

Heat: An Amateur's Adventures as Kitchen Slave, Line Cook, Pasta Maker, and Apprentice to a Dante-quoting Butcher in T Study Guide

Heat: An Amateur's Adventures as Kitchen Slave, Line Cook, Pasta Maker, and Apprentice to a Dante-quoting Butcher in T by Bill Buford

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

[Heat: An Amateur's Adventures as Kitchen Slave, Line Cook, Pasta Maker, and Apprentice to a Dante-quoting Butcher in T Study Guide.....](#) 1

[Contents.....](#) 2

[Plot Summary.....](#) 3

[Dinner with Mario and Kitchen Slave: Chapters 1-3.....](#) 5

[Kitchen Slave: Chapters 4-8.....](#) 7

[Line Cook: Chapters 9-12.....](#) 9

[Line Cook: Chapters 13-15.....](#) 11

[Pasta-Maker: Chapters 16-18.....](#) 13

[Apprentice: Chapters 19-24.....](#) 14

[Tuscan Butcher: Chapters 25-28.....](#) 16

[Dinner with Mario: Chapter 29.....](#) 18

[Characters.....](#) 19

[Objects/Places.....](#) 22

[Themes.....](#) 24

[Style.....](#) 26

[Quotes.....](#) 28

[Topics for Discussion.....](#) 29



Plot Summary

Heat: An Amateur's Adventures as Kitchen Slave, Line Cook, Pasta-Maker, and Apprentice to a Dante-Quoting Butcher in Tuscany is a funny memoir by The New Yorker writer Bill Buford. In this book, Bill describes his experiences working both in the kitchen of famous New York restaurant Babbo and as an apprentice butcher in Tuscany. Bill suffers burns, cuts, and humiliation in his attempts to learn to cook authentic Italian food, only to realize he was not ready to use this knowledge to do more than cook the occasional meal at home. *Heat* is a memoir but it is also the description of a love affair between one middle-aged man and the history and pleasure of authentic Italian food.

Bill Buford invites famous chef Mario Batali to dinner one night only to have Batali take over the kitchen and effortlessly make an exciting meal with ingredients he brought himself. Not long after this night, Bill convinces Mario to give him an opportunity to learn in the kitchen of his restaurant, Babbo. Mario agrees and soon Bill finds himself learning that everything he had thought he knew about cooking is wrong. Bill begins in the preparation kitchen, working with Elisa preparing all the food that would be necessary for the cooks to prepare that night during working hours. Bill cuts up meat and vegetables, prepares broths and sauces, and find himself working harder than he ever had before. On top of it all, he is unpaid.

Bill plans on working his way through the kitchen much like Mario Batali had done himself. Batali never wanted to be a cook, even though his passion even as a child was cooking. It was not until Batali took a job in California working in a small pizzeria that he decided to take cooking classes. Batali enrolled in the Cordon Bleu in London. From there, Batali returned to California where he became a chef at a hotel restaurant and was offered a kitchen of his own, but Batali refused. Instead, Batali returned to Europe where he worked in a pub under chef Marco Pierre White. White was tough to work for, often throwing tantrums, causing Batali to quit and move on. Batali wanted to learn Italian cooking from real Italian cooks. So he took a position in the kitchen of La Volta in the town of Porretta Terme, Italy. Eventually Batali would return to New York and open his first restaurant, Po. Unfortunately, a falling out with his partner would end with the partner buying Batali out and leaving him free to move on, to open Babbo.

Bill too wants to move on. Bill convinces Batali to move him up to the line cook. Bill begins on the grill, cooking the meat as it is ordered. The first few nights are a disaster, but Bill eventually catches on to the rhythm and is able to keep up with the orders. After a time, Bill wants to move on to learn pasta making. Batali agrees to move Bill to the pasta station but demands that he first return to the prep kitchen in order to learn how the pasta is made. When Bill moves to the pasta station after learning to make the pasta, he discovers that it is not only harder than he had originally assumed, but that it is also a hot job. Bill works over boiling water all night and he has to remember what sauces and ingredients go with what pasta.

Kitchen politics lead to a change in employees. Bill is moved back to the grill where he is tested by the new expediter or the man whose role it is to make sure all the correct



orders are made, plated, and sent out to the customers. Bill survives this test, but finds the stress in the kitchen difficult to deal with. Eventually, Bill decides that he wanted to go to Italy to learn as Batali did from the kitchen of a true Italian cook. Bill arranges to become an apprentice in the kitchen of Betta, the previous cook of La Volta.

Betta teaches Bill how to make a variety of pastas, including a tortellini that her family had traditionally made every Christmas. From Betta, Bill learns a lot about pasta, but he also learns about the essentials of cooking in Italy using the ingredients that are readily available and often going for months at a time eating the same thing day in and day out.

After leaving Betta's kitchen, Bill decides that he wants to be an apprentice to a butcher in Tuscany because Batali's father has apprenticed under the same butcher and because it seems like something a proper Italian cook should learn to do. Bill gets permission to begin working in the butcher shop of Dario Cecchini who is the most famous butcher in Tuscany. At first Bill is convinced he will never learn how to cut meat because Dario has restricted him to making jams, jellies, and sauces. However, just days before leaving Tuscany to return to New York, the maestro who taught Dario and works in his shop teaches Bill how to butcher a pig.

Upon his return to New York, Bill decides to buy a pig so that he can continue practicing his technique. Bill buys a pig from a friend and finds himself receiving dirty looks for carrying the carcass through a farmer's market and into his apartment building. Once home, Bill is able to carve the pig into so many pieces and make so many meals that he and his wife quickly became tired of pork.

