

La tovaglia che sazia: Luigi Ballerini the gastronome and his "tablecloth of plenty"

by Jeremy Parzen

"I'm the king, but you can wear my crown."

—Antoine "Fats" Domino, John Marascalco, Tommy Boyce

(quoted by Luigi Ballerini)¹

Three of the most powerful and enduring memories of my years working closely with Luigi Ballerini involve food (and/or the lack thereof).

The one is an image in his mind's eye, a scene he often spoke of: Milan, 1945, the then five-year-old Ballerini watches a defiant Nazi soldier atop an armored car, part of a phalanx in retreat from the Lombard capital, leaving it an "open city"; the muscle-bound German bares his chest in the winter cold, as if impervious to pain even in the moment of ultimate defeat. The Nazis left behind a broken city and people, who had already known hunger for quite some time and would not know prosperity and plenty for many years to come. At five years old, Luigi knew hunger all too well.

The next is an anecdote I heard him retell repeatedly: Milan, early 1960s (the outset of the Italian *miracolo economico*, the economic miracle, Italy's "miraculous" post-war revival), a young American guest in the home of his mother asks for some

¹ Ballerini, Luigi, "piccolo e grande testamento," *Il terzo gode*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1994, p. 103.

mayonnaise; when no mayonnaise is to be found, the matron of the house handily whisks some olive oil and egg yolks, transforming the *materia prima* into mayonnaise.

The third image was set against the ultimate land of plenty: Brentwood, Los Angeles, during the mid-1990s, witnessed with my own ears, the then fifty-something Ballerini is transported to another era by the melody of a nineteenth-century Istrian-Veneto folksong, "La mula de Parenzo":

Se il mare fosse de tocio
e i monti de polenta
o mamma che tociade
polenta e baccalà
perché non m'ami più

[If the sea were made of gravy
and the mountains of polenta
o mama, what sops!
Polenta and baccalà!
Since you don't love me anymore]²

Luigi loved to sing that song and he loved to remind his listeners that the lyrics came from a time when hunger dominated the cultural landscape of Italy, when common folk dreamed of a dish like polenta (ultimately the cause of the pellagra epidemic in

² Translation by the author.

nineteenth-century Italy) in the place of a lost love, where the hunger of the human spirit has become indistinguishable from the pangs of real hunger.³

However apocryphal or familiar, these three images offer three important clues in deciphering Ballerini's often misunderstood but indisputably and remarkably excellent contribution to the study of Italian gastronomy.

The first, a memory that Ballerini openly associated with his becoming aware of the catastrophe that had occurred around him and his family during their years in Milan between his birth in 1940 and the German's retreat in 1945, marks a point of departure: by then, Ballerini was already fatherless (his father, a fascist soldier, had been killed by the Germans on the Greek island of Kefalonia), and hunger was for Ballerini and his family, who resided in a Milanese *casa di ringhiera* (essentially, a suburban tenement), a harsh day-to-day reality with visceral rather than intellectual implications.

The second occurs at the precipice of Ballerini's often troubled but always fruitful relationship to the land of plenty, the United States: the American guest's request for mayonnaise (an emblem of French and hence *haute cuisine*), the subsequent distress when no mayonnaise is to be readily had, and the ultimate transformation of the now readily accessible eggs and olive oil represent a *rational distortion of nature*, as Lévi-Strauss might have viewed it, that allowed the then twenty-something Ballerini to transcend his (however noble in my view) culinary origins.⁴

³ Roberts, Stewart R., "Pellagra: Its Symptoms and Treatment," *The American Journal of Nursing*, Vol. 20, No. 11 (Aug., 1920), pp. 885-6.

⁴ In Lévi-Strauss' view, "there is no alternative to such distortions. Each society must shape itself out of nature's raw material, he believed, with law and reason as the essential tools. This application of reason, he argued, created universals that could be found across all cultures and times" (Rothstein, Edward, "Claude Lévi-Strauss, 100, Dies; Altered Western Views of the 'Primitive,'" *The New York Times*, November 4, 2009).

