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ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA

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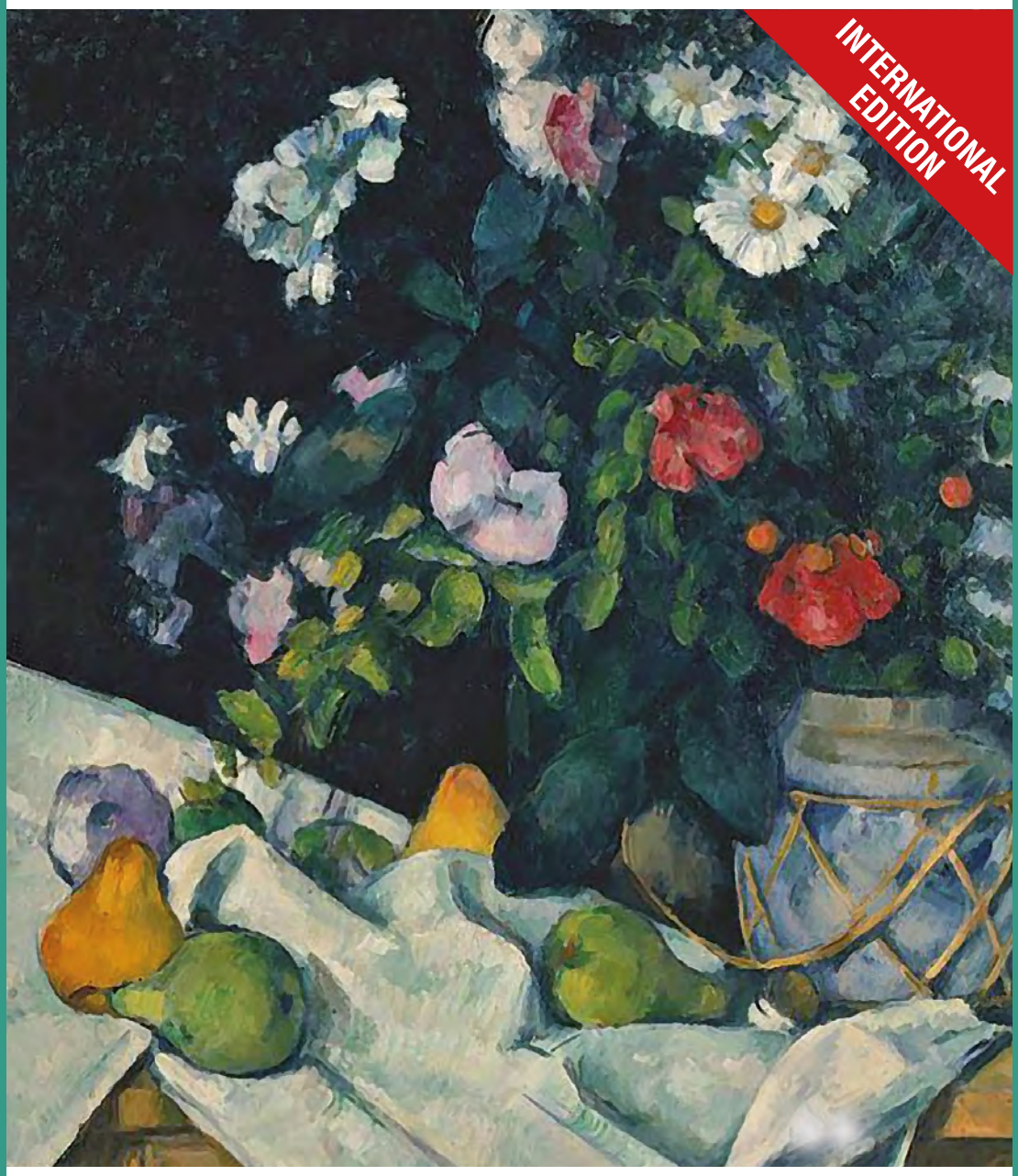

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On the cover: *Graphic elaboration of* Still Life with Flowers and Fruit *(ca. 1890) by Paul Cézanne; Alte Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin*

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Waiter! Excuse me!

by Paolo Petroni
President of the Academy

Service is becoming a real problem for many restaurants.