Bill returns to Tuscany and is taught how to carve the meat from a cow carcass. Bill finds this task to be much more difficult than he had ever imagined, but he also learns a great deal about carving a cow, the differences in cow breeds, and the use of the cows while they are living that affect the different cuts of meat. Bill also has the opportunity to see some of the traditional and beloved cows of the region on the farm of an acquaintance.

Eventually Bill returns to New York with the gift of all the knowledge he learned both in Babbo's kitchen and in Italy. During dinner with Mario one night, Bill finds himself drinking and eating much more than he could have imagined doing before his adventures in Italian cooking. When Batali asks Bill if he is going to open a restaurant with all his new knowledge, Bill realizes that he is not ready.



Dinner with Mario and Kitchen Slave: Chapters 1-3

Dinner with Mario and Kitchen Slave: Chapters 1-3 Summary and Analysis

Bill Buford is a staff writer for *The New Yorker* and is the founding editor of *Granta* magazine and *Granta* books. Bill has always been an amateur cook, often cooking elaborate meals for friends and family, a hobby that led to the adventures that eventually became this book.

In *Dinner with Mario*, Bill Buford was having a dinner party and he invited famed chef, Mario Batali, to come. Batali arrived with an armful of food and wine, taking over the kitchen without asking. In a gesture of appreciation, Batali took Bill to a New York Giants game where Bill discovered just how famous Batali was as a result of his Food Network television show, *Man vs. Mario*. At the time Bill met Batali, Batali and his partner owned three restaurants and were considering opening a fourth as well as buying a vineyard in Tuscany. Born in Seattle, Batali was the son of a Boeing executive who eventually took the family to live in Spain during Batali's adolescence. Batali had always liked to cook, but refused to go to cooking school and instead went to Rutgers in New Jersey. Batali would eventually discover the excitement in cooking and decide to attend the *Cordon Bleu* in London before taking a job under Chef Marco Pierre White. From there Batali would embark on a grand tour of the greatest restaurants of Europe, learning everything he could about cooking.

In chapter 1, Bill becomes an extern, a non-paid intern, in the kitchen of Batali's signature restaurant, Babbo. Bill began in the prep kitchen, the work done early in the day before the cooks came in to prepare for the night's dishes. Bill worked under Elisa, a talented cook who ran the prep kitchen. Bill's first day he discovered he should have had knives of his own, his first mistake to annoy Elisa. Elisa set Bill about carving the ducks, showing him where to find the oyster. However, Elisa worked too quickly and Bill could not repeat what she had done. On top of this, Bill managed to cut himself deeply on that first day. The prep kitchen taught Bill how to use the knife properly and how to cut up vegetables in an appropriate fashion.

In chapter 2, Batali moved to California in the spring of 1985. Batali began working for a catering company and became a sous-chef in a Four Seasons hotel six months later. After two years, Batali was offered a kitchen of his own at the Biltmore in Santa Barbara, becoming the highest paid chef of his age at the time. After a year, the company offered Mario a restaurant in Hawaii, but he turned them down. Batali wanted to learn how to cook like his grandmother, so he found a place in Italy where he could learn under the tutelage of a true Italian matron.



In chapter 3, Bill was in the walk in refrigerator one afternoon at Babbo along with several other kitchen workers. Gina, the pastry chef, came into the walk-in and told Bill he should go ahead and leave since he had a plane to catch that afternoon. When she left, Elisa told Bill not to listen to Gina and that he could leave only when Elisa told him to leave. This was Bill's first introduction to kitchen politics.

In these first chapters, the reader is introduced to Bill Buford. Bill is a writer for a prominent newspaper who has always had a fascination with cooking. Bill had invited famous chef Mario Batali to a dinner party and met a man he could admire. Bill, in his forties and convinced he was too old to learn anything new, took the chance and requested a place in Batali's kitchen. Batali immediately agreed, putting Bill to work at the lowest level in his kitchen at Babbo, kitchen slave. Bill learns not only that cooking professionally is much harder than he imagined, but that like any other work place, there are politics that cause tension in the workplace. At the same time the reader is getting to know Bill, the reader is also learning about Mario Batali. A modern day chef, Batali has entered a new level of fame by becoming one of the first celebrities to appear on the new television network, the Food Network. Batali began his career working in a small pizzeria and quickly moved his way up to four star restaurants. However, Batali knew he could be better, so he chose to continue his education in Italy under a true Italian cook. This is an honorable step in Batali's education and one the reader suspects Bill Buford might repeat.

Kitchen Slave: Chapters 4-8

Kitchen Slave: Chapters 4-8 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 4, Batali arrived in Porretta Terme, a small town in the valley between Bologna and Florence in Italy. La Volta was a small restaurant that was highly acclaimed where Batali would be working with Betta to learn how to cook authentic Italian dishes. It was a difficult time because Batali thought he knew so much more than he did and he had to learn humility. Bill Buford would visit the town years later with Joe Bastianich, Batali's business partner, and hear stories of Batali's time there. La Volta failed after Batali left because of a downturn in the economy, but the family bought a small pizzeria where Betta continues to cook. They laugh about Batali's ego and how Betta always refused to show him how to make her family recipe for tortellini.