The last image completes the triptych by virtue of its antipodal absurdity. By the early 1990s, Ballerini had landed (re-landed, actually) on the farthest shores of Western Civilization, landing the chairmanship of one of the most historically prestigious Italian studies programs in the United States at the University of California, Los Angeles, in Brentwood. Bill Clinton had just become president and the bursting of the economic bubble and the travails of the Bush-dominated oughts were seemingly lightyears away. The biggest threat to American national security was the president's dalliances with a young woman from Beverly Hills and the finest restaurants of Los Angeles were awash with monovarietal grappas, single-vineyard Brunello di Montalcino, Sassicaia the original Super Tuscan, and rich, creamy, yellow polenta — yes, polenta.

Polenta, reported *The Los Angeles Times* in 1991, "cornmeal porridge, is the humble grain that made good. Italian in origin, this dish is often found on the menus of some of the finest non-Italian restaurants in the country, and yet it started out (originally made from barley) as the K-ration of the ancient Roman army. Coarse cornmeal, found in any grocery store, is the basis of making polenta today."⁵

By the time Ballerini obtained one of the most prestigious chairs in North American Italian studies, the very same polenta that had caused the pellagra epidemic in nineteenth-century Italy — the very same polenta that the singer of "La mula de Parenzo" dreams of — had come to embody (quite literally) one of the greatest

⁵ Cone, Marcia and Thelma Synder, "Pass the Polenta, Please," *The Los Angeles Times* [Valley Edition], October 17, 1991. "It has taken over a dozen years," wrote Max Jacobson in 1992, referring to the popular Los Angeles restaurant Amici, "but [the owners] have slowly amassed a 1,000-bottle collection of great Italian wines, including the aptly named super-Tuscans, such as Ornellaia and Sassicaia, plus Barbarescos from Angelo Gaja, venerable Brunellos such as the famous Biondi-Santi and a host of vintage Barolos. Now the investment is paying off" (*The Los Angeles Times*, May 14, 1992).

expressions of Italian gastronomic tradition and was "found on the menus of some of the finest non-Italian restaurants in the country."

But even more mind-numbing was the notion that grappa (a distillate made from the *second* pressing of grape pomace after the must is used for winemaking, "the fiery friend of peasants," as R.W. Apple infamously yet aptly called it)⁶ had become so popular that "monovarietal" expressions of grappa were being sold in Los Angeles for obscene amounts of money. Grappa, wrote Ruth Reichl in 1989, "is the powerful distillate made from grape pressings":

Like the marc of France, to which it is related, it was long a workingman's drink. Since its recent elevation to designer-drink status, better and better brands have been coming to the market. They've become so popular that good Italian restaurants in America seem to be competing to see who can stock the largest selection.

Poli Assortment of Grappa sells for \$195 for five bottles; the distillate assortment is \$295 for six bottles. Both are available at Wally's Liquor in West Los Angeles.⁷

And pushing the envelope of reason even further, by 1991, money-hungry restaurateurs inspired by the frenzy of grappa mania had christened a new restaurant "Grappa" at the (literal) zenith of Western consumerist hegemony:

⁶ Apple, R.W., "Grappa, Fiery Friend of Peasants, Now Glows With a Quieter Flame," *The New York Times*, December 31, 1997.

⁷ Reichl, Ruth, "Grappa," *The Los Angeles Times*, December 24, 1989. \$295 for six 375ml bottles! And that was 1989!

A new Italian kitchen, Grappa, inhabits the site of the Old World Restaurant on the Sunset Strip. The interior has been redone in the mauve and gray, the brass and glass, of corporate hotel lobbies. The food is reasonably priced and reasonably good, the service pleasant and competent. But what I like best about Grappa is intangible — there's a kind of good-natured, comic spirit about the place. Each time I ate there, I felt as if I was in a Marcello Mastroianni comedy.

Grappa is not trendy. Its decor is a little pink, a little fussy. But unlike so many of the new little Italian cucinas, it is definitely not a formula restaurant. And something always seems to be happening here [sic]. Grappa, [...] Sunset Blvd., West Hollywood... Open Sunday through Thursday 11:30 a.m.-midnight; Friday and Saturday 11:30 a.m.-1 a.m. American Express, MasterCard, Visa. Full bar. Valet Parking. Dinner for two, food only, \$35-\$60.⁸

The vortex and vacuum of that "misunderstanding otherwise known as the Atlantic ocean," as Luigi likes to say, had dilated to a point of absurdity seemingly unrivaled in the annals of modern commercialization. (Although Grappa "was not trendy" like so many of the "new little Italian cucinas [sic]," dining there, wrote the reviewer, was like "sitting next to a set-up for 'Candid Camera.'")

