

**UGO TOGNAZZI**

**The InJester**

***Laugh Out Loud Stories  
and Recipes To Die For***

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At his home in Velletri, the actor and gastronome Ugo Tognazzi loved to gather friends, family, and colleagues, entertaining them with his extravagant theatrics. In preparing those legendary feasts, he would often stroll through his garden in search of artichokes and other seasonal delights; visit his chicken coop for fresh eggs; or reach into the massive family fridge that dominated his kitchen, which he considered the “family chapel.” This book was born out of his passion for food and his experiences as one of the protagonists (along with Michelle Piccoli, Marcello Mastroianni, and Philippe Noiret) of Marco Ferreri’s film *La grande bouffe*. Between childhood memories, clever culinary recipes, and movie set anecdotes, both happy and sad, the great Ugo teaches us how eating well is one of life’s most exquisite pleasures. How could anyone disagree?

Ugo Tognazzi (Cremona 1922–Rome 1990) made his acting debut with the Wanda Osiris Theater Company, then formed a successful comedic duo with the future TV personality Raimondo Vianello. His film career started in 1950. In 1961, he directed and starred in *His Women*. Between 1963 and 1988 he worked mostly in satirical cinema, acting in movies by Marco Ferreri (*The Conjugal Bed*, 1963; *The Ape Woman*, 1964; *The Wedding March*, 1966; *The Big Feast*, 1973) and by Dino Risi (*I mostri*, 1963; *Torture Me But Kill Me with Kisses*, 1968). He also created the two celebrated series *My Friends* (1976–1985) and *La Cage Aux Folles* (1978–1985). His performance in Bernardo Bertolucci’s *Tragedy Of A Ridiculous Man* (1981) won him the Palme D’or for best actor at Cannes. An amateur soccer player and life-long fan of Milan FC, he also loved to play tennis, but his true passion was food, so much so that he was often featured as a recurring guest and gastronomic adviser in many popular magazines.

## Preface

At my home in Velletri we have a huge fridge that defies the rules of consumer society. It's not one of those big Philcos, a spectacular polar white pot-bellied refrigerator. Instead, ours is made out of wood and takes up an entire wall in the kitchen.

Through its four windows you can peek into its insides and rejoice at the site of cold cuts, cheeses, veal, sides of beef, hanging majestically from shiny hooks.

This fridge is our family chapel.

Every now and then, in the morning, my wife catches me kneeling before this idol, this totem of the human adventure. I'm down there rapt in contemplation, waiting to receive an inspiration for lunch...

This image, certainly paradoxical, gives you an idea of how ascetic my attachment to the prosaic pleasures of the table is, and thus my attachment to life. In fact, when all is said and done, I shall be regarded as a martyr of the hearth. Although, generally speaking, rather than my own flesh, I lay down, with infinite care, little milky veal chops over burning coals.

Cooking is in my blood. And there, I think, one will undoubtedly find red and white cells but also, in my case, a substantial amount of tomato sauce.

I'm addicted to the stovetop. I suffer from acute *spaghettitis*. For me, the kitchen is the most arousing part of the home.

No one understands better than I do Quasimodo's hermeticism: for a pale olive, I could *really* lose my mind.<sup>1</sup>

I know the back doors and the best cooks of the most renowned restaurants in Europe.

Acting? Sometimes that seems more like a hobby. Eating, on the other hand, I do that full-time.

And I really feel alive in front of a pan. The sound of frying oil is music to my ears. I wish I could use the scent of a good ragù as an aftershave. A plate of tangled fettuccine or the oblong shape of a roast are, to me, vital sculptures, worthy of Henry Moore.

After making dinner, my greatest satisfaction is getting the approval of my friends and fellow diners. Now that I think about it,

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<sup>1</sup> It is a common misconception that Salvatore Quasimodo (poet, 1901–1968), noble prize laureate, was the author of the line "For a pale olive, one can lose their mind." Actually, the line belongs to Renzo Laurano, the pen name of Luigi Asquasciati (1905–1986), writer, journalist, and bon vivant. The line was then used in a comedy by Giovanni Mosca (1908–1983), who might be the source of misattribution.

from cooking, I get something I used to get on stage and that now, with cinema, I'm missing: a direct contact with an audience.

As I indulge in this love of food I suffer neither middlemen nor rules: I'm the creator of the scene and its performer, the deity that transforms the inert words of a recipe into a flavorful and colorful reality, harmonizing and measuring the ingredients, sensing, even emotionally, when things are perfectly cooked, participating viscerally in the frying of potatoes, suffering with garlic in boiling oil, rejoicing in *soffritto*, basking in every sauce, losing myself in the smells and aromas, loving the tiny leaf of basil that was just picked, sacrificed on a mound of steaming maccheroni in tomato sauce.

