continuate a mescolare delicatamente e ad aggiungete altro brodo per i prossimi 8 minuti, facendo sì che il riso non si asciughi mai, ma nemmeno che sia sommerso. Assaggiate un chicco di riso – dovrebbe avere una consistenza tenera – e regolate il condimento se necessario.

Aggiungete un ultimo mezzo mestolo di brodo e mescolate. Questo è importante, poiché il piatto *risi e bisi* dovrebbe essere più all'onda e umido rispetto ad un normale risotto. Incorporate il burro e mescolate fino a quando non si sarà sciolto, in seguito, aggiungete la maggior parte del parmigiano. Servite in ampie ciotole poco profonde, e cospargete con il parmigiano rimasto ed una macinata di pepe nero.

ESTATE

“È la città degli specchi, la città dei miraggi, al tempo stesso solida e liquida, al tempo stesso aria e pietra”. Erica Jong

Non ho mai chiesto indicazioni a Venezia. Questo non perché porti con me una cartina, o perché abbia una memoria fotografica (anche se ormai, dopo più di trent'anni, so come muovermi piuttosto bene), né perché io sia troppo orgoglioso. La vera ragione è che mi è sempre piaciuto perdersi. Una delle caratteristiche più straordinarie della topografia della città è che, un attimo prima, si può arrancare in mezzo ad una marea di gente in una via affollata e quello dopo, svoltando strada un paio di volte, ci si può ritrovare in un cortile silenzioso e deserto, con le lenzuola che sventolano da un filo per il bucato e un gatto randagio che si strofina sulla gamba. Un giorno di una fresca mattina di inizio estate mi è capitato di sbagliare strada e per puro caso mi sono ritrovato in un piccolo *campo* gremito da un'ottantina di bambini, tutti vestiti con casacche e grembiuli, che giocavano a palla, gridavano, cantavano, saltavano e ridevano, accompagnati da due suore con la tonaca e il soggolo.

Perdersi a Venezia è un rito di passaggio ed è anche il modo migliore per scoprire la città. Che divertimento c'è nell'andare sempre esattamente dove si deve andare? Se si conosce il punto di partenza e quello di arrivo, c'è poco da scoprire nel mezzo se non il percorso stesso, che probabilmente già si conosce. Di tanto in tanto, è molto meglio uscire dalle rotte prestabilite e lasciarsi sorprendere. Ad ogni modo, sarebbe inutile chiedere indicazioni ai veneziani. Muovono sempre una mano in maniera vaga di fronte a sé e dicono: "Sempre dritto". Suppongo intendano che in qualche modo arriverai dove sei diretto.

Le indicazioni stradali sono tutta un'altra storia. Fatta eccezione per i *nizioléti* (cartelli tradizionali veneziani caratterizzati da lettere nere stampate su un grande rettangolo bianco) che vi dicono dove vi trovate, quelli direzionali sembrano essere stati progettati con l'intenzione di confondere.

Spesso ci si imbatte in un cartello ufficiale, per esempio per San Marco, sul quale la freccia punta contemporaneamente a sinistra e a destra (indicazioni del gatto di Schrödinger?). Altre volte, si può trovare una freccia cancellata e sostituita da un'altra, magari pitturata sul muro, che punta da tutt'altra parte.

In estate, tuttavia, non vale più alcuna regola e vivere a Venezia diventa più faticoso che in qualsiasi altra stagione. Le strade sono impraticabili a causa dell'enorme quantità di turisti, e perdersi non è più contemplato perché muoversi diventa impossibile. Inoltre, il caldo è soffocante, l'aria è pesante e densa di umidità ed è pieno di zanzare. La maggior parte dei negozianti chiude i battenti e lascia la città per tutto il mese di agosto, fuggendo nelle case di villeggiatura sulla terraferma o rifugiandosi in parti più fresche del mondo.

È possibile trovare sollievo nelle isole più piccole della laguna. Le spiagge sabbiose della sponda adriatica del Lido sono molto frequentate in estate. Burano, ad esempio, nonostante venga invasa dai turisti tra le 10 e le 16 ogni giorno, è un'oasi calma e accogliente alla sera. Mazzorbo, con il suo campanile sbilenco e i suoi splendidi vigneti, solitamente è poco visitato e silenzioso. Infine Torcello, un tempo centro della Serenissima, ora appare come un sogno, che rimanda al suo antico splendore. Alcuni dei miei amici veneziani possiedono dei giardini privati a Torcello, e nei giorni caldi possono salpare con le loro barche e trascorrere il pomeriggio in pace all'ombra dei propri frutteti.

Dopo la festa di luglio del Redentore, durante la quale il canale della Giudecca si illumina con il più incantevole spettacolo di fuochi d'artificio e i veneziani ringraziano il Santo Redentore per essere stati liberati dalla micidiale peste del 1576, cerco sempre di evitare il centro storico della città

e di spostarmi verso le isole più lontane. Qui ho l'occasione di mangiare in modo modesto, visitare amici, o fare un giro in bici lungo il Lido e nuotare nell'Adriatico a largo delle spiagge di Pellestrina. È proprio in questo periodo dell'anno che cerco la semplicità. Cosa ci potrebbe essere di meglio in una giornata calda che sistemare un tavolino e una sedia sul balcone, tagliare un po' di formaggio, preparare un paio di fette di buon prosciutto di Parma insieme ad alcuni pomodori "ciliegini" tagliati a metà con un po' di sale e godersi questa semplice composizione con un bicchiere di Soave freddo, una bruschetta e dell'olio d'oliva? Che sia proprio questo il pranzo perfetto?

Non è un caso che questo capitolo sia dedicato solo in minima parte alla cucina tradizionale veneziana, e rappresenti invece una risposta più spontanea ai mercati e agli ingredienti di cui dispone l'estate. Potrei benissimo passare l'intera stagione senza mai accendere i fornelli o il forno in questo periodo dell'anno in cui sono il cibo crudo, le insalate e la combinazione degli ingredienti ad essere all'ordine del giorno più che la cottura.

Un giorno di giugno, credo subito dopo la chiusura estiva delle scuole, mi dissero che il pomeriggio seguente ci sarebbe stata una specie di festa all'aperto. Sembrava una cosa improvvisata, ma l'atmosfera mutò rapidamente e tutta l'attività che c'era in strada si concentrò sull'evento. Preparai delle insalate e le chiusi in grandi contenitori della Tupperware. Feci anche dei crostini con quello che avevo nella credenza (purea di acciughe e ceci su pane tostato) e poi iniziai ad essere un po' curioso per la festa in strada del giorno dopo.

In realtà, era più un picnic casuale che una festa formale all'aperto, ma ha riunito l'intera comunità e mi ha permesso di provare alcuni dei meravigliosi piatti casalinghi dei miei vicini: un grande salmone cotto al vapore con frutti

di bosco estivi, calamaretti fritti, *bovoletti* all'aglio, salame e formaggio in abbondanza, e un grande vassoio di sogliole marinate *in saor*, vicino alle quali ho indugiato anche troppo (la mia versione è a pagina 122.)

Durante i mesi estivi, il mio momento preferito della giornata è quello delle prime ore del mattino. A luglio, il sole sorge verso le 5.30 ma il cielo comincia ad illuminarsi almeno quaranta minuti prima. Si sente subito il verso dei rondoni, che stridono in cielo mentre volteggiano e si lanciano in picchiata per catturare la loro colazione di insetti volanti. Dopo aver aperto tutte le finestre e le porte del balcone, la sinfonia della città si riversa nell'appartamento: i motori dei vaporetti, le campane delle chiese, gli uccelli, i gabbiani, i fattorini, la raccolta della spazzatura, il postino, i vicini che parlano. Tutto ciò non si trasforma mai in routine, non smette mai di emozionare, suona sempre eccitante, e mi aiuta a iniziare ogni giorno con una marcia in più. Inoltre mi suscita un certo appetito e mi obbliga a pormi una domanda: Cosa c'è per pranzo?

San Pietro di Castello

Si può fare una bellissima passeggiata dalla fine di via Garibaldi all'isola di San Pietro di Castello. Quando ho bisogno di trovare conforto e voglio sentire l'erba e la terra sotto i piedi piuttosto che gli inesorabili *maségni* – le lastre di pietra istriana che compongono la maggior parte della pavimentazione delle strade in città – mi reco alla chiesa che si trova lì, una piccola e verde oasi di pace. Il percorso attraversa la parte più orientale di Castello, costeggiando il Canale di Sant'Anna e passando sul Ponte di Quintavalle. A volte, quando faccio questa camminata, non vedo anima viva.

In altri casi, mi fermo sul ponte e osservo la poca attività che c'è nel cantiere dove vengono portati i taxi d'acqua per le riparazioni, oppure aspetto che passi una *batellina* – un'antica barca di legno in cui il conducente sta in piedi con la faccia rivolta in avanti e pratica, con due lunghi remi, la tecnica tradizionale di canottaggio nota come “voga”.

Una volta arrivato sull'isoletta di San Pietro, l'atmosfera cambia nuovamente e diventa ancora più tranquilla e serena. Ci sono solo quattordici strade interconnesse tra loro e una manciata di abitazioni, alcune case popolari e qualche edificio medievale situato nei pressi della chiesa. Adoro i nomi delle vie e ho imparato a memoria i *nizioléti*, quelle indicazioni in bianco e nero dipinte direttamente sull'intonaco degli edifici che fanno angolo, usando gli stampi standard di lettere maiuscole richieste dal comune di Venezia. Ci sono Corte Nova, Ramo del Zoccolo, Campiello dei Pomeri, Fondamenta Olivolo e, inaspettatamente, Calle del Casino. Esisteva davvero un casinò su questa umile e casta isola un tempo? Una particolarità che riesce sempre ad attirare la mia attenzione è il numero dipinto sopra una porta moresca piuttosto grande in Calle Quintavalle. A Venezia, i numeri civici non vengono assegnati seguendo un ordine geografico, ma tendono ad essere distribuiti in maniera disordinata e casuale. In aggiunta, i numeri vengono assegnati agli edifici dell'intero sestiere, non delle singole vie. Questo posto, in particolare, si trova al civico 1 e non è una cosa che si vede molto spesso. Ci sono solo sei “numeri uno” in tutta la città, il più famoso dei quali è quello di Palazzo Ducale.