Last century, during the Sixties, I would occasionally dine in English restaurants while visiting distant relatives in London. To avoid linguistic embarrassment, I would prepare an array of common phrases to deploy in public venues, having learnt them by rote from the phrase books then available. However, I eventually realised that this was unnecessary, since nearly all waiters were Italian. A rare exception was represented by that legendary temple of roast beef, Simpson's-in-the-Strand. My relatives explained that **Englishmen no longer worked as waiters**. In today's London, Italians likewise no longer work as waiters, but are instead the owners of excellent restaurants, yielding their erstwhile positions to other nationalities.

Service personnel often hails from other countries, and is not well acquainted with dishes and ingredients

The same phenomenon has also been occurring in Italy in recent years. Service workers frequently come from other countries, and, however well-intentioned, **are not always well-versed in the nuances of our language** or even intimately familiar with the ingredients and the dishes

that they are tasked with serving. The problem, though, is broader and more serious. It may be comprehensible that by now such figures as the maître d'hôtel, the chef de rang and the commis, each with precisely delineated responsibilities, have somewhat fallen out of fashion; but the haphazard service found in most restaurants today is unconscionable.

Restaurant owners do not consider service important

Today's restaurant mainstays are waiters who invariably ask "who ordered the spaghetti?" even while serving a table for two; waiters fixedly staring at the floor or into space to avoid being ambushed with some irritating request; tables abandoned for aeons with diners facing empty plates; interminable minutes of anxiously awaiting some water, salt or pepper, which arrives when the food is already finished; nobody monitoring the room; each dish served by a different waiter; and piecemeal service, often leaving one diner foodless at a group table. **The basic rules of good service**, taught in all professional restaurant schools, **are seraphically ignored**. One wonders what has become of all the 'front-of-house' graduates churned out by hotel schools - even though common sense and a modicum of experience should often be sufficient. Evidently, restaurateurs do not consider service important, viewing it as an area for maximum cost-cutting. But this is ill-advised. Restaurant guides only report on the dishes prepared by the cooks; yet **we should all be more concerned with how these dishes are served**. The kitchen and the front of house are inseparable, but all too often, in Italy, the dining hall is left forlorn.

Orio Vergani Prize
for Antonella Clerici

by Silvia De Lorenzo

She brought cooking to television with simplicity, grace and professionalism.

Hosting *La Prova del Cuoco* (the Italian *Ready Steady Cook*), she was already a pioneer of televised cooking programmes eighteen years ago. Antonella Clerici achieved this with good taste and verve to help those who, like her mother, asked themselves: "what should I cook for lunch?" What she envisaged at the time was **a programme providing simple recipes** accompanied by a wine to complement the entire meal, **as occurs in families**. Despite the initial difficulty in gaining support for a programme dedicated to cooking, ratings demonstrated that audiences appreciate cheerful simplicity.
During the ceremony in the Principe di Savoia Hotel in Milan, Clerici competently and eagerly answered questions from journalists and from Paolo Petroni, who had just given her the certificate for the prize named after the Academy's founder. The meeting was co-hosted by the Milanese Delegates **Dino Betti van der Noot** (Milan) and **Giovanni Spezia** (Milano Navigli).

Life should enter the kitchen through conversation or a shared glass of wine

Antonella loves talking about cooking, declaring herself a gourmet eater first and foremost, but revealing two aces up her sleeve (whose secrets she partly disclosed), namely home-cooked risotto and *vitel tonné* (Piedmontese veal with tuna sauce). She has retained her enjoyment of cooking whatever is in the fridge, and when she does this (for friends and relatives), "life should enter the kitchen" in the form of conversation or a glass of wine shared with whomever is around. This, she recalls, is the spirit animating the programme that she presented for many years, recruiting **Anna Moroni**, the classic home cook (but with her own distinctive voice) and **Beppe Bigazzi** (a master to whom she owes much) as collaborators. She emphasised how much she learned from Bigazzi, creator of the 'zero food mile' concept, with his vast network of artisans: a cultivator