My cooking is artistic. I suffer for it like few others do. And that's why the scenography that accompanies it is so important to me, the atmosphere that surrounds it, that entire flow of pleasant sensations that come from memory or the environment, and that influence heavily the dish in front of you, enriching it with ancient and new meanings.

Just as every object whispered distant and half buried memories to Proust, food reminds me of times lost and found again. And a boiled chicken, for instance, brings me back to grandma, to Sundays in Cremona, to mustard; and fresh raspberries conjure up those ancient and rare vacations in the mountains with my parents.

Greed, gluttony: silly words, dictated by current morals, punitive and masochistic. Everyone is free to make their own choices, even to die stuffed with foie gras or consumed by intercourse. Let's bring to light these two great, healthy, and materialistic passions, too long confined to the ghettos of sinful behavior. Let's exhume the epicurean ideals that preached joy, life, and that made great the Roman world and the Renaissance; let us wholeheartedly reconnect with the uninterrupted and secular flow of drool, sperm, and shit; let's return, especially when it come to food, to that place that's becoming evermore elusive, beseeched by armies of preservatives, frozen foods, and tin cans.

Once upon a time, there was a grandma, a mother, a field, a vegetable patch.

Let's recreate them. It's up to us.

Now that the spiel is over, a few necessary warnings. This volume is made of three parts.

The first, which I entitled "auto-gastro-biography," includes a series of memories that deal with different times in my life, from the furthest away to the most recent. Starting from autobiographical premises, I wanted to write a few *tranches de vie* in which, as it often happens in everyday life, food is present in one way or another. To a

gastronome like me, talking about myself through food was the best way, perhaps the only way, to build a narrative.

The second part is comprised of the easiest of my recipes; I love simple cooking, the kind that doesn't take too much time, even though I'm a stickler for details and a perfectionist even when it comes to making spaghetti with butter, or frying an egg. I warn you that you might already know some of these recipes — also because I divulged many of them, every week, through the microphones of *Gran Varietà*<sup>2</sup> — but I'm certain you'll discover something more, or maybe less, or just different, that will help perfect, if I say so myself, their execution and therefore the final products.

The third and final part of the book is devoted to *La grande buoffe (The Great Feast)* and the recipes for the dishes shown in the film. A dazzling finale of fireworks that won't fail to satisfy your imagination and most of all your palate.

All that's left is for me to wish you a happy reading and *Buon appetito* with

Ugo Tognazzi

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<sup>2</sup> Gran Varietà was a radio program broadcasted by RAI (The Italian Public Broadcasting Company) between 1966 and 1979, every Sunday morning between 9:35 and 11. It included comic sketches and songs and was one of the most popular programs of the 60s and 70s.

# **AUTOGASTROBIOGRAPHY**

## **(Visceral Confessions)**

## 1930

### Auntie Broth

I had only been alive three days when my uncle Milan FC tied a little red and black bow around my manhood. I've always wondered what would have happened had I been born a girl instead of a boy.

My uncle Milan FC wasn't even my real uncle, but just one of my dad's business friends whom he chose to be the godfather at my baptism. I called him uncle the way all children do when forced by their parents, who try to show greater familiarity to the strangers that habitually frequent their households.

As for real aunts and uncles I already had about twenty of them: half on my mom's side and half on my dad's, plus this fake uncle who, to me, was the most uncle of them all since he took me to see soccer games and would send me postcards signed by the players.

The real aunts and uncles were divided into the following categories: the doll aunties, uncle coal, uncle cashier (on mom's side); rich uncle, plastic uncle, uncle inventor, auntie broth, uncle fabrics, pretty aunt, poor uncle and other less remarkable ones (on my dad's side). All these nicknames were made up by uncle Milan FC.

He was so Milan FC that:

- A) He lived in San Siro, naturally.<sup>3</sup>
- B) His apartment was entirely decorated in red and black.
- C) Even his slippers had black and red stripes.

Every wall was literally covered with fancy pictures of him shaking hands with soccer players. Whole teams with five forwards standing, three midfielders kneeling, right and left backs sitting and the goalie laying down, ball pressed against the ground.

There was a picture of the fabulous team Uruguay, "*Campione del mondo*."<sup>4</sup> Piola's acrobatic bicycle kick. Meazza's iconic header. Bartolini with his white headband; and the Milan FC teams from 1910, 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914 (intermission for World War I) 1919, 1920, 1921, 1922, 1923, 1924, 1925 (with the Fascist salute), up to 1930 or thereabouts.

On Sundays, if Milan FC won, he would get drunk; if they lost, he went to bed without dinner at 8pm. He managed to convince my dad to leave our building when he found out that Viani, the midfielder of the historic rival Ambrosiana-Inter, had moved in. The very same Viani who, by the way, would later become the wizard-coach of Milan FC, the best talent scout of the post war years.