La basilica di San Pietro di Castello è stata la cattedrale del patriarcato di Venezia fino al 1807. (Prima di allora, l'attuale cattedrale, la Basilica di San Marco, era una cappella privata ad uso esclusivo del Doge e delle sue coorti). È situata nel suo *campo* omonimo, una parola veneziana che indica una

piazza, al cui centro si trova solitamente un pozzo. Nel resto d'Italia questo si chiamerebbe piazza. (A Venezia, c'è solo una piazza - San Marco - e tutti gli altri sono *campi*). La parola significa letteralmente “campo” – in origine erano dei piccoli pascoli che ospitavano il bestiame. Attualmente sono stati tutti pavimentati, con una sola eccezione: Campo San Pietro. Questo è il mio tempio, un luogo dove ci si può sedere su una delle panchine rosse e leggere un libro, oppure chiudere gli occhi e ascoltare i passeri che si accapigliano in autunno o i rondoni che volteggiano e stridono nel cielo primaverile. Credo che la limitata quantità di prati e di alberi sia alquanto terapeutica; è bizzarro che si desideri maggiormente qualcosa quanto più questo manca.

Un incantevole cortile si nasconde all'interno delle mura della basilica e presenta alcune facciate fatiscenti, porte instabili e un ulivo. È talmente silenzioso che l'unica cosa che posso sentire quando mi trovo lì è il mio respiro. All'esterno, si può ammirare l'imponente campanile, che, come molti altri a Venezia, è inclinato in modo allarmante, probabilmente con un angolo di 86° o 87° invece che di 90°. Questo è il terzo campanile ad essere stato costruito qui – gli altri due sono crollati. Un'altra curiosità, che si può trovare lungo il sentiero lastricato tra gli alberi nel *campo*, è un singolo ciottolo bianco. Non si tratta di un'anomalia, ma venne collocato in quel punto per un valido motivo. Quando San Pietro divenne la cattedrale della città, il suo patriarca avrebbe dovuto ricevere il Doge per funzioni speciali e importanti occasioni religiose. Il fatto che il Doge venisse accolto solennemente dal patriarca avrebbe potuto generare qualche conflitto gerarchico – nessuno dei due voleva apparire come meno importante dell'altro. Fu così che si giunse ad un compromesso diplomatico e i due si sarebbero incontrati con discrezione, e senza tante cerimonie, nel punto esatto designato dalla pietra bianca.

BRANZINO ALL'ACQUA PAZZA

Per 4 persone

Il termine *acquapazza* fa riferimento al liquido di cottura di questo piatto, una combinazione di erbe, pomodori, capperi, peperoncino e vino, che conferisce un sapore fresco, speziato e piccante alla tenera carne bianca del branzino. Se non riuscite a procurarvi dei pesci di piccole dimensioni, provate a cucinare un unico branzino molto grande nella padella più capiente che avete e adagiatelo semplicemente così com'è al centro della tavola. Ciò lo renderà un centrotavola di maggiore effetto e contribuirà a rendere il pasto più simile ad una festa.

4 piccoli branzini interi ed eviscerati (chiedete al pescivendolo di pulirli)

olio extravergine di oliva

1 spicchio d'aglio tagliato molto finemente

1 peperoncino rosso, privato dei semi e tagliato finemente

sale marino grosso

500g di pomodorini ciliegini maturi, tagliati a metà

un bicchiere di vino bianco

una manciata piena di capperi

una piccola manciata di prezzemolo tritato

una piccola manciata di foglie di basilico spezzettate

Controllate che i vostri pesci, già eviscerati, siano privi di resti delle loro interiora e lavateli accuratamente sotto acqua corrente fredda. Asciugateli bene tamponando con fogli di carta assorbente.

In una padella molto capiente e dai bordi alti, per la quale avete un coperchio, scaldate una buona quantità di olio d'oliva a fuoco medio e disponete con cura i pesci l'uno accanto all'altro. Versate l'aglio, il peperoncino e un

pizzico o due di sale. Dopo 4 minuti, girate delicatamente il pesce e aggiungete i pomodorini tagliati a metà, assicurandovi che siano ben ricoperti e incorporati al liquido di cottura. Lasciate sfrigolare per altri 4 minuti. A questo punto aggiungete il vino e i capperi, coprite con il coperchio e fate cuocere a fuoco lento per altri 4 minuti, fino a quando il pesce sarà cotto internamente. Potete controllare bucando la carne nella parte più spessa del corpo. Inoltre, gli occhi dovrebbero essere diventati bianchi.

Disponete con cura il pesce su quattro piatti caldi. Aggiungete il prezzemolo tritato e il basilico nella padella, alzate il fuoco per un minuto o due per ridurre i pomodori, i capperi e la salsa ad una consistenza sciropposa, e versatene qualche cucchiaino sui quattro branzini.

AUTUNNO

“Il cavolfiore non è che un cavolo che ha frequentato l’università”¹⁹

Mark Twain

La Serenissima Repubblica di Venezia fu fondata per decreto alle 12 del 25 marzo del 421 nella chiesa di San Giacomo vicino al Ponte di Rialto. Nel 1204 divenne una Repubblica Marinara e nel 1400 estese il proprio dominio sulla terraferma. Nel ‘500, Venezia affermò ulteriormente la sua presenza sulla scena mondiale resistendo ai tentativi congiunti dell’Europa feudale e monarchica di assoggettarla e rimanendo fedele alle sue radici federali e repubblicane. Si era affermata come una potente città-stato.

¹⁹ <https://www.aforismario.eu/2019/10/frasi-cavolo-e-cavolfiore.html> (last accessed 4 October 2021)

La Serenissima si autogovernò magnificamente per i successivi due secoli, e fu un esempio di pace e di buon governo, nonché una fucina di arte, musica, teatro, artigianato e ricchezza guadagnata con fatica. Tuttavia, l'arrivo di Napoleone nel 1797 pose fine a tutto questo. Fu allora che perse la propria indipendenza e che ebbero inizio la sua decadenza, le varie occupazioni da parte degli austriaci e dei francesi, il suo declino e la sua caduta. Infine, in seguito alla costruzione, intorno alla metà del XIX secolo, del Ponte della Libertà (così denominato ironicamente), che collega l'isola di Venezia alla terraferma italiana, quella che un tempo fu una grande repubblica divenne a tutti gli effetti una regione del Regno d'Italia dei Savoia.

Non c'è da stupirsi che i veneziani siano un popolo orgoglioso.

Nella Venezia del ventunesimo secolo quell'orgoglio si manifesta ancora con ferocia in molti modi. Esso è presente nella politica dei vari gruppi separatisti e isolazionisti che desiderano restituire a Venezia la sua indipendenza e il suo potere passati. Lo si può sentire ogni giorno nel particolare accento e nell'impenetrabile dialetto che spesso i residenti usano per comunicare tra loro. Lo si può notare persino nei cartelli stradali, i *nizioléti*, che vengono spesso vandalizzati (o "corretti") nel caso in cui presentino consonanti dure doppie, T e D per lo più, dato che queste non esistono nel dialetto veneziano. La presenza della bandiera oro e rossa che raffigura il leone alato di San Marco è un forte richiamo visivo per chi passeggia per la città e frequenta i suoi bar e ristoranti.

Tuttavia la più bella manifestazione di questo orgoglio si trova nei mercati. Qui i commercianti espongono prodotti alimentari provenienti da tutta Italia: pomodori dalla Sicilia, tonno dal nord Atlantico, branzino dall'Adriatico. Tuttavia quando la frutta e la verdura, il pesce o i frutti di mare provengono dalla laguna, dalla vicina isola di Sant'Erasmo, oppure da una fattoria appena

fuori Treviso, il discorso cambia. Questi articoli vengono evidenziati come nostrani, cioè “nostri”. Lo si nota soprattutto quando le stagioni offrono un prodotto appena apparso sul mercato. L’orgoglio mostrato dai mercanti non deriva dal nazionalismo o da pregiudizi regionali, ma semplicemente dal fatto che sono fieri di poter vendere prodotti locali, che vengono coltivati, raccolti, allevati o catturati da pescatori, agricoltori e produttori locali. Ovviamente questo invoglia anche a me a comprare tutti i prodotti nostrani.

Un’altra peculiarità, che caratterizza i cartellini e le etichette del mercato e che trovo alquanto divertente, è l’utilizzo del dialetto. Il polpo, che viene chiamato così in tutta Italia, a Venezia è *folpo*. I piselli hanno questo nome ovunque sulla terraferma, ma a Venezia sono *bisi*. Persino i delicati granchi a guscio morbido della laguna, che in altre parti del Veneto vengono chiamati *moleche*, a Rialto sono *moeche*.

In autunno, mi entusiasmo all’arrivo del radicchio, delle zucche dalla ghianda bitorzoluta di Montebelluna e della lattuga di Castelfranco, squisitamente maculata in rosa e giallo paglierino. Questa stagione dura poco a Venezia poiché l’estate si protrae almeno fino a settembre e l’inverno, in realtà, arriva a novembre, ma fintanto che l’autunno perdura, i mercati risplendono di tinte dorate e sfumature di ocra. Può essere che le giornate si accorcino, ma la qualità della luce cambia notevolmente. Durante l’ora d’oro, in quegli interminabili istanti prima che il sole tramonti, la luce appare quasi fluida – fusa e dorata – e il tempo diventa flessibile, sembra dilatarsi e prendersi gioco delle menti semplici come la mia, ormai completamente ammaliata dall’incantesimo evocato da questa stagione. Anche la cucina casalinga subisce un effetto straordinario e drammatico e assume molte caratteristiche della stagione.

Dopo un'estate di vivaci insalate e sapori freschi, l'autunno rappresenta anche il periodo dell'anno in cui i miei pensieri sono rivolti alla preparazione della pasta. In cucina ci sono molte attività che trovo calmanti e terapeutiche (potete leggere del mio approccio meditativo al soffritto a pagina 303), ma devo ammettere che fare la pasta è in cima alla lista. A Venezia, la pasta viene sempre preparata sul piano di lavoro della cucina, mai in una terrina, e decido anch'io di adottare questo metodo. Il processo sembra assumere un aspetto cerimoniale, come se tutto dovesse fermarsi quando questo importante rituale ha inizio. Rompere le uova in una fontana di farina per poi portarla verso il centro con una forchetta sembra più un'attività da ricreazione all'asilo che un'attività culinaria seria. D'altra parte, ho scoperto che la libertà di versare, spargere e stendere con trasporto contribuisce a slegare e ad ammorbidire l'impasto. Per tirare la pasta preferisco usare un matterello piuttosto che la classica sfogliatrice, e vi invito a provare questo metodo tradizionale – è alquanto liberatorio.