In 1991, when Grappa opened on the Sunset Strip in West Hollywood, gastronomy had not yet come into focus in Ballerini's writing and research, even though

⁸ Huneven, Michelle, "Mastroianni Would Feel Right at Home. There's a good-natured spirit about this decidedly un-trendy Italian kitchen on the Sunset Strip," *The Los Angeles Times*, February 1, 1991.

the renaissance of Italian cuisine had clearly taken foot in the U.S. (and Luigi, as anyone who has ever dined with him will agree, has always loved to eat and drink well). As with so many texts in the seemingly contradictory and paradoxical corpus of Ballerini's writings, one must look beyond and across the texts to find initial clues of trends yet to emerge. Ballerini is at once one of the world's foremost authorities on Futurism and visual poetry, yet he is also an expert in Cavalcantian prosody. He is one of the foremost scholars of Manzoni, yet he can quote Amiri Baraka (né LeRoi Jones) *ad libidum*. He loves the recordings of Errico Carruso but he is equally enchanted by those of Fred Buscaglione. He is the top Italian translator of Gertrude Stein but he also loves Fats Domino's stream of consciousness. His essays — scholarly and otherwise — are dense and rich with information but sometimes the most tasty nuggets (*nugellae*) are found in his footnotes. In other words, to understand the enigmatic corpus of Ballerini's work, and in more to the point, his work as a gastronome, you need to read Ballerini backwards and crosswise.

One of the earliest traces of his culinary leanings appeared just a few years after Grappa opened, in the poem "per il partito comunista Italiano tentato di cambiar nome" ("on the Italian Communist Party tempted to change its name"):

quarto premio è la mano che dipinge, la tovaglia
che sazia...

[fourth prize is the painting hand, the tablecloth
of plenty...] ⁹

⁹ Ballerini, Luigi, *Il terzo gode*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1994, p. 37 (translated in *The Cadence of a Neighboring Tribe*, translated by Jeremy Parzen, Los Angeles, Sun and Moon, 1997, p. 16).

Ballerini's poetry is typically hermetical and linguistically dense and often times, rhythm and musicality, tone and sound take precedence over immediately apparent meaning. As the title reveals, this poem is clearly tied to a historical moment in Italy's post-war political self-awareness and Ballerini's own ideological self-consciousness and his often turbulent relationship with the Italian national identity. But beyond any topical resonance here, the syncopated stream of sounds, images, and their relationships is what emerges as the dominant force in this collection of poems. The fact that the "painting hand" and the "tablecloth of plenty" appear in sequence and in consequence is significant here (especially in view of the parallelism created in the original Italian where it is "the hand that paints" and the "tablecloth that satiates"): this may very well be one of the earliest instances in Ballerini's writing where a historically intellectual movement (painting) and a visceral (so to speak) movement (gastronomy) appear side-by-side, in chorus and in concert.¹⁰ This very same dichotomy — the intellectual and the visceral — the confluence of their defining elements and their divergence are forces that will later shape Ballerini's unique approach to historical gastronomy and the intellectual *and* visceral implications of the art of cooking from the middle ages, through the Renaissance, and onward to the industrial and contemporary era.

In gastronomic terms, the timing of the publication of both the original Italian version of this poem (1994) and the translation (1997) are significant. Even though a boom of pseudo-authentic Italian cuisine had begun on the west coast of the United States (with cold flavorless olive oil being served to guests as they sat down, one of the greatest

¹⁰ When Ballerini and I set about translating *Il terzo gode* (see previous note), we experimented with adapting and conveying prosodic and sonoral elements of the original Italian. As in this case, we avoided slavish renderings, favoring rhythmic and assonant translations instead. This how "la tovaglia che sazia" became "the tablecloth of plenty."

travesties of gastronomic history!), the true boom — Italian cuisine's bona fide conquest of the American palate and culinary imagination — had not yet taken shape. It wasn't until the opening of Babbo in Manhattan and Mario Batali's appearance, via his television show, on a national stage, that the true renaissance of Italian cuisine launched in this country.