Antonella Clerici between Roberto Ariani and Paolo Petroni

A moment during the press conference

Antonella Clerici with Paolo Petroni

of our traditions, able to teach consumers, through his books and beyond, how to combine flavour, health and affordability. The journalists included **Toni Sarcina**, founder of the food culture centre Altopalato (literally 'exalted palate'), and **Fiammetta Fadda** from *Panorama* magazine, who asked Antonella whether she had observed any changing tastes from her 'vantage point'. **"Today there's greater curiosity in the food world: a hunger for discovery"**, answered Antonella,

Beppe Bigazzi

though noting the necessity to distinguish between self-serving fads and traditions which never get old because they constantly renew themselves. She animatedly pointed out that **a television presenter's role also includes becoming well acquainted with new trends**, and suggested always trusting experts, real ones, in matters of health, food choices and dietary regimens.

She also tackled the evolution of cooking programmes, which are often only a pretext for spectacle. With her genial manner, she pointed out the differences between these and the spirit of the programme that, among others, made her famous: each episode was recorded live and was characterised by spontaneity, good cheer and often improvisation as well as the simplicity of home-cooking recipes. Without a script, it was possible to establish an informal rapport with the audience, using everyday life as inspiration.

Finally, she answered the question about her restaurant habits by explaining that **she likes rustic restaurants which use the produce of their surrounding territory** to create local specialities, and she prefers choosing whatever takes her fancy rather than ordering 'tasting menus'. On that note, Paolo Petroni pointed out how such views fit the Academy's philosophy. The prize was well-deserved, and its recipient had already chosen where to display it: in her studio, "among my fondest memories".

Live and unscripted shows created an intimate rapport with the audience

The event was followed by a meal created by the hotel's kitchen crew guided by chef Stefano Benedetti. Antonella Clerici, with her partner Vittorio Garrone, gave hints about future plans and her desire for new challenges.

Silvia De Lorenzo

The meal in the hotel Principe di Savoia

The menu

Food in musicals

by Sara Venturino
Musicologist, food writer

Unexpected 'stage prop' to tell stories and flesh out characters and settings, real or imagined.

Around 1825, the brilliant French intellectual and food scholar **Anthèlme Brillat-Savarin** wrote an essay expressing the famous concept "Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are" - also articulated by the German philosopher **Ludwig Feuerbach** in his "Man is what he eats" - intending to explain how behaviour at table is profoundly influenced by one's environment, social class, ethnicity or religion. The concept was revisited in the 1970s by the French sociologist **Pierre Bourdieu**.
Recipes, cooking methods and ingredients pass down the generations, communicating culture and traditions. What better means than food, then, to tell stories and flesh out characters and settings, whether real or imagined?
The many authors and lyricists of the great Broadway musicals must have considered it a godsend: such a powerful, flexible tool, able to make audiences relate and empathise as this theatrical genre requires.
Perusing last century's musical theatre literature, one finds many musicals which use food as an unexpected 'stage prop', deploying it for various means: to set the story in a precise time and place; denote characters' cultural background; identify groups and ethnicities; exploit stereotypes to generate critique and reflection; define social class relations; frame specific historical periods; or even seed love between two characters.
In *Pacific Overtures*, for example, **food catapults the audience into isolationist, pre-colonial Japan in the 1850s**: dialogues and settings illustrate the local agricultural and farming practices of the time, the historical role of rice (so important that it was even used for paying taxes), and the rituals involving tea.