Palazzo Ducale e la quarta colonna

Piazza San Marco, che spesso viene definita il salotto d'Europa, è uno degli spazi aperti più suggestivi del mondo dal punto di vista architettonico. Ogni giorno decine di migliaia di turisti vi giungono in visita. Eppure i veneziani non ci mettono piede praticamente mai. L'insieme di folla, bancarelle di souvenir in plastica, piccioni e gruppi turistici la rende una delle esperienze più sgradevoli della città per gli abitanti di Venezia.

A dire il vero, i veneziani non evitano solo Piazza San Marco. L'ingorgo che si forma nella zona intorno al Ponte di Rialto può diventare soffocante, tanto

che le strade diventano impraticabili, e Strada Nova a Cannaregio assomiglia a una mischia di rugby lunga un chilometro, soprattutto nei mesi estivi. Questo è uno dei motivi per cui ho scelto di vivere ai Giardini nella parte orientale di Castello – non ci sono attrazioni turistiche particolari, i gruppi turistici non si spingono oltre il Ponte dei Sospiri, e le strade sono praticamente libere anche in alta stagione.

Ad ogni modo, c'è una buona ragione per visitare lo spiazzo di fronte a Piazza San Marco, conosciuto come la *piazzetta*. Quest'area pavimentata con pietre istriane ha una rilevanza storica significativa, in quanto è stato il luogo in cui i criminali condannati e i nemici della Repubblica venivano giustiziati. Ci sono due colonne imponenti, una delle quali sorregge il leone alato di San Marco, mentre l'altra supporta San Teodoro e un cocodrillo dall'aspetto alquanto triste. Fu tra questi due simboli che, all'inizio del XVI secolo, uno dei più grandi criminali di Venezia trovò la morte. Un salumiere di nome Biagio fu catturato dopo la macabra scoperta di un piccolo dito in una ciotola di zuppa preparata con il suo *muséto*. Confessò di aver rapito, ucciso, mutilato e cucinato diversi bambini che risultavano scomparsi nel suo quartiere. Dopo essere stato legato ad un cavallo e trascinato per la città, il serial killer fu scorticato vivo e torturato in pubblico, gli furono mozzate le mani, poi gli vennero staccati gli arti, e infine fu decapitato proprio qui tra le due colonne.

A volte, però, vengo in questo vivace luogo turistico per un'altra colonna. Ce ne sono diciotto che fiancheggiano la facciata di Palazzo Ducale al piano terra e si susseguono dalla piazzetta a sinistra fino al Ponte dei Sospiri a destra. Se osservate la quarta colonna a partire da sinistra, potrete notare che, rispetto alle altre, sporge un po' di più dalla facciata del palazzo e che la sporgenza tra la colonna e la pietra del pavimento è leggermente più stretta.

Per secoli, gli scolari hanno fatto questo gioco: stare con la schiena appoggiata alla colonna e cercare di spostarsi da una parte all'altra senza toccare il pavimento. Sembrerebbe una sfida piuttosto semplice, in realtà, come ho potuto constatare io stesso dopo svariati tentativi, è impossibile. La leggenda narra che ai condannati venisse assegnata tale impresa come ultima possibilità di salvezza. La possibilità di essere liberi e di salvarsi deve essere sembrata davvero vicina per loro, tuttavia il fallimento era inevitabile. Furono giustiziati tutti comunque.

POLPETTE FRITTE

Cicchetto per 4 persone

Nel sestiere di Cannaregio, appena usciti da Strada Nova, si trova un'antica osteria indicata nelle guide con il nome Ca' d'Oro ma localmente conosciuta come Alla Vedova – “Il locale della vedova”. È alquanto affascinante, in particolare per il suo richiamo alla Venezia del diciannovesimo secolo. Infatti, in circa 130 anni non è cambiato molto: ciò che si vede è tutto quello che ha da offrire, e quello che ha sempre offerto dal 1891.

Tuttavia, mentre i tavoli nelle due piccole sale sono frequentati per lo più dai turisti, la gente del posto sta sempre al bar e ordina un'*ombra* (un piccolo bicchiere di vino) e una polpetta. Sono proprio le polpette che continuano a farmi tornare all'osteria Alla Vedova; sono sempre e immancabilmente deliziose. Il ritmo con cui vengono ordinate e consumate indica che dalla cucina ne arriva una fornitura costante tutto il giorno, e che sono sempre calde. Ho cercato di convincere l'attuale proprietaria, Mirella, a condividere

la ricetta, ma lei custodisce gelosamente questo segreto. Quella che segue, dopo anni di ricerca scrupolosa e letteralmente centinaia di assaggi, è la mia versione.

400g macinato di vitello

3 uova medie

75g di parmigiano grattugiato

1 spicchio d'aglio, tritato molto finemente

2 cucchiaini di farina 00

una piccola manciata di foglie di prezzemolo tritate molto finemente

300 g di pangrattato (100 g inzuppati in un po' di latte, 200 g per l'impanatura)

sale fino

pepe bianco macinato

olio extravergine d'oliva, se necessario

olio vegetale

Mettete il macinato di vitello, le uova, il parmigiano, l'aglio e la farina in una terrina molto capiente. Utilizzando una forchetta, amalgamate tutti gli ingredienti. Ora aggiungete le foglie di prezzemolo tritate, il pangrattato imbevuto di latte (strizzato per eliminare il liquido in eccesso), un pizzico di sale abbondante e una spolverata di pepe bianco. Mescolate con cura. Coprite la terrina e lasciate riposare l'impasto per circa un'ora per farlo insaporire.

Formate delle palline con il composto, aggiungendo altro pangrattato se è troppo umido o un po' di olio d'oliva se è troppo asciutto.

Una volta formate, rotolate le palline nel rimanente pangrattato fino a ricoprirle completamente.

In un'ampia padella dai bordi alti, scaldate circa 3 cm di olio vegetale fino a quando sarà abbastanza caldo da far diventare un piccolo pezzo di pane dorato in circa un minuto. Immergete le polpette nell'olio caldo e friggetele,

girandole spesso, fino a quando non saranno uniformemente croccanti e dorate – circa 3 o 4 minuti.

Rimuovete le polpette con le pinze e scolatele su diversi fogli di carta da cucina. Servite immediatamente, mentre sono ancora calde.

INVERNO

“Città ripugnante, verde e sfuggente”²⁰

D. H. Lawrence

Nei mesi invernali di novembre, dicembre e gennaio, sono pienamente consapevole del fatto che Venezia è una città costruita sull’acqua. Ovviamente, la laguna e i canali sono una presenza costante, tuttavia, quando giungono le correnti gelide dalle Dolomiti a nord e le fredde maree dell’Adriatico si alzano da sud e da est, l’acqua inizia ad essere sempre più in primo piano nella mia mente.

C’è acqua ovunque e i 177 canali lo ricordano in ogni momento. Di solito, nei *campi* si può trovare anche una fontana che eroga acqua potabile tutto il giorno. Il collegamento diretto tra la laguna e i due principali corsi d’acqua, il Canale della Giudecca e il Canal Grande, permette loro di apparire più simili al mare, grazie all’evidente movimento ondosso e agitato. E poi c’è l’Acqua Alta...

Acqua Alta è l’espressione utilizzata dai veneziani per descrivere il fenomeno invernale di una marea che si infrange su alcune parti della città e

²⁰ My translation.

sommerge le piazze e le strade. Più la marea è alta, più le inondazioni sono dannose, e aumentano le probabilità che l'acqua entri nelle case, nei negozi, nelle botteghe e negli alberghi. Naturalmente, è oltremodo angosciante per i residenti, ma è una cosa a cui ormai si sono abituati. Esiste un sistema di allarme che suona diverse ore prima dell'arrivo dell'alta marea – una specie di sirena antiaerea seguita da una serie di segnali acustici ad alta frequenza che indicano il livello della marea. Inoltre, vengono posizionate delle passerelle sopraelevate nelle parti della città più colpite. Tutti indossano le calosce o in alternativa, quando il tempo peggiora particolarmente, gli stivali di gomma, e i mobili vengono spostati ai piani superiori.

L'Acqua Alta può essere esacerbata da piogge intense e da forti venti. La pioggia ha uno strano effetto su Venezia, persino nei periodi migliori. In caso di forti acquazzoni, può sembrare soffocante. In una città fatta di pietra e marmo, la pioggia non ha nessun altro luogo in cui andare e la percentuale di umidità sale oltre il limite di sopportazione. L'espressione “bagnato fino al midollo” assume un significato quasi letterale – si può avere davvero la sensazione che il midollo osseo si stiano bagnando. Nel periodo successivo a un temporale, il suono leggermente attenuato dei carrelli sui ponti e dei vaporette che avanzano lentamente sull'acqua, in realtà, è piuttosto gradevole, ma può passare molto tempo prima che ci si senta nuovamente asciutti.

Il 4 novembre 1966, Venezia fu colpita da un'Acqua Alta di proporzioni catastrofiche. L'insieme di due alte maree, tre giorni di pioggia, un forte vento di levante e fiumi in piena che dalla terraferma si riversavano nella laguna, causarono l'inondazione di alcune parti della città fino all'altezza della spalla circa, per ventiquattro ore.

Tuttavia, l'inverno regala anche giornate luminose, in cui l'aria è gelida e frizzante e il cielo è ampio e azzurro. La luce invernale sembra più limpida. L'angolo di inclinazione del sole, infatti, è più basso e gli permette di rimbalzare sui muri schiariti di terracotta e di inondare le piazze e i cortili con un bagliore roseo e luminoso. Il riflesso del sole sulla laguna crea una meravigliosa lucentezza dotata di un chiarore latteo. È in giorni come questi che gli anziani della città preferiscono uscire, pieni d'entusiasmo e quasi sempre coperti con le loro pellicce più appariscenti, piuttosto che rimanere in casa per ripararsi dalle rigide temperature invernali. Se si aggiungono cappelli, sciarpe, guanti e occhiali da sole, diventa impossibile riconoscersi. Quando c'è ghiaccio, o quando è nevicato, capita spesso che i miei vicini camminino a braccetto, uomini con donne, donne con donne e uomini con uomini. (In effetti, Venezia è l'unica città che conosco in cui risulti del tutto normale vedere uomini anziani camminare a braccetto, indipendentemente dal tempo, e questa è una pratica che intendo adottare durante la mia vecchiaia).