In Chapter 5, Bill explains how the Babbo kitchen was like two different kitchens. First was the prep kitchen and all the employees required to work it. Then came the evening kitchen and the cooks who prepared Batali's dishes for customers. They included Andy, the expeditor, Nick, the pasta guy, Dominic Cipollone, the sauté chef, and Mark Barrett, who worked the grill. Bill recalls how Batali showed up one afternoon to cook and push a dish called cioppino. Batali took Dominic's place and Dominic bumped into him while preparing his own dishes. Batali became angry and dressed Dominic down in front of the entire kitchen. Batali did not spend much time in the kitchen, but the workers never knew when he would show up so every day was worked as though Batali was expected to walk in the door at any minute.

In Chapter 6, it is 1992 and Batali had opened the new Rocco with partner Arturo Sighinolfi. The restaurant did not do well, however, and Arturo was put out with Batali's decision to enter into a contract with a new network, The Food Network, becoming an overnight celebrity. Batali left Rocco's and started a new restaurant, Po, with partner Steve Crane. However, the partnership soured and Crane bought Batali out.

In Chapter 7, changes came to the kitchen of Babbo with Nick leaving to learn to cook in Italy like Batali. Several positions had to be filled immediately. Batali immediately hired Abby Bodiker because she had been a prep cook for The Food Network. However, her work was less than accessible to the sous-chefs and created tension in the kitchen. Another woman, Holly Burling, was hired simply because she was trained in Italy. Bill discovered another bit of kitchen politics as well when he discovered that all kitchens have the Latins, often Spanish speaking workers who were hired to do the menial tasks no one else wanted to do. In Babbo's kitchen these included a group of cousins, one of whom had committed suicide not long before Bill came to work in the kitchen over a troubled relationship.

In Chapter 8, Bill learned how to cook short ribs, learning first what they were and from what part of the animal they came through his trusted butcher. Soon after mastering this dish, Babbo stopped serving short ribs and moved to the simpler cut of meat known as



chuck flap, a meat that had all the benefits of short ribs without the often unappetizing appearance.

In these chapters, Bill Buford concludes the story of how Batali became a chef and continues his own story of working as a kitchen slave in the kitchens of Babbo. Like any other chef, Batali learned all he could before deciding he wanted to open his own kitchen with his own selection of dishes. Batali began working at a friend's restaurant and moved to his own, struggling with his sudden fame from a show on the new Food Network and compatibility problems with his partners. Batali finally found his current partner and has known wild success ever since. However, Bill wanted to know about Batali's past and learns that he was thought of as an arrogant fool when he was at La Volta in Italy. At the same time, Bill learns what a difficult thing a successful restaurant kitchen can be with so many egos attempting to work and flourish in the same place. Politics enter the kitchen, causing friction between the chefs, as well as unpleasantness whenever Batali decides to visit the kitchen. However, unlike other famous chefs, Batali is not one to throw temper tantrums and this is something that Bill is quick to point out.

Line Cook: Chapters 9-12

Line Cook: Chapters 9-12 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 9, Bill was promoted to the grill station. This station required the worker to prepare the steak, chicken, or fish and its appropriate accompaniments while the rest of the meal was prepared elsewhere. There was a set way to grill the food so that the food would bear the appropriate marks from the grill. However, Bill had trouble turning over the branzino, a stuffed fish that was delicate and difficult to handle. On his first night, Bill dropped or burned nearly half the branzino. After two months on the grill, Bill was hammered for the first time, given more orders than he could keep up with. However, Bill was able to keep up and was proud of his skills until Batali came in one night and criticized some of his work. Bill was pushed off the station, but he stuck it out and managed to recover his spot.

In Chapter 10, Bill spent time with Marco Pierre White to answer for himself the question of what Batali had learned from him. Bill found White to be a disorganized dyslexic outside of the kitchen who was able to translate his disability into an uncanny ability to create unique and artfully designed plates of food. White also had a terrible temper in the kitchen when things did not go his way that bled into his personal life at times, especially when he became excited about something. White was also an avid hunter who often prepared what he shot. Bill regretted that he never had a chance to work in White's kitchen before he retired from cooking.

In Chapter 11, Bill visited Italy where he ate homemade pasta at the Trattoria La Buca run by a woman named Miriam Leonardi. Bill was so impressed by the pasta that he wanted to learn to make it himself. It was also about this time that Bill began researching authentic Italian cooking and came across the book *De Honesta Voluptate et Valitudine*, a book written by a librarian at the Vatican in 1463 who met chef Maestro Martino and was so impressed that he wrote a book about his recipes.

In Chapter 12, Bill returned to Babbo and begged Batali to allow him to work the pasta station. Batali said that he was too old to keep up with the pasta station but finally relented and told Bill that he could work the station, but he would first have to work in the prep kitchen making the pasta. Bill had trouble with the most basic shape, but eventually caught on to the technique. However, this struggle taught Bill that making pasta by hand was much more difficult than he had imagined. Bill then had to learn about the basic sauce used to serve with the pasta called ragu. Bolognese ragu is often made with meat that is cooked in wine and simmered for so long that it becomes a sticky sauce or a condiment as Batali refers to it. Finally Bill is allowed to work the pasta station, but finds it difficult to remember the ingredients for the multiple pasta dishes served. Bill finally got the hang of it, and even learned an important lesson. Bill had never liked clams before, but learned that when the clams are boiled and allowed to open within the pasta dish, the flavor is one that cannot be duplicated by any other means.