A scene from the musical
How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying

The dialogues in Pacific Overtures *display the role of rice and the rituals involving tea*

The arrival of American visitors, bearing unknown foods, would interrupt the country's isolation, sparking a new evolutionary direction in the Japanese diet from 1868 onwards. In this case, food symbolises an intercultural encounter and the historical change due to new influences.
Some musicals are strongly place-bound, and in such cases food can **describe settings and lifestyles**, and flesh out characters and professions. This happens

A scene from the musical Fiddler on the Roof

with such productions as *Oklahoma!*, *State Fair*, and *Carousel*: in this last, in particular, **the atmosphere of Maine and its typical cuisine pervade the entire script**, culminating in the great scene of the clam bake in which the entire town participates. The show itself, like many others in fact, was conceived by its authors during a Theatre Guild meal, and required **extensive research into local cuisine and its cookbooks**, whence derived many of the song lyrics. And then there is *The Most Happy Fella*, set in the Californian wine region of Napa Valley and structured as a veritable feast for the senses, with detailed descriptions of wines and foods and a crucial wedding scene (rendered by the Italian word *Sposalizio*!) and the song "Abbondanza", recounting the nuptial banquet. Tony, the protagonist, is from southern Italy: Italian songs are sung and the typical foods of our traditions are declaimed as if they were poems. And speaking of gastronomic poetry, in this musical **the passage of time is described through the changing colours of grapes and the growth of grapevines**.

Detailed descriptions of wines and foods culminate in a wedding banquet

Food can also disclose a **character's ethnic or social origin**, as with **Tevye** in *Fiddler on the Roof*, immediately identifiable as a Jew in a Russian village by the rules of kosher food and the rituals of Shabbat dinner, or **Hud** in *Hair*, a man of colour who refuses to be stereotyped through the foods that whites believe he must surely eat and enjoy.

In some musicals, food signals **the onset of epochal change** in society or industry. *The Music Man*, for example, narrates the slow but inexorable encroachment of the modern food industry through the vicissitudes of a small American backwater in the early 20th century. In *Face the Music* we witness New York trudging through the Great Depression in the 1930s, with characters trying to eke out a living but not giving up the 'comfort food' represented, in the culture of the time, by the brand-new 'Automat' chain restaurants, a type of automated self-service dispenser so fashionable as to attract even high-society personages, becoming meeting places for the citizenry.

The world of offices and large companies is brilliantly symbolised, in *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying,* by the sacred icon of the coffee machine: poignant satire of the 1960s business world, wherein stressed employees depended, irrationally and spasmodically, on caffeine, and secretaries dreamt of quitting work and marrying a manager, coddling him and providing a warm dinner for his return home. Somewhat antifeminist, certainly, but a candid portrayal of that society.

In other cases, musicals use food as an irreverent **critique of American bourgeois society** including its racism and social injustice (As Thousands Cheer), or to shock the public by indicting 'the System' through the concept of 'eat or be eaten' (the meat pies - containing human flesh! - in *Sweeny Todd*).

In *My Fair Lady*, we witness an incisive analysis of hierarchy and social mobility in early twentieth-century England (still relevant nowadays in some respects) expressed through chocolates, Eliza's forbidden dream, hence the perfect ammunition for Professor Higgins to bribe her by - a theme echoed across the pond, though more flippantly and raucously, in *Hello, Dolly!*, with the grandiose dinner at the Harmonia Gardens.

The office world symbolised by the sacred icon of the coffee machine

The **all-consuming necessity to put food on the table** is explored through various viewpoints in many musicals, from the starving orphans in Oliver! to the bread stolen by Jean Valjean to feed his family in *Les Misérables*, triggering events which symbolise a particular moment in history and its implications for human dignity: the story ends with a wedding banquet as demonstration of improved social conditions.

Innumerable musicals, finally, feature food as a means of **winning a romantic partner** (a prime example: *She Loves Me*) or as a piquant erotic allusion (in *Hair*, or *Hairspray*).

In the final analysis, one could conclude that it is significant that such an art form as the musical - always aiming to express universal sentiments and explore social issues and changing mores - has, from its very birth, chosen food as a tool to enhance its content, illustrating how food can truly be considered as an intercultural leitmotiv transcending time and traditions.

Sara Venturino

The tradition of chocolate eggs

by Gigi Padovani
Journalist, food writer

Once intended only for children, they are now gifts for the entire family, often boasting refined and costly ornamentation.