Di notte è tutta un'altra storia. Venezia va a letto presto tutto l'anno – entro le 21 o le 22 è già tutto chiuso oppure sta chiudendo – ma in inverno la città si addormenta anche prima. Venezia è la vecchia signora d'Europa. Ad ogni modo, passeggiare per le strade deserte di notte è un'attività davvero piacevole. Il suono dell'acqua che si infrange sulle sponde dei canali e l'eco dei passi sul duro selciato hanno un che di onirico. La scarsa illuminazione stradale della città contribuisce a prosciugare tutti i colori, e Venezia si trasforma in una versione in bianco e nero di se stessa.

Le prime mattine d'inverno regalano un'altra meraviglia. Dal momento che le acque dei canali e della laguna si trovano a pochi centimetri sotto le lastre di pietra delle strade, delle piazze e delle passeggiate, Venezia gode di una

propria nebbia marina. Questa tende a ristagnare nell'aria all'altezza delle ginocchia fino a dissiparsi con il passare del giorno, ma finché dura, crea un effetto speciale incredibile, degno di qualsiasi film horror di Hollywood.

In inverno la città è molto più tranquilla. Spesso mi dirigo a piedi al mercato di Rialto, quando c'è una bella mattinata, per regalarmi dei prodotti che non posso trovare nella mia zona, e le strade, che di solito pullulano di gente, sono meravigliosamente deserte. Prendo il *traghetto* da Strada Nova, attraverso il Canal Grande e arrivo al mercato. (Un *traghetto* è un'imbarcazione a remi usata dai locali per evitare di percorrere a piedi le grandi distanze, in quanto si è costretti a passare per uno dei quattro ponti tra: Rialto, Accademia, Scalzi e Costituzione). Esistono sei punti di attraversamento sul Canal Grande e a volte ci si riferisce a questi come ai ponti "invisibili". Quando si sale a bordo, il conducente porge il proprio avambraccio affinché lo afferriate, poi bisogna pagare qualche moneta per una traversata di novanta secondi. Sembra esserci un'unica regola non scritta: le signore si possono sedere, i signori devono stare in piedi. I traghetti sono gondole dismesse, senza decorazioni, senza oro, completamente neri (come da ordinanza comunale), senza le morbide sedute e molto spesso un po' ammaccati e malconci.

A novembre e a dicembre, il mercato di Rialto è una gioia per gli occhi. La festa della Madonna della Salute, che ha luogo il 21 novembre, è una ricorrenza importante nel calendario veneziano e gran parte della città si prepara per questo evento comprando un agnello castrato, ma negli altri giorni le bancarelle del pesce e della verdura in questo mercato sono accoglienti come qualsiasi altro che conosca. Gran parte della verdura – il gustoso cavolo nero e radicchio di un viola intenso – viene dalla terraferma, dalle coltivazioni e dai campi del Veneto. È proprio durante l'inverno che

Venezia si connette più profondamente con le foreste e con le montagne del nord Italia, e le due cucine trovano un punto d'incontro.

Inoltre, in questo periodo dell'anno, i mercati possono essere esplorati con più facilità e la gente del posto non deve avere a che fare con turisti, fotografi e comitive. Con il mio carrellino veneziano e una lista della spesa, mi inserisco abbastanza bene e mi piace l'idea di sentirmi io stesso un veneziano.

Ortis e il barile di baccalà

A pochi passi da casa, appena oltre l'Arsenale, la sede storica e attuale della marina di Venezia, si trova uno dei miei alimentari preferiti. Si chiama Gastronomia Ortis e la facciata da sola costituisce una ragione sufficiente per visitare il negozio. Sulla fascia di marmo posta sopra le vetrate, ci sono delle scritte talmente belle e uniche, che ho cercato di immaginare come sarebbero anche tutte le altre lettere dell'alfabeto nell'improbabile ambizione di creare un nuovo carattere tipografico – in futuro. Tra le altre cose è anche una latteria, e le due “t” scolpite nella fascia di marmo hanno delle stanghette così alte e particolari che in un primo momento ho pensato che ci fosse scritto “lalleria”.

Ma il motivo per cui questo posto è una vera e propria mecca è che si tratta dell'unico negozio rimasto a Venezia dove il *baccalà mantecato* viene preparato sul posto. In realtà, questa lavorazione viene sospesa nei mesi più caldi, ma da ottobre a marzo, nei barili all'esterno del negozio si può trovare il baccalà in diversi stadi di ammollo e desalinizzazione. Da quanto ho potuto constatare, il baccalà risale lungo le doghe del barile mentre i commessi in

camicie bianco, a intervalli di qualche ora, lo trasferiscono in acqua più pulita, ammorbidendo e desalinizzando la delicata polpa. In seguito, i veterani del negozio (nessuno può avere meno di settant'anni) rimescolano le scaglie di baccalà con prezzemolo, aglio e olio d'oliva finché non raggiunge quella splendida, soffice consistenza così amata dai veneti (vedi pagina 232).

La ricetta del *baccalà mantecato* è davvero importante nella tradizione veneziana. La sua storia è gustosa quasi quanto il piatto stesso. Pietro Querini, un nobile veneziano del XV secolo, stava navigando verso le Fiandre quando una tempesta quasi distrusse la sua nave. Raggiunse una piccola isola nell'arcipelago norvegese di Lofoten, dove lui e i suoi uomini rimasero per quattro mesi, in attesa che la nave venisse riparata. Durante la permanenza, si innamorò così tanto del baccalà locale e del modo in cui veniva ammorbidito e speziato che, una volta rientrato a Venezia, iniziò a importarlo.

Da Ortis si prepara il *mantecato* classico, ma la variante *alla vicentina* è altrettanto famosa (vedi pagina 233) e sono anche venuto a conoscenza di una versione *in rosso* fatta con una salsa di pomodoro. Il negozio è una piccola capsula del tempo e ho l'impressione che non sia cambiato quasi niente negli ultimi ottant'anni o giù di lì.

CASTRADINA

Per 4 persone

Per quanto ne so, questo piatto si mangia solo una volta all'anno, il 21 novembre, in occasione della Festa della Madonna della Salute. È una celebrazione che commemora la liberazione della città da un periodo particolarmente prolungato e mortale di peste. È un'occasione stupenda ed è connotata da un profondo senso di orgoglio locale e di costume, a differenza della Festa del Redentore a luglio, che sembra più un evento turistico. I festeggiamenti di novembre prevedono la costruzione di un ponte temporaneo che attraversa il Canal Grande, collegando la Basilica alla chiesa della Salute.

Secondo la tradizione, la *castradina* è fatta con l'agnello castrato, ma se non fosse possibile procurarselo, si può provare con il montone, il cui sapore è molto più intenso di quello dell'agnello e decisamente più corposo. Lo spezzatino è un piatto a cottura lenta perfetto per scaldarsi d'inverno e, come tutti gli stufati, diventa più gustoso con il passare del tempo, quindi vale sicuramente la pena farne una grande quantità e riscaldare gli avanzi il giorno dopo.

3 litri di brodo di carne

olio extravergine d'oliva

2 cipolle grandi, affettate

2 patate grandi a pasta gialla, sbucciate e tagliate a cubetti

sale marino grosso

pepe nero macinato

800 g di fesa di montone o di agnello castrato, tagliato a bocconcini grandi

50 g di burro

2 gambi di sedano tritati

1 spicchio d'aglio, tritato

I verza, privata della parte centrale e tagliata a fette

Per prima cosa, portate a ebollizione il brodo di manzo in una pentola capiente, poi abbassate la fiamma e lasciatelo sobbollire.

Prendete un'ampia casseruola con coperchio, scaldate un filo di olio d'oliva e fate soffriggere a fuoco medio metà delle cipolle affettate per 5 minuti. Aggiungete i cubetti di patata, un pizzico di sale e uno di pepe. Mescolate per un altro paio di minuti. Aggiungete i pezzi di fesa e girateli delicatamente nella casseruola finché non iniziano a scurirsi. Ora aggiungete la maggior parte del brodo, conservandone una piccola tazza, portate a ebollizione, mescolate, poi abbassate la fiamma, lasciate sobbollire e posizionate il coperchio in modo obliquo in modo da creare un po' di spazio per far uscire il vapore. Cuocere a fuoco lento per 2 ore e mezza, mescolando una o due volte.

Nel frattempo, a parte, in una padella pesante, sciogliete il burro a fuoco medio e soffriggete le cipolle rimanenti fino a quando diventeranno morbide e lucide. Aggiungete il sedano, l'aglio e la verza, insieme ad un pizzico di sale, e continuate a cuocere per altri 5 minuti. Aggiungete la tazza di brodo di manzo tenuta da parte, coprite, poi abbassate il fuoco e cuocete lentamente per 40 minuti.

Mettere la casseruola di *castradina* su di un sottopentola resistente al calore al centro della tavola, con un mestolo al suo interno, diverse ciotole riscaldate e il cavolo stufato.

5. Commentary on the translation

This chapter focuses on the translation work carried out and, in particular, it aims to illustrate, in three macro paragraphs, what the main morphosyntactic, lexical and stylistic problems faced during the translation process were and how they were solved and rendered in the target text.