In these chapters, Bill is promoted to line cook and is able to grill meats and make pasta. At the same time, Bill begins to fall in love with the authenticity of Italian cooking, especially fresh pasta he tastes on a trip in Italy. This causes Bill to desire to make pasta at Babbo, but the experience proves to be more frustrating than he was prepared for. However, it shows how determined Bill is that he remains in the kitchen, an unpaid slave, learning all he can about cooking the food he loves. At the same time, Bill begins to research the history of this food, learning about pastas and sauces from a book written six hundred years ago. The book contains recipes that are recognizable and often still used today in some parts of Italy.

Line Cook: Chapters 13-15

Line Cook: Chapters 13-15 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 13, Bill again goes back in time to 1995 when an article appeared in The New York Observer that brought Mario Batali the attention of the head of a new network called The Food Network. This executive, Jonathan Lynne, read an article about a group of chefs who would meet after hours at a place called Blue Ribbon and relax with one another. Lynne created a show for Batali in which he would teach viewers how to cook specific dishes. It was a big success in the beginning, but quickly became a tired format and Batali was never able to find another format that fit his style. Bill recorded nine months of Batali's show, however, in order to learn from this famous chef. However, Bill's meals would never turn out like Batali's. Once Bill began working at Babbo's he figured out this was because it was nearly impossible to translate a recipe designed for a hundred people into one for two.

In Chapter 14, Bill talks about polenta. Polenta is a porridge-like cereal that is made from cornmeal. However, in his research into polenta, Bill learned that polenta was not made from corn until Columbus brought it back from the New World. Before corn, polenta was made from a variety of grains, including barley. Bill often attempted to make polenta, following directions to stir it constantly, but it never came out right. At Babbo's, Bill learned that it was not necessary to stir polenta, but that it was necessary to allow it to cook for hours. Bill made his first batch of polenta while part of a team cooking a special dinner at a benefit in Nashville. Bill did well despite the fact that a local Italian cook stood over his shoulder the whole time.

In Chapter 15, Batali and his partner, Joe, opened a new pizzeria in a cursed building on Fifth Avenue called Otto. The place was doomed to fail because the flat pizzas Batali insisted on serving were inedible. However, the place did very well, much to everyone's surprise. At the same time, Andy, the expeditor at Babbo's, was becoming anxious for Batali and Joe to fulfill a promise to back him in a Spanish restaurant. Andy's anxiety was becoming a problem in the kitchen, leading to a great deal of tension. At the same time, Frankie, the sous-chef, was making life difficult for those in the kitchen as well with his criticism. One night Bill was on the grill again because there was a change in personnel and they thought it would be better for someone else to do the pasta station. Frankie stood over Bill, waiting for him to make a mistake. However, Bill never did. After that night, Bill felt he was finally a part of the kitchen staff.

In these chapters, Bill relates Mario's experience on the Food Network, making himself a star that helped to make his restaurants a success. However, there is some debate over whether it was The Food Network who made Mario Batali, or Batali who made the Food Network. Bill used the programs himself to learn to cook before his days at Babbo's but found it near impossible to replicate the recipes accurately, as most people probably did because it is not possible to reduce a restaurant recipe to one for only two people. Bill also continues to find new recipes that are new to him but old as Italy. Bill's

experience with the polenta again showcases his fascination with the history of Italian food as well as his growing level of knowledge. Finally, tensions are growing at Babbo's as cooks come and go and personalities conflict. The reader suspects that this level of politics is beginning to disturb Bill's desire to get down to the simplicity of Italian cooking and will prompt a change.



Pasta-Maker: Chapters 16-18

Pasta-Maker: Chapters 16-18 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 16, Bill had become obsessed with when the egg became a main ingredient in fresh pasta. In the earliest books that Bill had been able to find, the pasta called for flour and water but no egg. Bill felt the question more intently as he decided he wanted to learn to make pasta from a real Italian cook. Bill called Miriam, the woman who fixed the first fresh pasta he had tasted, but she did not know what she could teach him. Bill met the chef from a famous Italian restaurant while she was in New York as a guest chef and asked to be her intern, but she refused. Finally Batali, speaking to Mark, suggested they both intern with Betta at her new pizzeria. Bill jumped at the chance and arrived in Italy ten days ahead of Mark in order to have time alone with Betta. Betta forced Bill to watch first, teaching him through her actions. Betta's recipe includes eggs which brings Bill back to the question of when egg became an ingredient in pasta. Bill finally consulted the curator at the pasta museum, but even she had no clue when the first egg was used in pasta dough. Eventually Bill found what he believed to be the first recipe to ever use an egg in a book called *Lo scalco alla moderna* by Antonio Latini written at the end of the seventeenth century.

Betta eventually allowed Bill to make pasta, first teaching him how to roll the dough out as thin as possible before creating shapes. Bill found this process difficult, but rewarding. Bill begged Betta to teach him tortellini, something Betta had refused to teach Batali. Eventually Betta agreed, after forcing Bill to promise not to tell Batali, telling Bill the story of how her mother and aunts would make it each Christmas. When Bill went home, he studied tortellini, discovering that no two recipes are alike.

In Chapter 17, Andy was finally given his own restaurant, Casa Mono. Everyone was concerned that Andy could not cook, but when he made the whole menu for Joe, Batali, and Bill, they discovered his cooking was perfection.

In Chapter 18, Frank took over Andy's job. Multiple people quit in the aftermath of this change of the guard, some out of protest and some just because it was time to move on. Bill was one of the latter.