No Italian family would forgo chocolate Easter eggs: according to calculations by the CNA Alimentare (a food producers' trade union), their annual revenue exceeds 200 million Euros, and in the Easter season more chocolate (the 'food of the gods'!) is sold than at any other time of the year. Furthermore, market research indicates that Easter eggs, once intended for children, are now gifts for the entire family, presented in an increasingly refined and costly manner.
Chocolate connoisseurs disdain chocolate eggs, because in order to hold their shape they require a higher cocoa butter proportion than chocolate bars; their cocoa mass hovers around 50 % and often their dark chocolate aroma is excessively masked by those of sugar and vanilla; or, to cater to children's tastes, they are made of milk chocolate.
Yet some chocolate artisans have managed, in recent years, to create veritable works of art using two types of techniques: traditional eggs externally decorated with *ghiaccia reale* ('royal icing' - a 19th-century tradition of decorating with an icing made of coloured egg white and sugar, dispensed with a piping bag), typical of Piedmont; or eggs with an 'architectural' feel, left partly open to display futuristic shapes.

Some chocolate artisans have managed, in recent years, to create veritable works of art

Why are chocolate eggs eaten during Easter? This is due to an 'invented tradition' born a century and a half ago, similar to others generated for celebratory foods: another example is *panettone*, the sweet sponge cake which only became an Italian Christmas tradition from the early 20th century due to industrial promotion.
In reality, eggs are associated with Easter for religious reasons. In the Middle Ages, there was the custom of painting eggs, based on symbolism which is reasonably obvious: eggs give rise to life, recalling the resurrection of Christ. Some studies link this tradition to Lent: not only was meat forbidden, but eggs also, especially among the orthodox faithful. Hens, however, continued laying eggs even during the forty-day Lenten fast, so these were boiled until they became rock-hard.

Eggs decorated by the master confectioner and chocolatier Guido Bellissima

Gradually the sacred gave way to the profane, with lively and colourful decorations having little to do with the passion of the Christ.
The real breakthrough, however, was the idea of a surprise hidden within the egg. Some maintain that it originated with an egg-shaped platinum and diamond jewel commissioned in 1883 by **Tsar Alexander III** of Russia from the master goldsmith **Peter Carl Fabergé** for his wife **Maria Feodorovna**, Princess of Denmark. Indeed, chocolate eggs did appear in European confectionery shops a few years later. Today France, Britain and Italy all claim paternity of that speciality. In 1832, a French tinsmith began selling chocolatier's moulds in Paris, and soon confectionery shop windows were filled with chocolate eggs and bells, as recounted in a paper by the French chocolate historians **Katherine Khodorowsky** and **Hervé Robert**. The British company Cadbury began mass-producing eggs in 1875.

The real breakthrough was the idea of a surprise hidden within the egg

Chocolate Easter eggs are now big business for chocolate-making artisans, while Ferrero concentrates on smaller chocolate eggs for children, sold year-round and concealing a diminutive toy: the invention of the 'Kinder Surprise' eggs, created by the manager **William Salice**, dates from 1974. Little rabbits and bears are preferred in Britain and Germany. The Lindt 'Gold Bunny', created in 1952, is a Swiss icon worldwide. The tradition of Easter chocolate bells, *cloches en chocolat*, continues in France and Belgium.
According to an article in the confectioners' magazine *Il Dolce*, published for years in Turin, the mania for chocolate Easter eggs had already hit Italy in 1927: these were made by the Casa Sartorio company using a machine for moulding hollow shapes. Further evidence is supplied by the splendid posters for the UNICA confectioners' association in Turin, by the futurist **Depero**. Apparently the first chocolate eggs were already being made in the 19th century in Turin by the widow **Giambone**, who ran a workshop in the city centre: these were created by hand using two hemispherical metal moulds. On the first day of 1991, a master confectioner and chocolatier left us aged 79; many artisans are indebted to him, having learnt the art of decorating chocolate eggs from him. His name was **Guido Bellissima**: born in Messina, he moved to Turin at the age of two, and began working, aged only twelve, for confectionery companies - firstly Caffarel, then Venchi Unica as head of the chocolate department, and finally De Coster, from 1958. There it was that Bellissima was best able to express his artistic gifts, establishing a department full of worthy apprentice decorators who learned his most refined techniques.