In 1998, just months after Babbo opened, Ruth Reichl wrote of the now historic restaurant:

When I arrived at Babbo, I thought the decor was attractive but predictable. The long, narrow space has lost the Southern airs of its former incarnation and turned into a spare, modern room. The first detail you notice is the golden light. Then you notice the racks of wine on the wall and the big table in the middle covered with wildflowers, cherries, cheeses and plums.

The look is simple and appealing. So is the menu. Still, I was not prepared for the sheer deliciousness of the first dish I tasted: warm house-cured anchovies in a vinaigrette. The flavors were deep, the tang of the vinegar edged with the taste of lemon peel. It was wonderful. So was a special pasta with sheep's milk cheese and broccoli rape that had just the right degree of bitterness. But the big event of the evening was two-minute spicy squid, a big, robust bowl of tomato-drenched seafood that is supposedly eaten by Italian lifeguards. Lucky them.

Much of the food is rustic. Desserts, on the other hand, move in the opposite direction. Who would imagine that a tiny portion of saffron panna cotta topped with peaches, served in a tiny portion, could be so deeply satisfying?¹¹

Reichl's glowing praise of Batali's new "downtown" project was perhaps the first shot of a revolution that has reached the farthest corners of our culinary universe (as I write this essay, I have just been informed that the popular fast food chain Subway has launched a new campaign bringing "hungry customers another taste of the Italian countryside with its new low-fat Tuscan Chicken sub sandwich").¹²

The culinary world would never be the same. And Ballerini, a true gourmand who had not yet found his calling as gourmet, had shifted his primary residence back to New York City where a brave new world of "rustic" Italian flavors and aromas was beginning to burst at the seams.

As if by providence, Luigi was already working on what would be his first landmark contribution to the study of Italian gastronomy, a collaborative translation of Pellegrino Artusi's nineteenth-century cookery book by two of the best literary and scholarly translators active at that time, Stephen Sartarelli and Murtha Baca. It may seem insignificant now, but before Luigi's enthusiasm for this project, academic presses generally shied away from gastronomy and historic recipe books. And even more significantly, Luigi did not approach cookbook authors for the translation but rather scholarly and literary translators (this innovative approach posed its own problems but the final results were nonetheless thrilling).

¹¹ *The New York Times*, June 26, 1998.

¹² <http://www.pr.com/press-release/13248>

The book did not see publication until 2003 but the germ for Luigi's introduction had surely been planted. Wisely, Luigi asked Michele Scicolone, author of some of the popular and successful Italian cookery books in this country, to contribute a brief presentation of the book from a culinary standpoint. But his substantive introduction represents one of the first instances where an American-based Italian scholar approached the subject of Italian gastronomy with the academic seriousness it deserves and commands. In this, one of Luigi's first major contributions to the field, he wrote with judicious inspiration:

The many incarnations of Artusi's book are another sign of the role it has played in the history of modern Italy, both as an incentive to retrieve its centuries-old gastronomic tradition and as a bind factor in the shaping of a culturally grounded national unity. while the two issues are tightly connected, the former comes equipped with a curious corollary: the ancient *diaphorà* between France and Italy in their quest for gastronomic primacy...

Victor Emmanuel II, Italy's first king, was himself a great lover of French food, and when Florence became the temporary capital of the nation and he took up residence there (1865-71), Florentines immediately noticed how he much preferred "French" butter to their "superior" Tuscan oil. Artusi's pages, written in Florence during those years and printed there some twenty years later, showed not only that French and Italian culinary traditions out to be viewed as a parallel experiences, but that the common

Renaissance denominator they shared, thanks to Catherine de' Medici, patron saint of both Italian and French cuisine, was perhaps more "common" on the southern side of the Alps than in the land of the Sun King.¹³

Rereading this pages today, I cannot help but recall how the university press publication of Luigi's *Scienza* was overshadowed for many years by Kyle Phillips's 1996 translation of Artusi's masterwork, rendered simply as *The Art of Eating Well*, published by Random House. Where Artusi's title was *Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well*, the more commercially minded Random House decided to adapt and abbreviate the title to *The Art of Eating Well*, consequently removing the *science*. What's remarkable about Luigi's passion and vision for this book (which, seven years after its publication, seems to have become the more prevalent, popular, ubiquitous, and relevant edition, at least gauging by the frequency of entries in WorldCat.com) is that where most editors saw cookbook writing as a purely technical literary form, Luigi saw it as a cultural and intellectual genre as well. Where others saw only the commercial viability of the *art of eating*, Luigi saw the *science in* (i.e., an epistemological approach to) *the kitchen*.