These chapters describe Bill's trip to Italy to learn from the same woman who taught Batali so much about pasta and sauces. Bill remains obsessed with pasta, allowing his obsession to include when the first egg was used in pasta dough. This obsession possesses Bill until he finally finds what he believes is the answer. What the importance of this question is, the reader is not clear, but it once again reveals Bill's interest not only in the food and how it is prepared, but the history of it and how it touched the people who have continued to make it generation after generation. This is illustrated by Betta's story of how she would help her mother and aunts make tortellini every Christmas. At the same time, turmoil has touched the kitchen of Babbo's, so Bill decides it is time to move on, causing the reader to wonder where he will go next.



Apprentice: Chapters 19-24

Apprentice: Chapters 19-24 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 19, Bill convinced his wife to quit her job and go with him to Italy while he apprenticed for a Tuscan butcher. Bill called Dario Cecchini, a famous butcher who also allowed Batali's father to intern in his shop, and asked for a position. Dario immediately agreed. Upon Bill's arrival in Dario's shop one Sunday, he found Dario reciting Dante's *Inferno* to a crowd of customer.

In Chapter 20, Bill began his apprenticeship on a Monday. The shop was quiet, with only Dario, the maestro, and married couple Carlo and Teresa. Bill was put to work making red chili jelly called mostarda and preparing other sauces sold in the shop. Bill was injured himself several times his first few weeks in the shop, banging his head on a machine used to pound meat, slipping and falling, and cutting his fingers. Bill really wanted to learn to cut meat. However, he found making sausages a fascinating job that was only made more momentous when Teresa and Maestro sang "O sole mio."

In Chapter 21, Dario was born into a family of butchers, but he intended to leave the family business and become a veterinarian. However, Dario's father contracted cancer and died, leaving Dario's family in such financial difficulty that he had no choice but to learn the family business. Dario moved out of his family home a short time later, buying Il Greppo, an ancient estate, in order to have space of his own. Il Greppo stands between two large estates, both devoted to growing grapes.

In Chapter 22, Bill and his wife, Jessica, went to dinner with Dario and his girlfriend, Ann Marie, only to watch Dario berate the restaurant owner for serving foods that are not Italian and steak that was made from inferior meat.

In chapter 23, Bill was finally allowed to help prepare pigs for a dish called arista. The Maestro showed Bill how to make the cuts, but Bill managed to make major mistakes when he cut up his own pig.

In chapter 24, Bill returned to New York with his wife. Bill wanted to continue to practice what he had learned, so he arranged to buy a pig from a friend. Getting the pig home from the green market where he bought proved illuminating, but when he got it home, Bill was able to carve up the pig appropriately and use nearly every part of it for multiple meals. In fact, Bill made so many dishes with the pig that he and his wife became tired of pork.

These chapters follow Bill as he goes to Tuscany and becomes an apprentice to a famous butcher. Dario is the most famous butcher in Tuscany because his meat is always the best. However, Dario had not wanted to be a butcher, an ironic turn in his fated life. Bill wants to learn to cut up meat because he feels it is important to know where your meat comes from. However, Bill must be patient and work his way up to the

top just as he did at Babbo. Finally Bill is able to cut up a pig and discovers that knowing where your meat comes from is not something all people want to know. However, Bill proves once again that his resolve to learn all he can about authentic Italian cooking is strong as he continues to learn everything he can.



Tuscan Butcher: Chapters 25-28

Tuscan Butcher: Chapters 25-28 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 25, Bill returned to Dario's shop. The Maestro continues teaching Bill as though he had never left, picking up on the thigh of a cow. During this time, Bill visited a local vineyard and saw for the first time the "chianine" or the cow that once populated this region of Italy. The chianine is larger than a normal cow and tends to be all-white. The chianine once worked hard on the vineyards and farms of the region, resulting in a tender and much-desired meat. Bill also began to learn about the different cuts made on a cow. Bill discovered that some of the cuts that the Maestro told him he could not find in other books, causing him to come to the conclusion that butchers of different regions have different cuts on the animals they use. During this time, Bill would often bring cuts of meat to the Maestro, including parts of steaks he had eaten at a restaurant the night before in order to get his opinion on the quality. Also during this time, Bill learned the different cuts needed to butcher an animal, including the silver sliver to get rid of the silver strings on a piece of meat.

In Chapter 26, Dario was saddened by a breakup with his girlfriend and often treated customers unkindly for the first few weeks after Bill returned. Bill also noticed that Dario did not stock pork chops in his shop. When Bill asked about it, Dario becomes irate. Later, Dario gave Bill a book he wrote himself that contained recipes that did not really describe the dishes. Bill decided Dario had not wanted to be a butcher and so he choose to be an unusual butcher. A few weeks after Bill returned, Dario's neighbor Giovanni, bought a bull to go with his three cows. The whole town was talking about it, except Dario. It was then that Bill learned Dario and Giovanni were angry at each other when the Maestro's son fell in love with Giovanni's daughter and was forbidden to see her. The rift continued to grow until Bill witnessed an awkward meeting of the two men that illustrated their chivalrous rivalry.

In Chapter 27, Bill and his wife Jessica watched the arrival of Giovanni's bull. The vineyard workers were not prepared and were working quickly to expand a fence and move the cows into another pasture. They had no luck until Beppe, the man in charge of the cows, arrived and easily moved them. For weeks, everyone in town talked about the bull and whether he would live up to expectations. Eventually Bill learned it had. During this time, Bill overheard an argument between Dario and a customer over chianine meat. Dario did not sell chianina steaks and had no intention of doing so. In fact, his meat came from Spain. The Maestro explained to Bill that chianina were no longer worked like they had been in the past and therefore their meat was no longer worth eating.