5.1 Lexical Analysis

One of the lexical aspects introduced in the analysis of the source text concerns the presence of many words and locutions referable to the culinary field (considering the nature of the book examined). Hereunder, a list of the food terms used in the source text will be given, together with their translation into Italian:

- *bakery* > “panificio”;
- *(fruit and veg) barge* > “chiatta del fruttivendolo”, typical Venetian boat where they sell fruit and vegetables;
- *batch* > “partita”;
- *batter* > “pastella”;
- *bowl* > “ciotola” or “piatto fondo”, also translated as “terrina” (mixing bowl);
- *to brown* > “abbrustolire” or “rosolare”;
- *butcher* > “macelleria”;
- *to chop* > “tritare”;
- *clove (of garlic)* > “spicchio”;
- *to coat* > “ricoprire” or “cospargere”;
- *cook* > “cuocere” or “cucinare” as a verb, “cuoco” as a noun;

- *to cube* > “tagliare a cubetti”;
- *cuisine* > “cucina”, intended as cooking style, usually of a particular country or region;
- *to desalt* or *to desalinate* > “desalinizzare”, from which derive the word *desalination* > “desalinizzazione”, which is to remove salt from a product;
- *to deseed* > “togliere i semi”;
- *dish* > “piatto”, intended as type of food;
- *farm* > “frutteto”, “coltivazione” or “fattoria”; here, the translation depended on the context;
- *fishmonger* > “pescivendolo”;
- *to fry* > “friggere”;
- *frying pan* > “padella”;
- *garden* or *allotment* > “orto”;
- *glut* > “quantità eccessiva”;
- *to grate* > “grattugiare”;
- *greengrocer* > “fruttivendolo”;
- *greengrocery* > “frutta e verdura”;
- *ground* > “macinato” or “tritato”;
- *gutted* > “eviscerato”, referring to the innards of the fish;
- *to incorporate* > “incorporare” or “aggiungere”;
- *ingredient* > “ingrediente” or “prodotto”;
- *innards* > “interiora”;
- *kitchen* > “cucina”, room or place where people cook;
- *knob* > “noce”, referring to butter it literally translates as “pezzetto” into Italian, but “noce di burro” is the most commonly used expression;

- *ladleful* > “un mestolo”, intended as a quantity of something, like a stock, a stew, etc.;
- *lid* > “coperchio”;
- *marinated* > “marinato”, soaked in a liquid;
- *market* > “mercato”;
- *mashed* > “purè” or “purea”;
- *meal* > “pasta”, often it has been translated into “cena” or “pranzo”, according to the context;
- *to mince* > “macinare” or “tritare”;
- *oven* > “forno”;
- *to peel* > “pelare” or “sbucciare”;
- *pinch* > “pizzico”, referring to salt or to spices;
- *poached* > “cotto al vapore”;
- *poaching liquid* > “liquido di cottura”;
- *recipe* > “ricetta”;
- *to reduce* > “ridurre”;
- *saucepan* > “casseruola” or “pentola”;
- *to sauté* > “rosolare” or “saltare in padella” as a verb, “rosolato” or “saltato” as a noun (*sauté*, *sautéed*);
- *to scatter* or *to sprinkle* > “cospargere” or “spolverare”;
- *seasoning* > “condimento”, often combined with the verb *adjust* (*adjust the seasoning*), which translates into Italian as “regolare il condimento”;
- *to shell* > “sgranare”, and also *podded* (sgranato), referring to peas;
- *to simmer* > “sobbollire” or “cuocere a fuoco lento”;
- *to sizzle* > “sfrigolare”;
- *to slice* > “affettare”;

- *stallholders* or *traders* > “bancarellisti”;
- *stash* > “scorta”;
- *stew* > “stufato”;
- *to stir* > “mescolare”;
- *stock* > “brodo”;
- *stove* > “fornelli” or “fuochi”;
- *supper* > “cena”;
- *to tear* > “spezzettare”, referring to leaves of basil, sage, etc.;
- *tile* > “sottopentola”;
- *to toast* > “tostare”;
- *tray* > “vassoio”
- *twist* > “una macinata”, referring to pepper (it literally would translate as “una rotazione” or “una torsione”, but since it is associated with a pepper mill, here it was translated as “una macinata di pepe”);
- *vine* > “vite”;
- *vineyard* > “vigneto”;
- *to whip* > “rimescolare”
- *wine jug* > “brocca di vino”, using the term “brocca” instead of the common “caraffa” is based on the cultural background of Venetian restaurants and *osterie*, in which this word is more used;

As already discussed in the lexical analysis of the source text, the Venetian dialect plays an important role in this cookbook. As a matter of fact, Russell Norman reported many Venetian dialect words in order to promote the cultural identity of the city. As Margherita Taffarell (2018: 109) aptly states:

Dialect and cuisine are two manifestations of regionalism in Italy. Italian cuisine, like its language, is both unique and multifaceted. Both represent

a world full of connotations, they are a means of intuitive understanding of the world, a way of reconciling with the outside world, a familiar, intimate, homely means of communication, and an element of identity representation.²¹

In order to comply with the intentions of the author of the original text and to give importance to the cultural identity of Venice in the translation, I decided to keep all the dialectal expressions used in the source text. As a matter of fact, all the words taken from the Venetian dialect refer to its culinary traditions (e.g. *secoe*, *moeche*, *fondo*), its architecture (e.g. *fondamenta*, *rio terà*, *campo*), its customs (e.g. *nizioléti*, *ombra*, *traghetto*), and they contribute to highlight the regional element of this book. Considering this I thought that reporting these dialectal terms in the Italian translation could help to arouse the interest of the target reader in Venetian culture and cuisine.

5.2 Morphosyntactic analysis

This section of the dissertation will analyse the main interventions and the main translation strategies that the translator carried out at the morphosyntactic level, observing the main differences between the two languages.

In the analysis of the source text, it was mentioned that the English syntactic structure tends to be simpler than the Italian one. Nevertheless, the English language has considerable structural constraints which do not correspond to those of the Italian language. Therefore, it is of vital importance to clarify

²¹ My Translation.

which the main ones are. The first I would like to mention is the use of the subject. As Papi (2016: 52) states:

where in English the subject pronoun in the main proposition must necessarily be expressed [...], Italian can rely on verbal inflection, and resorts to the explication of the subject in contrastive contexts or in marked communicative conditions.²²

As a matter of fact, any English sentence requires the subject pronoun to be made explicit, whereas in Italian it is often implied. Here are a few examples:

- “I am sitting with friends outside a restaurant in Giardini” > “Sono seduto con alcuni amici fuori da un ristorante ai Giardini”; the subject pronoun “I” was omitted in the translation;
- “Travelling along the Grand Canal, I know I will be back” > “Mentre percorro il Canal Grande a bordo di un vaporetto, so già che tornerò”; here the two repeated subject pronoun “I” was omitted in Italian.

Another considerable difference between English and Italian concerns the construction of nominal syntagmas. The nominal syntagma in English, in its simple form, is composed of the head (noun or pronoun) and determiners (articles, demonstrative adjectives, numerals, etc.). In complex structures, the nominal head is subject to various types of premodification and postmodification (Papi, 2016: 113). The Italian nominal syntagma has a largely parallel structure; however, there are some important differences between the two systems. The main one concerns the tendentially "regressive" structure of the English nominal syntagma and the tendentially "progressive" structure of the Italian nominal syntagma (Papi, 2016: 114).

²² My translation.

In Italian the modification develops more naturally to the right of the nominal head and is articulated in a more analytical structure through the aid of prepositional syntagmas.²³

Thus, it is evident that most cases of premodification in English are matched by postmodification in the Italian rendering. Here are some of the many examples found in the source text and their respective translation into the target text:

- “choose the *inkiest* cuttlefish or the *plumpest* peaches, the *brightest* sardines or the *purplest* artichokes” > “a scegliere le seppie *con più inchiostro* o le pesche *più grosse*, le sardine *più fresche* o i carciofi *più viola*”; in this case the premodification, in English, concerns the absolute superlatives, which, in the Italian rendering, follow the heads “seppie”, “pesche”, “sardine”, “carciofi”. In this sentence, we can also see how the author of the source text plays with the absolute superlatives, which he creates out of a distinctive feature of the products (“inkiest”, “purplest”);
- “*silhouetted* bell towers on the horizon” > “campanili *che si stagliano* all’orizzonte”; as we can see here the adjective *silhouetted* has been rendered into Italian with a relative clause;
- “*expansive bruised* skies” > “sotto un cielo *vasto e plumbeo*”; in this case the two adjectives, placed before “skies” in English, have been placed after “cielo” in Italian;
- “the *dramatically changing* nature of the markets” > “della natura dei mercati *che muta radicalmente*”;
- “*gingham-aproned* grandmothers” > “le nonne *con il grembiule a quadretti*”; as we can see here, the compound adjective, composed

²³ My translation.

by “gingham” (con tessuto a quadretti) and “aproned”, which is the adjectivalization of the word “apron” (grembiule), has been placed after the head “nonna” in the Italian rendering;

- “Some of the recipes are traditional, some put together from fragmented conversations with *ninety-year-old-grandmothers*” > “In questa raccolta di ricette, alcune sono tradizionali, altre messe insieme da conversazioni frammentarie con delle *nonnine*”; in this case, the English compound adjective has been translated by means of a reduction with “nonnine”.

Another element that can be included in the category of pre-modifications is the so-called 'Saxon genitive', which was already mentioned in the analysis of the source text. In those cases where it was found to be present, it was rendered, in Italian, with a form of postmodification by means of explicit prepositions. A few examples:

- “I absolutely must include their *mother’s* recipe for this or their *grandfather’s* version of that” > “avrei dovuto assolutamente includere la ricetta *della* loro *madre* di questo o la variante *del* loro *nonno* di quell’altro”;
- “I catch the *waiter’s* eye” > “Incrocio lo sguardo *del* *cameriere*”;
- “It is the beginning of a day of celebrations to honour the *city’s* patron saint, St Mark” > “È così che ha inizio una giornata di celebrazioni in onore del santo patrono *della città*, San Marco”.

Premodification, often replaced by postmodification, is only one of the cases of syntactic inversions that have been carried out in the text. Another case of syntactic inversion, for example, concerns the position of adverbs. Adverbs, in English, can have different collocations. They can be placed at the beginning of the sentence, within the sentence or even at the end, depending

on the type of adverb. This rule also applies, in principle, to Italian, but this language prefers to place adverbs at the beginning of sentences. A couple of examples are also given here:

- “and my day will *usually* begin with thoughts of food” > “e, *solitamente*, la mia giornata inizia con riflessioni sul cibo”; in the source text, "usually" is placed after the subject, whereas in Italian it has been placed at the beginning of the sentence with the addition of a comma;
- “I *usually* head 100 metres to Campiello Caboto and buy my produce from Stefano Tommasi” > “Di solito, mi dirigo 100 metri più avanti verso il Campiello Caboto e faccio la spesa da Stefano Tommasi”; also in this case, the adverb, initially placed after the subject, has been put before it in the Italian rendition;
- “One of the great frustrations, *however*, is not being able to buy it all, take it home and cook.” > “*Al contrario*, una delle più grandi frustrazioni è quella di non poter acquistare tutto, portarlo a casa e mettersi ai fornelli”.