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<sup>3</sup> San Siro is the neighborhood where the Milan FC Stadium is located.

<sup>4</sup> The Spanish "mundo" is here substituted for the Italian "mondo" and is meant as an homage to the great South American soccer team.

My dad, who didn't care about soccer at all, but didn't want to ruin his business relationship with my uncle, moved the family to Porta Magenta, a little closer to San Siro, and thus I was free from catching the *Interista* infection.

I never asked why this uncle so fond of nicknames called my dad *Ceolin*, and me *cavaliere* and my manhood, permanently marked by the red and black bow, *menagramo*.<sup>5</sup> What I do know is that before taking me to games he would cut a hole in my pant pocket and I was supposed to pass through it a little wooden devil painted in red and black. I would hold it there, with my hand in my pocket, pressed against my *menagramo*. Only when Milan FC scored a goal could I take it out and wave it around as a sign of jubilation.

One Sunday Milan FC lost 5 to 0. Uncle went to bed without dinner and died of a heart attack. In his spiritual will and testament he left me his passion for Milan FC along with the other aunts and uncles. Most of them have since gone to join him. Rich uncle, since "lucky in money, poor in health." Uncle inventor ended up the same way. His greatest achievement was that of figuring out how to open envelopes without tearing the letters inside. He sewed a cotton thread along the edge of the envelope, leaving a piece of it hanging out (more or less the way cigarette packs work, with that piece of cellophane sticking off the corner). But then he quit inventing and joined the Edison company. Poor uncle was run over by a car, in the name of progress that seeks to end poverty and does it by eliminating the poor.

Uncle plastic, however, is still alive, as he was always destined to last longer than the others; and auntie broth is also alive and kicking, or one could say she is alive and cooking.

Her nickname was given to her at a family gathering. Brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law on my dad's side would get together every year for a Christmas lunch. In case of emergencies, these family gatherings would take place on non-holidays.

One year, my father got really sick and, during one such emergency gathering, a complex plan for aid and council was devised by everyone, from rich uncle to poor uncle. Among the various resolutions, there was one of an exquisitely economic-domestic nature; and that was: to convince my mother that she could make an entire meal out of a single bone. Auntie broth was charged with the task of explaining how: "Go get a beef bone, but a good one, eh, you got to choose the right one, one with all the tendons and bits of meats still

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<sup>5</sup> *Ceolin* is a rather uncommon last name; *Cavaliere* means "knight"; *Menagramo*, in the other hand, is a little more complicated: a sullen, gloomy person who the community believes brings bad luck, a jinx. This unusual nickname might be connected to an apotropaic superstitious ritual predicated on the paradox of calling the young man's manhood a jinx when in fact it brings the team good luck.

stuck to it. With the bone, you can make a nice broth, especially if you add a good onion, herbs, and some carrots, this way you'll have some vegetables already cooked for later too. Take the tendons off the bone and season them, those are really tasty. With the bits of meat you have left, you can make a few nice meatballs. That way, with one bone you'll be all set for three days. You and your children!" From that moment on she was known as Auntie Broth.

Maybe this is why those Sunday afternoons at the stadium — with the little wooden devil pressed against my *menagramo*, and uncle Milan FC who would take it out of my pocket to wave it around after every goal — were first and foremost my escape from those meatballs.

### **Meatball Recipe**

First off, let's clarify that making meatballs, for me, means using any type of leftover meat: boiled, broiled, roasted, chicken, beef, whatever. To this meat, I then add a sandwich roll soaked in milk. People tell stories of that one time I made meatballs using a boiled potato in addition to the roll soaked in milk: a resounding success. To the leftover meat, well minced, add leftover prosciutto or salami, or even a piece of leftover sausage, blanched. And a leftover clove of garlic, minced with plenty of parsley (leftover).

If by chance you don't have all this leftover stuff, it's okay, some of it you can also go out and buy. But it's really not the same, for a meatball made out of leftovers is much tastier.

If you don't have leftover parsley, remember you can also use basil.

Don't forget a bit of nutmeg, not too much. And a whole egg (two eggs, if you're making more than 20 meatballs). And how about two spoonfuls of parmigiano? Or even pecorino if you prefer. Salt and pepper to taste, naturally.

All of this must be meticulously mixed by hand, and turned into little balls the size of a walnut, which you will then roll in flour and squeeze at the two ends. The tiny earths thus created will be dipped in an egg wash, salt and pepper. Roll the meatballs over bread-crumbs and fry them. Remember, half oil, half butter. I almost didn't let you in on this secret but I'm selfless, in the kitchen as in life.

I forgot: lemon zest. If it's not included in the mixture, the meatball won't give off the same aroma.

Public service announcement: if among your leftovers you happen to have some porchetta, don't hesitate to throw it in the mix. I have a fond memory of a great porchetta laden meatball eating session: a friend of mine had 36 of them.