In Chapter 28, Bill visited La Pieve di San Leolino, Panzano's oldest church, as he prepared to leave Panzano for the last time. This visit made Bill think of the history of Italian food and how it had remained a large part of life in Italy, but those who made it



were slowly disappearing. Bill believed for this reason it was important for people like him to learn the old ways and to learn about the food, its preparation, and its history. When Bill said his goodbyes to the Maestro, he attempted to give him his knife steel, but the Maestro made him put it in a drawer so it would be there when he returned.

In these chapters, Bill not only continues to learn how to cut up meat in a butcher shop, but he begins to learn about human nature. Bill becomes aware of the influence of fathers on the men in Panzano, including Dario who only became a butcher because of his father's dying wish. Bill also becomes aware of old conflicts that remain despite a desire to be chivalrous and honorable. It is an entire lifestyle that includes the history of man as well as the history of the food. Bill is proud that he has learned how to make this food because he feels as though he is perpetuating a tradition that is slowly dying away.



Dinner with Mario: Chapter 29

Dinner with Mario: Chapter 29 Summary and Analysis

In 1998, Babbo was awarded three stars by the New York Times. When that particular writer quit, several replaced her, leaving Batali convinced that they would be visited by another writer. Batali encouraged his waiters to watch for the critic and to treat that critic well. However, when the writer finally came to rate Babbo, the kitchen was in turmoil and the waiter did not recognize him until his final visit. Batali was a wreck, worried about the result. However, the review was good, giving Babbo three stars once again. The restaurant would have gotten four, but the music was too loud. This was because Batali had to be in the kitchen during the switch in expediter positions from Andy to Frankie.

In Chapter 29, Bill and Batali met for dinner. Batali ordered more food that Bill once would have thought appropriate, but which he now encouraged. They also drank so much that Bill eventually found it impossible to write coherent notes on the dinner. During that dinner, Batali asked Bill if he would be opening his own restaurant now that he had learned so much. Bill admitted however, that he was not ready for such a venture. Instead, Bill wanted to research Catherine de Medicis, the French queen whom the Italians blame for teaching the French all their cooking secrets.

This final section of the book wraps up how things ended at Babbo. Babbo received three stars once again. The restaurant would have gotten four, but Batali played his music too loud, cheating himself out of the one thing he wanted and had berated his employees about for years. It is ironic but Batali is satisfied that the food was good enough. Bill continues to enjoy Italian cooking, but he began as a man of words and continues as such, focusing on another project that deals with French queen Catherine de Medicis.

Characters

Bill Buford

Bill Buford is a writer who works for the New Yorker. Bill also is the founding editor of Granta magazine and publisher of Granta Books. Several years ago, Bill met Mario Batali, a famous New York chef, and convinced him to let Bill work in his kitchen at Babbo. Bill had always been a weekend chef but wanted to learn how the professionals do it. At Babbo, Bill discovered he had to start at the beginning again, learning how to use a knife and how to cut vegetables. Bill moved quickly through the ranks of the kitchen, however, learning the grill and the pasta station before leaving to learn how to make pasta in the kitchen of a true Italian matriarch.

Bill went to Italy and learned to make pasta from Batali's teacher, Betta. Betta taught Bill things she had refused to teach Batali because she was afraid that her recipes would show up on Batali's menu at Babbo. From there, Bill went to learn how to be a butcher in Tuscany. Bill wanted to know every aspect of cooking from the cutting off the meat to the cooking. At the end, Bill learned a great respect for Italian cooking, for the history of Italian cooking, and for Italians in general.

Mario Batali

Mario Batali became a chef in the eighties after working in a pizza place and learning how exciting restaurants can be. Batali trained at a good cooking school and worked under one of the most well respected chefs in Europe. Batali then returned to America and worked in two of his own restaurants before finally beginning Babbo. Before Babbo, Batali was introduced to an executive from a new television network called the Food Network. Batali had a show on the network called *Malto Mario* on which he taught viewers to cook some of the popular dishes at his restaurants. As a result, Batali became one of the best known chefs in New York.

Marco Pierre White

Marco Pierre White began his cooking career by touring some of the most successful restaurants in Europe and learning how those chefs worked. White then worked in the kitchen of a pub, cooking French foods that no pub had ever served before. Batali was White's assistant at the pub and learned to dislike White's reduced sauces. White was a tough boss, often having temper tantrums when Batali did not do the work at White thought he should. White also taught Batali how not to behave in the kitchen. Later Bill Buford would visit White and learn that he was dyslexic, causing him to be more visual than most people. This was a gift that helped him prepare dishes in an artistic manner that was unique to him.



Dario Cecchini

Dario Cecchini was the most famous butcher in Tuscany. Dario did not want to become a butcher. Instead, Dario had gone to school to become a veterinarian. However, Dario's father died of cancer before Dario finished his education, forcing Dario to come home and learn his father's trade in order to care for his family. Dario became a good butcher but he was also unique, doing things his own way in order to have something that was just his, not his father's or grandfather's.

The Maestro

The Maestro worked in Dario's shop when Bill apprenticed there. The Maestro taught Dario how to be a butcher and continued to work for him, cutting meat in his shop. Later the Maestro would teach Bill as well, teaching him how to butcher cows and pigs, a talent that Bill took home with him and practiced on a pig in his own home. Bill came to respect the Maestro a great deal and felt the feeling was mutual.