However, other types of syntactic inversions of a more general nature have been employed in the target text. Here are the most significant examples:

- “hotels, as convenient and pleasurable as they are, *do not have ensuite kitchens*, so my natural instincts as an amateur chef and jobbing restaurateur are continually thwarted” > “per quanto comodo e piacevole possa essere un soggiorno in hotel, i miei istinti naturali di cuoco amatoriale e di ristoratore vengono continuamente ostacolati, *in quanto le camere non sono dotate di una cucina*”; in order to make the sentence more fluent in the target text, the main clause of the source text has become a causative

clause in Italian, and the consecutive clause of the source text has become the main clause in the translation;

- “my hotel of choice *for several years* has been a small, humble and dilapidated pensione, a guesthouse on the southern tip of Dorsoduro” > “*per diversi anni* ho soggiornato in una piccola, umile e fatiscente pensione, ubicata sulla punta meridionale del quartiere di Dorsoduro”; here again, an inversion has been made, placing the adverbial of time at the beginning of the sentence; as a matter of fact, while in English it is more common to find adverbials of time at the end of the sentence, in Italian it is more natural to place them at the beginning;
- “the enoteca, like many across the city, simply fills your empty plastic water bottles with the wine of your choice *for a few euros*” > “l’*enoteca*, come fanno molte altre in tutta la città, *per pochi euro* vi riempie le bottiglie di plastica vuote con il vino di vostra scelta”;
- “I am often drawn to the market, *as if in the embrace of a powerful tractor beam*, by the promise of a new ingredient, or the delivery of a particularly splendid batch of some familiar ones” > “spesso vengo attirato al mercato dalla speranza di trovare un nuovo ingrediente oppure una partita davvero splendida di prodotti locali, *come se fossi sotto l’influenza di un potente raggio traente*”; the relative clause was placed at the end of the sentence in the target text in order to give more emphasis to the feelings of the author.

Other cases of syntactic inversions that the translator decided to make will be placed in a broader category, which also involved the use of other translation strategies: reformulations and transpositions. In certain cases, the English syntactic construction would have resulted in a rather ineffective

rendering if it had been followed step by step, not only as for the word order, but also more "literally" in the use of certain types of expressions. Therefore, for reasons of use in the target language and greater fluency in the target text, the translator had to intervene and make some adjustment. Below, a list of the most interesting examples, from a translation point of view, which have undergone the greatest changes:

- “having a faded elegance and an *easy charm* that has certainly helped me to feel at one with my surroundings” > “per una sua eleganza sbiadita e un’incantevole semplicità che mi hanno fatto sentire tutt’uno con l’ambiente circostante”; here, in order to convey the message of the author of the source text, the sentence has been radically changed, and the noun “*charm*” has become an adjective in Italian and the adjective “*easy*” was translated as a noun;
- “The latter counts precision, consistency and expertise among its virtues” > “La seconda, invece, annovera tra le sue qualità la precisione, la coerenza e la competenza”; in this case, the partitive complement has been placed immediately after the verb, and the adverb “*invece*” has been added to emphasize the differences with the previous sentence;
- “*It is this oral tradition*, with family favourites passed down verbally from generation to generation, *that I hoped* would form the basis of my exploration, *too*” > “*Speravo proprio che questa tradizione orale*, basata sulle specialità della famiglia tramandate verbalmente di generazione in generazione, *potesse costituire* la base del mio esperimento” > here the subordinate sentence has become the main clause in the target text and the adverb *too* was

- translated as “proprio” in Italian and placed after the verb to give more emphasis to the sentence;
- “*as warm as toast*” > “*piacevolmente calde*”; the English complement that specifies a comparison would be literally translated into Italian as “caldo come un toast”, but here it was translated as “piacevolmente calde”, a colloquial expression in Italian which is also a descriptive equivalent of the English expression;
 - “For fruit and vegetables it’s Stefano, in Campiello Caboto. He employs a couple of cheeky chaps who flirt outrageously with the (mostly) elderly female clientele” > “Per la frutta e la verdura, in Campiello Camboto, c’è Stefano, che si avvale della sfrontatezza di un paio di ragazzi, che sono soliti flirtare in modo scandaloso con la clientela femminile, per lo più anziana”; in this case, the translator decided to combine the two separate sentences of the source text, to make one single sentence in the target text. In order to do so, the translator removed the pronoun “*he*” and the period, and he created a relative clause in the target text;
 - “I bought two kilos on the spot without much of an idea what I was going to do with them. I needn’t have worried” > “Ne acquistai subito due chili senza avere la minima idea di cosa farne, ma non mi sarei dovuto preoccupare”;
 - “And there’s the silent, brooding chap who finds shade to set up his table where he decapitates, disembowels and butterflies one tiny sardine after another, using only his thumbnails, neatly laying them out on a sheet in front of him, his hands and forearms drenched in blood up to the elbow” > “Poi c’è il tizio silenzioso e pensieroso che cerca uno spazio all’ombra per allestire il suo

banco. Una volta trovato, decapita, sventra e apre a ventaglio una piccola sardina dopo l'altra, usando solo le unghie dei pollici per poi disporre accuratamente i pesci su un foglio davanti a sé, con le mani e gli avambracci imbrattati di sangue fino al gomito”; in this case, the translator has divided the sentence of the source text into two different sentences in the target text, in order to give a pause in this description of the fish cleaning process;

- “*I sense unfinished business*” > “Ho la sensazione di aver lasciato qualcosa di incompiuto”; here, the lexical gap has been replaced by a grammatical structure.

By analysing the above examples, which represent some of the most complicated passages to translate, the main strategies adopted by the translator in the rendering were introduced. In addition to the syntactic inversions, the main types of procedures carried out, thus, concern: expansions, reductions, transpositions and modulations. We will see below in more detail what they consist of, listing more specific examples for each category.

Expansion consists in the insertion, in the target text, of clarifications which are not contained in the source text, but which are necessary to clarify its meaning or to make it more fluent. Here are the most interesting cases:

- “The apartment is humble and sparsely furnished but *has* a glorious terrazzo floor, bare brick walls in the kitchen” > “L'appartamento è umile e arredato in modo spartano, ma *può vantare* un magnifico pavimento in graniglia, muri di mattoni a vista in cucina”; in this case, the verb *to have* was translated as “può vantare” to emphasize the contrast with the main sentence in the target text;

- “sunlight *glinting*” > “e lo *scintillio* del sole *sulla superficie dell’acqua*”; this expansion was required in order to make the sentence clear in the target text;
- “the food philosophy is the same: *less is more*” > “la filosofia culinaria è la stessa: la ricerca della semplicità, o come si direbbe in inglese, “*less is more*”” > in this case, the translator decided to report this English expression in the target text, but he added an explanation in order to make the Italian audience understand it;
- “(Schrödinger’s directions?)” > “(indicazioni del gatto di Schrödinger?)”.

The opposite category of intervention to expansions is that of reductions. Reductions consist, as the word itself suggests, in a translation which, for reasons of use in the target language or greater fluency in the target text, tends to use fewer words than its source version. Due to the fact that this book was an Italian regional cookbook, meant for an English audience, this procedure has been employed in many occasions during the translation. As a matter of fact, some of the explanations given by the author of the source text, were not required in the target text. Also in this case, the most interesting reductions will be analysed:

- “If you ask for a “latte” you’ll get a glass of milk”; in this case, the sentence was removed from the target text, since the Italian audience knows this fact;
- “It’s also a dairy, a latteria” > “Tra le altre cose è anche una latteria”; also in this case, the term “*dairy*” was not reported in the target text in order to avoid repeating the word “latteria”;

- “is one of my favourite alimentari (the Italian word for convenience store)” > “si trova uno dei miei alimentari preferiti”; the explanations in brackets is omitted in the target text;
- “I have rented a small apartment in a *narrow street*” > “Ho affittato un piccolo appartamento situato in una *calletta*”; here, I decided to render the “*narrow street*” with the correspondent Venetian dialect term, which is *calletta*;
- “Traditionally, castradina is made with castrated lamb, *but since that’s not always available outside of Italy* you could try it with hogget” > “Secondo la tradizione, la castradina è fatta con l’agnello castrato, *ma se non fosse possibile procurarselo*, si può provare con il montone”; in this case, the explanation of the author of the source text “*since that’s not always available outside of Italy*” was omitted in the translated text, since the Italian audience is not interested in this information.

The intervention category of modulation will now be analysed. Modulation is a translation procedure consisting of a change of perspective from the source text to the target text, usually for reasons of usage in the target language. This change can be of different types.

From negative to affirmative form:

- “with *no* sense of disloyalty *nor* any less pride” > “senza provocare *alcun* senso di tradimento delle proprie tradizioni *o* di mancanza di orgoglio”;
- “That sense of celebration and rebirth is *nowhere* more evident than in the markets, in the ingredients, in recipes and in the city’s home cooking” > “Questo senso di celebrazione e rinascita è *tanto* più evidente nei mercati, negli ingredienti, nelle ricette e nella cucina

casalinga della città”; here, the negative “*nowhere*” has been rendered with an intensifier in the target text.

From affirmative to negative form:

- “This *has only served* to emphasize the frustration” > “Questo, ovviamente, *non ha fatto altro* che intensificare la mia frustrazione”;
- “*There is little point* in asking a Venetian for directions anyway” > “Ad ogni modo, *non avrebbe molto senso* chiedere indicazioni ai veneziani”.

Exchange of subjects:

- “Generally speaking, it is *the peasant tradition* of simplicity that pervades and persists” > “In genere, *la semplicità* della tradizione contadina è particolarmente diffusa e persistente”;
- “*I was told* that the following afternoon there would be some sort of open-air feast” > “*mi dissero* che il pomeriggio seguente ci sarebbe stata una specie di festa all’aperto”; in this case, the subject of the source text sentence is “*I*”, whereas in the target text is “they”, which is implied.

One particular type of intervention carried out in this field concerns the passage, in the verb tenses, from the English passive form to the Italian active form. This, too, is obviously an intervention made by the translator for reasons of use in the target language; although, in fact, in Italian the use of the passive form is widespread, in some cases, it is more appropriate to use the active form. Here are some examples:

- “*They were* perfect briefly *sautéd* with olive oil, salt, garlic and chopped parsley” > “Semplicemente saltate con un po’ di olio

- d'oliva, sale, aglio e prezzemolo tritato, *si sono rivelate perfette*"; here the passive verb was rendered in Italian with an impersonal form to give more fluency to the sentence;
- "only a small leap of imagination *is required* to picture it as it once was" > "con un pizzico di fantasia lo *si può* immaginare com'era una volta"; also in this case, the passive form was rendered in Italian with an impersonal verb;
 - "*I was told* that the following afternoon there would be some sort of open-air feast" > "*mi dissero* che il pomeriggio seguente ci sarebbe stata una specie di festa all'aperto".