Hollow, decorated eggs

Bellissima's enormous Easter eggs, decorated with 'royal icing', are unforgettable

In his final years, he offered training courses at the Beccari Baking Institute in Turin, which dedicated a lecture hall to him after his death. Bellissima's enormous, masterfully decorated Easter eggs will be forever enshrined in memory: during many a springtime they left passers-by dumbfounded before the display windows of the Caffè Torino in piazza San Carlo, bearing miniature sugary depictions of churches, monuments, gardens, carriages and historic palaces. And as was his custom, instead of his own signature, he left only the name of the commissioner, De Coster, on those chocolate masterpieces weighing one or two hundred kilogrammes each. Guido Bellissima, a shy man with irreplaceable talent, universally remembered as the last grand master of the old Turin confectionery school, deserves an important place among the pioneers of chocolate.

Gigi Padovani

The cake which tastes *of springtime*

by Morello Pecchioli
Journalist

The colomba cake, with its distinctive shape and flavour, embodies the essence of festive tradition.

Impossible as it sounds, the meek, gentle, sweet Easter dove-shaped *colomba* cake took its first flight from the hands of that scoundrel **Alboin**, king of the Lombards, molester of maidens and brutal 'stalker' of his wife **Rosamund**, whom he forced to drink from the skull of her father, king **Cunimund**, slain by Alboin himself.
Pavia, Easter 572: legend has it that following a three-year siege, the furious Alboin entered the horrified city. Fearing revenge, rape and pillage, the terrified citizens hid their jewels, their last food scraps and their virgin daughters.
The only person to maintain his cool in that crazed anthill was a baker who calmly kneaded and baked a loaf which he shaped like a dove, a symbol of peace ever since the time of Noah. Once it was ready, he gifted the loaf to the fierce conqueror, hoping to pacify him. Though ruthless, Alboin had refined tastes when it came to womenfolk and food, and, won over by the sweet dove, altered his plans of ghastly revenge, swearing to respect the name and symbol of peace represented by the bird. So when his thugs presented him with the ten virgin girls whom they had been able to collect notwithstanding the efforts of the city's fathers, and he asked the first what her name was, the clever maiden, chaste but not stupid, answered: "Colomba" (meaning 'dove'). Thus primed, the other tender doves followed suit. The amused Alboin kept his promise, leaving the ten girls untouched.

Two legends, set in the Lombard court, narrate the origin of the colomba (dove) cake

A second legend, also set in the Lombard court, provides a different origin myth for the *colomba* cake. Monza, Lent of 612: queen **Theodelinda**, a Catholic intent on converting her subjects to her faith, received in her palace the Irish abbot **Columbanus** (St Columban), founder of the monastery of Bobbio, accompanied by a flotilla of ascetic brethren.
Theodelinda welcomed them with full honours, offering them a sumptuous banquet featuring trays overflowing with spit-roasted fowl and plump game. Horrified, the monks rejected the meat, which is forbidden during Lent. However, before the queen could be offended, the saintly abbot blessed those roasted meats and - a miracle! The lavish bounty was transformed into sweet white loaves shaped like doves.
That is not all: there is a third legend. Legnano, 29 May 1176: in the heat of a battle between the Lombard League and **Emperor Frederick Barbarossa**, two

white doves alit on the League's Carroccio, the ox-drawn wheeled battlefield altar symbolising the union between the League's members. This was a good omen: after Barbarossa's defeat, the victory was celebrated with dove-shaped sweet loaves, a custom which survives today.
This latest legend was invented out of thin air in modern times. It is utter balderdash wrought by the children's author **Lucilla Calfus Antonelli** in the early 1930s, commissioned by **Dino Villani**, advertising director for the Motta sweet company.