Miriam Leonardi

Miriam Leonardi worked in a restaurant in Italy where Bill visited during his time at Babbo. Miriam prepared for Bill the first plate of fresh pasta he had ever had. As a result, Bill became obsessed with the idea of learning how to make pasta. Bill tried to get Miriam to teach him how to make pasta but she finally admitted to him that she could no longer roll out the dough herself. Instead, she started using a pasta machine to do the work for her. This caused Bill to feel some pity for Miriam and to also be disappointed that her pasta was not truly authentic.

Betta Valdiserri

Betta Valdiserri owned a restaurant called La Volta with her husband in Italy. Mario Batali came to La Volta to learn from Betta how to cook authentic Italian dishes. Betta found Batali arrogant and refused to teach him her most treasured recipe for tortellini. After Batali left, Betta and her husband suffered difficult financial times and lost the restaurant. However, they later opened a pizzeria where Betta continued to make fresh pasta. Bill went there to learn from Betta how to make pasta. Betta eventually taught Bill how to make tortellini but only after he promised never to give the recipe to Batali.

Joe Bastianich

Joe Bastianich became Mario Batali's partner after his partnership with Steve Crane desolved. Joe and Batali opened Babbo together with Batali running the kitchen and Joe running the kitchen. Eventually Joe and Batali opened three more restaurants together and a restaurant for their friend, Andy.



Elisa Sarno

Elisa Sarno was the prep chef at Babbo. Elisa taught Bill the basics such as how to cut up carrots and to prepare meat for various recipes. Elisa was a strong cook but others in the kitchen questioned her abilities in the highly tense atmosphere of the restaurant business. If not for Elisa, Bill never would have learned some of the things he desperately needed to know to become a better cook.

Giovanni Manetti

Giovanni Manetti was Dario's neighbor when Bill was an apprentice at Dario's butcher shop. Giovanni and Dario had a falling out when Giovanni's father refused to allow the Maestro's son to date Giovanni's sister, Giovannia. Giovanni's father died shortly afterward, leaving Giovanni and his sister in charge of the family vineyard. Giovanni decided to continue his father's quest to learn about his Tuscany heritage and buy some chianina cows just like the cows that once were workhorses in the area.



Objects/Places

Pasta Pot

The pasta pot at Babbo's is a large contraption with two large sinks that have heating elements that boil the water and keep it boiling all night. The pasta is placed in baskets where they boil until ready.

Grill Station

The grill station is where Bill learned to grill the steaks, fish, and chicken that he serves at Babbo's.

Ragu

Ragu is a sauce that is often served with pasta. There are as many recipes for ragu as there are cooks but most ragu sauces contain some kind of meat, wine, and spices.

Tortellini

Tortellini is a stuffed pasta that is cooked in broth. Betta's family normally has tortellini at Christmas time.

Chianina

Chianina is a breed of cattle that was once indigent to the region of Tuscany where Dario lives. However, the cattle can no longer be found there and is no longer of culinary value to the people of the region.

De honesta voluptate et valitudine

De honesta voluptate et valitudine is a book written in 1463 by a Vatican librarian who fell in love with the cooking of Maestro Martino and he wrote about the food, the recipes, and the chef.

Bartolomeo Scappi's Opera

Bartolomeo Scappi's Opera is an 1570 text on Italian cooking that Bill Buford studied in his quest to learn to cook authentic Italian food.



Lo scalco alla moderna

Lo scalco alla moderna by Antonio Latini is written in the seventeenth century and contains what appears to be the first pasta recipe using eggs.

Dante's Inferno

Dante's Inferno is a literary work dealing with the multiple levels of hell. Dario often quotes Dante's Inferno when he is emotional.

Babbo

Babbo is the name of Mario Batali's restaurant in New York. It is at Babbo that Bill works as an "extern."

Otto

Otto, meaning eight in Italian, is a pizzeria that Batali and his partner open while Bill worked at Babbo.

Casa Mono

Casa Mono, meaning house of monkey, is the Spanish restaurant backed by Batali and his partner. Andy, the former expeditor of Babbo, runs the restaurant.

Tuscany

Tuscany is a region of Italy. Bill spends several months in Tuscany learning to be an Italian butcher.



Themes

Italian Cooking

Italian cooking is a style of cooking that comes from the traditions and dishes of Italy. Bill Buford was once a weekend cook and someone who enjoyed learning new recipes and creating elaborate meals for his friends and family. However, Bill wants to do more with his cooking. Bill admires chefs like Mario Batali and he wants to learn what it is like to do what they do. For this reason, Bill finds himself writing a piece on Batali for the newspaper he works for at the time and befriending him. Bill eventually convinces Batali to allow him a spot in his restaurant, Babbo. Batali agrees, opening the door for Bill to first learn that he actually knows nothing about cooking.

Bill's journey in a way starts at the very beginning where he has to relearn everything he thought he knew. Bill learns that even something as simple as his cutting technique is incorrect and that there are better ways to save both time and energy. Bill also learns that there are only two correct ways to cut up a carrot. This is something that blows his mind and leaves him frustrated when he is forced to throw out a large batch and start over because he has not cubed the carrots well enough.

Once Bill learns the basics, he yearns to learn more. Bill wants to learn true Italian cooking. For this, Bill turns not to his friend Batali but to Batali's own teachers. Bill goes to Italy and learns to make pasta at the side of Betta, an Italian matron who has been making pasta since childhood. From there, Bill continues his education, learning more about the food he loved and even more than perhaps he wanted to know.