The last category of interventions that will be analysed is that of transpositions. Transposition or recategorisation consists in a change, from the source text to the target text, of grammatical category. There have been countless interventions of this type. Here are some examples of the most interesting ones:

- "*over a simple supper of risotto*" > "*mentre assaporavo* per cena un semplice risotto"; from prepositional phrase to temporal subordinate sentence to give more fluency;
- "*I have always had a preference*" > "*ho sempre preferito*"; here the direct object has been rendered as a predicative verb;
- "Along with the honesty you find in a domestic kitchen, you will often discover a startling absence of written recipes" > "L'onestà che si trova nella cucina domestica spesso si associa sorprendentemente all'assenza di ricette scritte"; in this case, the adjective *startling* has become an adverb in order to make the sentence more fluent in the target text;

- “located close to where the Sant’Anna Canal *starts*” > “situato in prossimità dell’*inizio* del canale di Sant’Anna”; from a source text verb to an adverbial of place in the target text.

After analysing the main categories of interventions through which the translator has made the appropriate changes in the target text, another crucial point of morphosyntactic analysis will now be discussed: verb tenses. As regards verb tenses, as seen in the analysis of the source text, the prevailing tenses in the book are past simple and present simple. As already mentioned, if the past simple refers to actions that began, lasted and ended in the past, the simple present refers to habits or things that happen regularly and for things that are generally true or for permanent situations. The translation of these two verb tenses did not cause many difficulties to the translator. As a matter of fact, the simple past was often rendered into Italian with “imperfetto” or with “passato prossimo”, and in some occasions with conditional or subjunctive. As far as the simple present is concerned, as already mentioned in the analysis of the source text, it is mostly used as historic present in order to tell stories and habits of the Venetian way of life. Here are a few examples of both the simple present and the simple past used in the source text and their respective translation in the target text:

- “it *transpires* that some locals believe recipes made famous in other regions *were* originally *stolen* from Venice in the first place” > “sembra che alcuni veneziani siano convinti del fatto che le ricette divenute famose in altre regioni *siano state* originariamente *rubate* a Venezia”; in this case, the passive simple past in the source text was translated as a passive past subjunctive in the target text;
- “*There is little point* in asking a Venetian for directions anyway” > “Ad ogni modo, *non avrebbe molto senso* chiedere indicazioni a un

veneziano”; here, the simple present of the source text was translated into a conditional in Italian, in order to connect the meaning of this sentence with the following: “Muovono sempre una mano in maniera vaga di fronte a sè e dicono: “Sempre dritto””.

So far, the main differences in the use of verb tenses between English and Italian have been analysed; now, I would like to mention some particular kinds of changes that the translator had to make in this field. The first one concerns a subject which had already been introduced in the analysis of the source text: the gerund. As a matter of fact, the gerund has a rather versatile use in English, since it is often used as a connection between one sentence and another, mainly creating links of subordination (which sometimes, however, in Italian, can correspond to links of co-ordination). This "inflated" use of the gerund in English is lacking in the Italian language. Therefore, some examples of the use of the gerund in English and the different ways in which the translator has rendered it in Italian will be presented below:

- “as it once was, gondolas *sailing* past, sunlight *glinting*” > “com’era una volta: con le gondole che lo *percorrevano* e lo *scintillio* del sole sulla superficie dell’acqua”; in the source text the gerund refers to a progressive action in the past, and in the target text was rendered with an imperfect verb, in the case of *sailing*, and with a noun in the case of *glinting*;
- “At other times, the arrow will have been crossed out and a new one graffiti-ed in its place *poiting* somewhere else entirely” > “Altre volte, si può trovare una freccia cancellata e sostituita da un’altra, magari pitturata sul muro, che punta da tutt’altra parte”; here, the gerund has been rendered with a relative clause in the target text;

- “Finally, after the construction of the ironically named Liberty Bridge, *connecting* the island of Venice to mainland Italy in the middle of the nineteenth century” > “Infine, in seguito alla costruzione, intorno alla metà del XIX secolo, del Ponte della Libertà (così denominato ironicamente), che collega l’isola di Venezia alla terraferma italiana”;
- “the rider stands, facing forwards, with two long oars, practising the local rowing technique know as the voga” > “il conducente sta in piedi con la faccia rivolta in avanti e pratica, con due lunghi remi, la tecnica tradizionale di canottaggio nota come “voga”; in this case, the gerund “*facing*” was rendered with an adverb of manner in the target text, and the gerund “*practising*”, translated as an indicative present, introduces a coordinate clause in Italian ;
- “*Cracking* eggs into a well made of flour and then *bringing* the flour in the middle with a fork” > “*Rompere* le uova in una fontana di farina per poi *portarla* verso il centro con una forchetta”; here, the gerund was translated as an infinitive present in the target text;
- “He confessed to abducting, murdering, mutilating and cooking several children” > “Confessò di aver rapito, ucciso, mutilato e cucinato diversi bambini”; here, the gerund was rendered with the Italian past participle;
- “Additionally, *knowing* what I did” > “Inoltre, *dato che* ero a conoscenza”; in this case, the gerund was rendered with a causative clause.

Another element, typical of the English structure of the sentence, that will be analysed here is the use of the impersonal *You* to refer to an unspecified person. This corresponds to the Italian construction with the impersonal “si”

and is formed by the pronoun “si”, followed by the third person singular of the intransitive verb. Here are a couple of examples:

- “*You can still see the shape of the original waterway*” > “*Si può ancora vedere la forma del corso d’acqua originale*”;
- “*even when you are able to dodge the tourists, traders and shoppers*” > “*anche quando si riesce a schivare turisti, commercianti e acquirenti*”.

The last point of the morphosyntactic analysis that we will explore concerns punctuation. The main differences found, between Italian and English, in the use of punctuation concern the use of commas and inverted commas. First of all, as far as commas are concerned, we can say that, in English as in Italian, they are normally used to separate subordinate sentences and coordinate sentences from each other, or subordinate sentences from coordinate sentences. The difference is, however, that in Italian it is often preferable to omit the comma before the conjunctions "and" and "but", while in English it would be a mistake not to put it before the conjunctions "and" and "but", if the latter introduce a sentence of their own. In translating the source text, the translator has noticed that some periods were too long, or that some short sentences could be put together in order to make the reading more fluent for the target reader. Here are a few examples of the change that was made in the rendering of the target text:

- “*For fruit and vegetables it’s Stefano, in Campiello Caboto. He employs a couple of cheeky chaps who flirt outrageously with the (mostly) elderly female clientele*” > “*Per la frutta e la verdura, in Campiello Camboto, c’è Stefano, che si avvale della sfrontatezza di un paio di ragazzi, che sono soliti flirtare in modo scandaloso con la clientela femminile, per lo più anziana*”;

- “And there’s the silent, brooding chap who finds shade to set up his table where he decapitates, disembowels and butterflies one tiny sardine after another, using only his thumbnails, neatly laying them out on a sheet in front of him, his hands and forearms drenched in blood up to the elbow” > “Poi c’è il tizio silenzioso e pensieroso che cerca uno spazio all’ombra per allestire il suo banco. Una volta trovato, decapita, sventra e apre a ventaglio una piccola sardina dopo l’altra, usando solo le unghie dei pollici per poi disporre accuratamente i pesci su un foglio davanti a sé, con le mani e gli avambracci imbrattati di sangue fino al gomito”;
 - “I am able to begin the serious business of stalking my neighbours” > “posso dedicarmi al lavoro serio: il pedinamento dei miei vicini”;
- here, the colon was added in the target text in order to give more emphasis to the action;
- “only a small leap of imagination is required to picture it as it once was, gondolas sailing past, sunlight glinting” > “con un pizzico di fantasia lo si può immaginare com’era una volta: con le gondole che lo percorrevano e lo scintillio del sole sulla superficie dell’acqua”;
- in this case, the colon introduces a sentence that explain what was told previously;

As far as inverted commas are concerned, it can be said that usually, in Italian, main quotations are introduced by double inverted commas, secondary quotations (within other quotations) by single inverted commas. On the contrary, in English the rule varies according to the style of reference, which can be British or American, and in this case, the author of the source text follows the British rules (single inverted commas for quotation). Here an example will be presented:

-'Mi scusi, signora, cosa farai con questi ingredienti?' > "Mi scusi, signora, cosa farai con questi ingredienti?";

5.3 Stylistic analysis

The last point of the analysis of the target text is its stylistic analysis. In the analysis carried out on the style of the source text, it was pointed out that the predominant register is informal with traits of colloquial language. In addition, the book is at times informative, at times expressive and at times persuasive. The means used by the author to give this personal touch to his book are figures of speech, idiomatic and colloquial expressions. Therefore, in this section, these linguistic aspects that have so far been left unexplored will be analysed. The rhetorical figures, which have led to rather significant problems from a translation point of view, are the first to be discussed.

With regard to the problem of the translation of metaphors, Newmark's theory is particularly explanatory:

Usually, only the more common words have connotations but, at a pinch, any word can be a metaphor, and its sense has to be teased only by matching its primary meaning against its linguistic, situational and cultural contexts. (Newmark, 1988: 106)

Therefore, according to Newmark, situational, cultural and linguistic contexts are what makes a metaphor comprehensible in a language, but sometimes, as far as rendering is concerned, if necessary, any word can be a metaphor, as long as it comes as close as possible to the "primary meaning" of the original expression. Thus, according to this theory, finding alternative solutions in the rendering of a given metaphor in a translation may not only

be appropriate, but essential. Here some examples of how the translator has rendered the metaphors in the target texts:

- “Additionally, knowing what I did about the way Venetians *celebrate* seasonal ingredients and the dramatically changing nature of the markets, month to month” > “Inoltre, dato che ero a conoscenza *dell’importanza che i veneziani conferiscono* agli ingredienti stagionali e della natura dei mercati, che muta radicalmente mese dopo mese”; in this case, the metaphor “*celebrate*” is used to emphasize the importance of seasonal ingredients in the Venetian cuisine. At first, the translator tried to render the metaphor in the target text as: “Inoltre, dato che ero a conoscenza del modo in cui I veneziani *trattano* gli ingredienti stagionali”, but then he realized that in this sentence, the sense of celebration of the ingredients had been lost in translating. Thus, he decided to work with the target audience in mind, aiming for a fluent and more effective delivery of the message. And this is precisely the concept of “primary meaning” expressed by Newmark: the important thing is that the intention of the message is clear, not so much its form;
- “But the reason this place is such *a mecca*” > “Ma il motivo per cui questo posto è una vera e propria *mecca*”; the meaning of this metaphor, which refers to the fact that a place is very popular, is the same both in English and in Italian, thus, the translator did not need to find an alternative for this figure of speech.