Dino Villani is the true father of the modern Easter dove cake

Indeed he, Villani, is the true father of the modern Easter dove cake (with diced candied citron, granular sugar icing, hazelnuts and almonds). A journalist, painter and engraver, Villani was among the founders of the Italian Academy of Cuisine, and was a wizard of communication. The thirtieth anniversary of his death occurred only weeks ago. As well as the Easter *colomba* he invented the Miss Italia beauty pageant, the Mother's Day and Valentine's Day celebrations, and the Buon Ricordo commemorative restaurant plates. To solve the problem of inactive bakeries following the long *panettone* season around Christmas, he suggested to the Milanese baker-entrepreneur Angelo Motta, founder of the eponymous company, the launch of a baked Easter speciality: the *colomba* cake. But a good cake was not enough: people had to be made aware of it.
In his book *Confessioni di un persuasore* (*Confessions of a Persuader*), Villani writes: "Easter is not a holiday for sitting round the hearth but one for outdoor excursions and countryside outings; the *colomba* was known only in a few towns in Lombardy and its tradition was recent and very tenuous. I remember that in my home too, when bread was still made at home, my parents would fashion a dove-shaped loaf to keep me occupied. They made it by knotting a length of dough and then shaping the head and the tail, adding details with scissors. Two peppercorns or vetch seeds formed the eyes". The tradition existed; the task was to revivify it, sparking a desire for Mr Motta's dove cakes among prospective customers. Villani, the first person in Italy to perceive the importance of integrated communication, relied on Antonelli's aforementioned legend, and on radio sketches by **Marcello Marchesi** and a team of writers, actors and journalists to whom he sent *colomba* cakes to taste. The result: enthusiastic responses and rave reviews. For free. From the best-selling novelist **Virgilio Brocchi**: "It is delectable and refined. It somehow tastes like home, and its endearing shape reminds me of my parents' house, where my mother's Easter dove cake bore a hard-boiled egg on its breast and an olive branch in its beak". The actor **Lucio Ridenti** gratefully enthused: "Only you, with your December *panettone* and your April *colomba*, keep us tethered to tradition". From the physician and populariser of science **Ernesto Bertarelli**: "The dove is a tradition dating from the time of Noah, simpler and less cruel than that of the lamb. This is the gentle dove of peace and springtime". From the Calabrian writer **Corrado Alvaro**: "The *colomba* has the form and flavour of our childhood sweets, which had a purpose and embodied the essence of festive traditions".
It was almost a triumph. Almost. What was missing was a perch whence the dove could take flight. Villani found it in the studio of **Cassandre** (Adolphe Jean-Marie Mouron), one of the world's best poster artists. The French graphic designer created the iconic poster wherein a white dove, silhouetted against a splash of blue sky, flies carrying a flowering peach branch in its beak, surmounted by the freshly baked cake. In the background, the slogan conceived by Villani: "The cake which tastes of springtime".
Does the *colomba* have Lombard origins? The Italian Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies has no doubt about this, adding the cake to its published list of Traditional Italian Agrifood Products (*Prodotti agroalimentari tradizionali italiani*, or PAT) alongside Sicilian *palummeddi*, large dove-shaped biscuits made of

sugar, white flour and cinnamon, decorated with a hard-boiled egg (*pupi cull'ova*: 'egg puppets'), symbolic of the Resurrection. However, the Veneto region (Villani was from Verona) contests the Lombard origin of the modern *colomba*. The *Atlas of Traditional Agricultural and Food Products of the Veneto*, published in Venice, reports that the Easter dove cake "was created in Verona in the late 19th century following a venerable tradition, becoming an important speciality for the area's food industry". This *colomba* is identified with the *fugassa* (focaccia) found in the Veneto, featuring the same ingredients and the same icing as the *colomba*.

The French graphic artist Cassandre created the celebrated poster which made the colomba cake's fortune

This hypothesis is supported by a big name in the Veneto's confectionery industry: **Dario Loison** from the Vicenza area, heir to a dynasty of bakers in Costabissara. His company, founded by his grandfather over 80 years ago, produces *colomba* cakes distributed throughout Europe and thirty-odd countries worldwide, including the USA, Japan and China. "I always saw *colomba* cakes coming out of the family oven. My father learned the craft of making spiced *colomba* cakes from the Veronese baker **Borsaro** according to the traditional art of master bakers in the Veneto. The *colomba*, evolved from the *fugassa*, originates in the Veneto".

Morello Pecchioli