During the years that followed Luigi's return to New York City, he began to contribute regularly to the newly launched English-language edition of Italy's *National Geographic* of gastronomy, *La Cucina Italiana* (known in this country as *The Magazine of La Cucina Italiana*). His short articles were often colorful but always based in serious literary and scholarly contemplation and the topics ranged from Pope Martin the V's eels (as reported by Dante) to an expression of D'Annunzio's virility through the flipping of a

¹³ Pellegrino, Artusi, *Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well*, translated by Murtha Baca and Stephen Sartarelli, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2003, p. xix.

frittata (you can image the sexual connotations!) and Pontormo's daily eggs. To my knowledge, Luigi was the sole "literary" contributor to the field during this period (roughly 1998-2001), when the interest in Italian cuisine and gastronomic history was literally exploding in this country. Where others were contented by finding mere nostalgia in the traces of the "old world" in a "new world" interpretation of the grand Italian culinary tradition, Luigi approached it with a literary and scholar wit and wisdom breathed a new life and soul into the field in this country.

A great example of this was his early contribution to then newborn, high-brow journal *Gastronomica* (University of California, Press), founded in 2001 by professor of Russian literature at Williams, Darra Goldstein, who seemed to share Luigi's vision for an epistemological and historiographic approach to gastronomy. In 2003, Darra published his hypertext "Bockenheimer Revisited," in which Luigi invited a group of scholars, philosophers, culinary historians, and chefs to interpret Bockenheimer's recipe for sponge stuffed with almond milk and cooked over a spit — a recipe that the medieval cookery author recommends for prostitutes. "Surprised as you may be to find representatives of the world's oldest profession freely circulating among prelates, monks, soldiers, dignitaries, courtiers (and their wives), country squires, counselors, princes, and barons," wrote Ballerini,

who either resided at the Roman Curia or visited it from every corner of Europe in the first half of the fifteenth century, we hope that the challenge of identifying the ingredient (*spongia*, a sponge) that accounts for the peculiarity of the recipe, as well as the ways in which it relates to the

discharging of peculiar, but not unimaginable, professional duties, will be for you, as it was for this writer, irresistible.¹⁴

With the disarming humor and irony that accompanies much of his literary scholarship, Luigi was trying to get a new generation of recipe readers to understand that those who came before us often saw cookery books as an expression of the contemplative intellect, of science and knowledge, of an *ars* that belongs side-by-side with the *ars poetica*. The fact that he brought intellectuals and chefs together for this hypertextual project was indicative of the new direction Ballerini was driving food writing. Countering the passive acceptance of progressivism embraced by most of his contemporaries, he showed us that the ancients and the humanists knew much more about cooking than we do. To Mario Batali, an ingredient is a mere mundane event, a vehicle to Reichl's heart via her palate. But to prelate Bockenheim and his contemporaries, an ingredient was so much more: an emblem, a symbol, a metonym, a metaphor, a riddle, a conundrum, a key to understanding something beneath the surface of the world. I'm sure that Luigi would agree with me if I were to quote the pseudo-Freud, invoking Duchamp's pipe, and say, "sometimes a sponge is not just a sponge."

Luigi seemed to sense the discomfort that his revolutionary approach to food writing was creating in some circles. In the *aporia* of the introduction to his landmark edition of Maestro Martino's *The Art of Cooking*, he addressed the reader in the following manner:

Dear Reader: This is a cookbook — a historical cookery book. If you do not care to read about the world from which it grew (and it would be perfectly understandable if you didn't), skip the present introduction

¹⁴ *Gastronomica*, vol. 3, 2003, p. 50.

altogether. No need to feel guilty about it. Read it only if you are the type that does not mind a little suffering. I promise that, at the end, you will hasten to search for a great chef, either in the outside world or within yourself, to obtain from either of them (or from both) the culinary reward you undoubtedly deserve.¹⁵

In the pages that follow, Ballerini meticulously reconstructs the rarefied world that Maestro Martino moved in: it was a brand new world of cardinals, popes, and *condottieri*, humanists and warriors, politicians and *bon vivants*.