Another figure of speech found in the source text is the assonance, as in the case of: “Venice has, *over* the centuries, *occupied* and been *occupied*”, which

was rendered in the target text with another assonance: “Venezia, nel *corso* dei secoli, ha *conquistato* ed è stata *conquistata*”.

Metonymy was also found in the source text: “the birthplace of Antonio Vivaldi”, which was used to refer to Venice. This figure of speech was maintained in the target text, since the author makes an ironic comparison with Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons*: “Inoltre, mi è sembrato davvero appropriato che il luogo di nascita di Antonio Vivaldi fosse anche lo scenario delle mie *Quattro Stagioni*”.

The last figure of speech that I would like to mention is the paradox “*less is more*”, since it is the only loan expression used in the target text. The translator decided not to translate this locution, because this concept, that originated from the world of architecture, now is widely used in all fields, and in many languages, to indicate that what is of smaller quantity, could be of higher quality. In this case, the expression refers to the Italian philosophy of cooking with few quality ingredients. However, the translator added an explanation of this expression in the target text to make it more comprehensible to the Italian audience.

Another stylistic feature that I would like to mention here is the use of italics, which was employed by the author of the source text to give emphasis or to report Venetian dialect and Italian terms. As a matter of fact, the translator decided to keep this feature in the target text for Venetian dialect words and to give emphasis to the same parts of the original text. Here a few examples of how italics has been used:

- “would collar me and tell me I absolutely *must* include their mother’s recipe for *this* or their grandfather’s version of *that*” > “mi hanno approcciato e mi hanno detto che avrei dovuto

assolutamente includere la ricetta della loro madre di *questo* o la variante del loro nonno di *quell'altro*”;

- “I have rented a small apartment in a narrow street” > “Ho affittato un piccolo appartamento situato in una *calletta*”; in this case, the translator decided to render “narrow street” with the Venetian word equivalent “*calletta*”;
- “Further afield are a small supermarket, a couple of spritz bars and the local communist club” > “Poco più lontano ci sono un piccolo supermercato, un paio di *bàcari* e il locale circolo comunista”; also in this case, the expression “spritz bars” was rendered with the Venetian dialect term “*bàcari*”. Here, I would also like to mention that the words “*bacàri*” and “*rio terà*” was written with the correct Venetian spelling, as opposed to how the author of the source text had written them: “*bacaro*”, “*rio terra*”.

In addition to the rhetorical figures, in the source text, the presence of many idiomatic expressions was also observed, among which many phrasal verbs. Idioms are an important aspect from a stylistic point of view, since they constitute some of the elements that most distinguish the colloquial style of the text (it would be difficult, for example, to find phrasal verbs in an academic text). Here some cases of idiomatic expressions that have been found in the text and their translation are presented:

- “choose the *inkiest* cuttlefish or the plumpest peaches, the brightest sardines or the purplest artichokes” > “a scegliere le seppie *con più inchiostro* o le pesche più grosse, le sardine più fresche o i carciofi più viola”; here, the adjective referring to the cuttlefish was rendered as a complement of quality in the target text;

- “Additionally, *knowing what I did*” > “Inoltre, *dato che ero a conoscenza*”; in this case, this idiomatic expression was rendered as a causative clause in Italian;
- “*As far as I can tell*, this dish is eaten only once a year” > “Per quanto ne so”; here the literal translation would be “distante tanto quanto io possa dire”, which has no meaning in Italian. Therefore, the translator decided to render it as it was written “*as much as I now*” in the source text;
- “But the reason this place is such a *mecca*” > “Ma il motivo per cui questo posto è una vera e propria *mecca*”; in this case, the expression is very similar in Italian, and the translator emphasize it a little more in the target text;
- “The shop is a tiny *time capsule*” > “Il negozio è una piccola *capsula del tempo*”; also in this case, the expression has the same meaning in the source text and in the target text, that is a container storing a selection of objects chosen as being typical of the present time, buried for discovery in the future. Here it indicates that the shop is so antiquated that when you go there it feels as going back in time;
- “He employs a couple of *cheeky chaps*” > “si avvale della *sfrontatezza di un paio di ragazzi*”; in this case, there is an expression belonging to the British and Australian slang, that means “a cheeky man or boy, especially one who is likeable, entertaining or charismatic”²⁴. In Italian the adjective “*cheeky*” was rendered with the noun “*sfrontatezza*” and “*chaps*”, which is the shortened form of “*chappies*”, as “*ragazzi*”;

²⁴ https://www.lexico.com/definition/cheeky_chappie (last accessed 24 September 2021)

- “I experienced quite a commotion one early spring day, 8 March, *as it happens*” > “In uno dei primi giorni di primavera, l’8 marzo *per l’esattezza*, [...], ho provato una certa eccitazione”; this expression could have been translated into Italian as “di fatto” or “si dà il caso”, but probably the intention of the author of the source text is to specify the date, and this two translations did not render this idea. Thus, the translator chose to use the expression “per l’esattezza” in order to convey the message of the source text in the target text;
- “they are rare and *eye-wateringly* expensive” > “sono rare e *incredibilmente* costose”; here the adjective “*eye-wateringly*” means that they are so expensive that it could make you cry, but, since there is no such expression in Italian, the translator rendered it with the adverb “incredibilmente”;
- “I bought two kilos *on the spot*” > “Ne acquistai *subito* due chili”;
- “Much better to occasionally *go off-piste* and surprise yourself” > “Di tanto in tanto, è molto meglio *uscire dalle rotte prestabilite* e lasciarsi sorprendere”; in this case, the expression “*go off-piste*”, which usually refers to skiing off the regular runs, means “to do something different to what is normal or expected”²⁵ and it was rendered with an equivalent Italian expression in the target text;
- “Later, over a simple supper of risotto in a Venetian friend’s kitchen, I had a bit of an *epiphany*” > “Poco più tardi, mentre assaporavo un semplice piatto di risotto a casa di un amico veneziano, ho avuto una sorta di *illuminazione*”; here, the term

²⁵ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/go-off-piste> (last accessed on 25 September 2021).

“*epiphany*” was translated as “illuminazione”, since the word “epifania” is not commonly used in Italian.

Concluding the list of idioms, special attention will be paid to some examples of phrasal verbs found in the source text and how they have been translated:

- “if I were to *take on* that challenge” > “se *avessi accettato* la sfida”
- “Not only do they *get away with it*” > “Non solo riescono sempre a spuntarla”; here the phrasal verb means “not be punished”, but it was rendered with a similar colloquial expression in the target text;
- “once they *got wind of* my project” > “una volta *appreso* del mio progetto”; here the meaning of the phrasal verb (hear rumors of) has been translated as “appreso” into Italian by means of a reduction;
- “the only sensible way to *cope with* the abundance of peas, artichoke and chard at that time of year” > “l'unico modo sensato di *far fronte* all'abbondanza di piselli, carciofi e bietole in quel periodo dell'anno” in this case, the phrasal verb is a synonym of “handle” (deal with), and is used in the source text to exaggerate the idea of the abundance of vegetables during the spring. For this reason, it was rendered with a similar expression, that could convey the same message, in the target text;
- “There's big Tomas, a broad-shouldered fellow who spends hours every day *cutting* the leaves *from* artichokes, *trimming* the stalk *back* and *carving out* the heart, or *fondo*” > “C'è il gigante Tomas, un personaggio imponente che ogni giorno passa ore a *tagliare* le foglie dei carciofi, *rifilarne* il gambo ed *estrarne* il cuore, detto anche *fondo*”; here the phrasal verb “*trimming back*” was rendered

as “rifilare” (meaning to refine the stalk) and “*carving out*” as “estrarre” (meaning to extract the heart).

As observed, many of these idiomatic expressions represent colloquial forms and are an important element to take into account with regard to style. In addition, we can observe how different forms have been used to translate all these types of expressions. The reason behind this is that, as Papi (2016) states:

Repetition is not always [...] artistically motivated and therefore usable as a cohesive tool. The search for naturalness leads to translation choices of variation. (Papi, 2016: 143)

Not being always capable of finding the correct correspondent for some colloquial expressions in two different languages, the translator should adapt the source text to his needs in order to obtain the best possible solution, also considering the target reader’s expectation. This concept of "negotiation" is expressed thoroughly in an article by Bassnet (2005), which deals with a dichotomy that can be found very often in the translating process: acculturation and foreignisation. Here what the author writes on this subject is reported:

The highest form, it could be said, is neither acculturation nor foreignisation, but rather a process of total absorption, whereby the foreign text is reconstituted in another language in such a way that, ideally, there is perfect harmony of identity between the two. (Bassnett, 2005: 121)

What is important, as Bassnet writes, is not so much that one form is preferred to another, but that a process of "total assimilation" takes place, so that there is a "harmony of identity" between the version of the source text and the version of the target text. This, then, was the goal the translator set himself. Between acculturation and alienation, however, it can be said that,

in general, the translator opted for acculturation. Acculturation, in fact, consists of a rendering that focuses more on the target culture than on the source culture, the opposite process to alienation, which, on the contrary, “alienates” in order to better accommodate the source culture.

6. Conclusion

As already stated in the introduction, the choice of translating an English book that deals with an Italian cookery book is quite unusual. As a matter of fact, since the translator already knew the target culture, which was the same as that on which the source text is based, the translation process was easier in comparison with a possible translation of a text based on British cuisine. Nevertheless, I thought that it could be interesting to see how an Englishman managed to relate with the traditions, customs and people of the city of Venice. In addition, the main purpose of this translation is to offer the Italian audience a book that deals with the cultural identity and authenticity of the Venetian region, so that the target readers may get to know this culture. As a matter of fact, similarly to the original book, where the author operates a kind of “translation” of the Venetian culture for the English audience, I attempted to carry out the same operation for a possible Italian reader. However, in the process, I have tried to comply with the intentions of Russell Norman and render the feelings that Venice aroused in him, and at the same time, I made several changes to make the target text captivating for the Italian audience.

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