Before Ballerini's contribution, scholars had — honestly and generally — little to say about Maestro Martino beyond their relatively technical assessments of his cooking (his use of new culinary nomenclature, his introduction of cooking times and specific ingredient amounts, etc.). With his introduction to the University of California Press translation, Ballerini literally ripped the field wide open by focusing his study not on Martino but rather one of Martino's prominent employers, the Venetian patriarch, cardinal, military powerhouse and Vatican enforcer, Ludovico Trevisan (1402-65), who rose to power "through excellent military service (like his presence at [the battle of] Anghiari) and his Machiavellian ruthlessness."¹⁶ In this work, Luigi's approach to food writing and scholarship blend brilliantly in my view, like Nero d'Avola and Frappato in a Cerasuolo di Vittoria.

He writes of Trevisan:

... the brilliance of his political career did not in any way efface his fame as an epicure. Indeed, his love fo the good life earned him the title

¹⁵ Martino, Maestro, *The Art of Cooking*, edited by Luigi Ballerini, translated and annotated by Jeremy Parzen, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2005, p. 1.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 8.

"Cardinal Lucullus." Trevisan was very well known and admired for his love of entertaining. His home in San Lorenzo in Damaso was the San Simeon of his day: there he collected unusual animals — like white asses, Indian hens, lap-dogs, and goldfinches — and cultivated rare varieties of fruit that he obtained from his friends and from purveyors of food.

...

So obsessed was Trevisan with obtaining the finest and most unusual foods and wines for his guests that his requests for certain delicacies could easily take precedence over discussing politics in his correspondence — even when the very balance of power in Italy was at stake. After no less than three missives to his friend and putative son Onorato Caetani, lord of Sermoneta, in which he request fish — the "finest possible" for a dinner he will host on the occasion of Pope Nicholas V's visit to San Lorenzo in Damaso, Trevisan mentions almost as an afterthought a political event of epochal importance... Francesco Sforza's conquest of Milan... one of the great turning points in the balance of power in northern Italy.¹⁷

Where others simply saw innovative cooking techniques and recipe writing, Ballerini found a clue, a key to opening the door on to the world of Trevisan and the balance of military might and courtly power that defined the Italian Renaissance (and ultimately produced a body of literature, painting, and sculpture that continues to inform and inspire our world today). His enviable scholarship invests Martino's text with new significance by understanding Martino through Trevisan's eyes. After all, it was most likely Martino who prepared that meal for Pope Nicholas V and it was to Martino that Trevisan

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 8-9.

answered when the chef and Renaissance writer of recipes (science) requested the finest fish possible for the repast (a request that took precedence over news of Sforza's conquest of Milan). Ballerini may have found these juicy tidbits of arcane information in the footnotes of some dusty and crusty tome of an east-coast theological library. But with the brilliance he uniquely commands, he found in them a substantive (and no less entertaining) key to a greater understanding of the Italian Renaissance.

Since the publication of Ballerini's *Martino*, he has edited a wonderful series of historical cookery books published by the Milanese editor Tommasi and more recently, Mondadori published his delightful illustrated encyclopedia of herbs, *Erbe da mangiare* (2008), where once again his marriage of food writing and literary scholarship bring new verve to the field, with unexpected and often surprisingly delicious results.

I remember fondly an afternoon working with Luigi in Los Angeles, more than fifteen years ago, on I-can't-remember-what translation or project. We took a break and cooked some pasta and then debated whether to dress it with olive oil or butter. A discussion of the appropriateness of olive oil and grated Parmigiano Reggiano ensued. With the same self-effacing humor that has endeared Luigi to more than a generation of young Italian students here in the U.S., he asked me, "ma sono così poco casalingo?" ("Am I so lacking in domestic skill?") It's another one of those culinary moments I'll never forget about Luigi. From his inauspicious start in Milan (literally starving, Luigi often reminded me), to his first encounter with Francophilic mayonnaise (whisked graciously by his mother), to the renaissance of Italian cuisine in the U.S., when the world was turned upside down and inside out, and polenta and grappa became the

victuals and spirits of would-be culinary kings and coquinating queens, his journey as a gastronome has been as unlikely and surprising as it has been fruitful.

O, Luigi, you *can* be the king and you most certainly are in my cook book. But may we wear your crown?

—Jeremy Parzen

January 8, 2010

Austin, Texas