History of Italian Cooking

As Bill Buford began to learn Italian cooking, first in Babbo's kitchen and later in the kitchen of a true Italian matron, he studies the history of his favorite food. Bill searches for books that dated as far back as the twelfth or thirteen century. In these books, Bill discovers that many of the recipes have not changed over many generations despite a change in the number and variety of ingredient available to modern cooks. Bill becomes interested in the history of the food and of the traditions that brought about the need for each of these dishes.

In his studies, Bill learns that ancient Italians would eat polenta made of barley, which is a grey and tasteless porridge that Bill tries to replicate and finds unappetizing. Bill also discovers that pasta has always been made with water until some unknown moment when Italians began putting eggs into their pasta dough. This leads Bill on a strange quest to find the moment when the egg was first put into the dough. He soon finds out that no one knows exactly when that moment took place.

In time, Bill becomes aware that the area in which an Italian lives, the whims of the cooks, and many other things affect the differing recipes found through the country. Bill



discovers that there are as many recipes for ragu and tortellini as there are cooks to make them. Bill also discovers that many staple foods of Italy came about because the ingredients were easily available to the cook and later became a tradition. This information adds another dimension to the history of Italian cooking that Bill is collecting.

Legacy

While in Tuscany, Bill hears the stories of each family he came into contact with. What Bill finds interesting about these stories is the role of the father in each. For Dario, his very existence comes about because Dario's grandfather asks his father to get married and settle down from his death bed. Dario himself becomes a butcher only because his father dies an early death and asks his son to learn the family trade. Dario's neighbor, Giovanni, takes over his father's vineyard and begins making wine and raising cows because he is continuing his father's desire to discover his Tuscan ancestry. It seemed to Bill that the spirits of the father overshadows everyone he meets.

At the same time that Bill learns about the people of Tuscany and about the food he loves, he also realizes that the food and the traditions of Italy are beginning to fade. The food of Italy has always been passed down from family member to family member. However, Dario does not have children and neither does Betta. This makes Bill realize that many of their secrets will disappear when they die. For this reason, Bill feels honored to be a student to these two Italian cooks and to learn their secrets so that he might continue the legacy of the food he loves and the people he also admires and loves.

Style

Perspective

This book is a memoir. The book discusses a time in which the author became an unpaid intern in an Italian restaurant in the hopes of learning to cook the food he had always loved and wanted to cook. The perspective of this book is highly personal and subjective because it is about the experiences of a single man written down for the readers by that same man. Bill Buford shares not only his experiences in learning to cook and prepare Italian food, but his opinions on that food and the history of the dishes he cooked.

This book is a highly personal book and almost like a diary meant for only a few eyes. However, the author has shared his diary with millions of readers, sharing his experiences discovering the food he loves and learning how to cook and prepare it. Bill brings to the book his confusion, the difficulties he had, and his ultimate respect and understanding of the tradition of the food. For this reason, the perspective of this book works well with its subject matter.

Tone

The tone of this book changes as the book develops. At first, Bill Buford is a weekend cook who is aware of his limitations. When Bill first goes to work at Babbo, he makes many mistakes and he is not afraid to share those mistakes with the reader. The tone at this point is amused, lighthearted, and almost self deprecating. Bill is not afraid to laugh at himself. However, as the book continues to develop, the reader notices a more serious tone. Bill becomes more proficient in his cooking and he begins to research the history of the dishes he is learning to cook. This makes the tone take on a more authoritative quality, giving the book a sense of seriousness and confidence.

The tone of the book fits well with the different sections of the book. The book is both amusing and educational, not only taking the reader on a journey through one man's mid-life crisis, but also giving the reader information they might need to explore their own interest in Italian cooking. Bill Buford hides little from the reader and is completely honest, showing both the good and the bad as well as the interesting and the boring. In the end, the reader walks away sensing as though they have read a man's personal journey and also learned something. For this reason, the tone fits the subject matter well.

Structure

The book is divided into seven parts. Each part is given a title that deals with a job or an event that describes that point in Bill Buford's adventures in Italian cooking. Each part contains either an untitled section or a chapter. There are twenty-nine chapters in the



book, each of varying length, some longer than thirty pages while others are as short as two or three. The book includes exposition, including internal monologue and authorial voiced comments. The book also includes scenes in which there is dialogue.

The book follows Bill's adventures in Italian cooking in a simple and linear time line. The book begins with Bill's first dinner with Batali and his request to work in his restaurant. There are a few times when Bill moves around in time, specifically when he tells Batali's history but when it comes to Bill's own story, he tells the story in a linear fashion. Bill moves from Babbo's to Italy where he learns to make pasta and then to Tuscany where he learns to be a butcher. The story contains a full plot and comes to a satisfactory conclusion at the end of the book.



Quotes

"Mario Batali is the most recognized chef in a city with more chefs than any other city in the world" (Dinner with Mario, pg. 5.)

"I cubed pork for a ragu (only after my first batch was returned-'These are chunks, I asked for cubes') and learned how to trim the fat off a flank of beef" (Kitchen Slave: Chapter 1, pg. 19.)

"Po is like a teenage Babbo-thirteen tables, plus another two on the sidewalk, and a menu that borrows heavily from La Volta" (Kitchen Slave: Chapter 6, pg. 54.)

"The grill station is hell. You stand at it for five minutes and you think: So this is what Dante had in mind" (Line Cook: Chapter 9, pg. 81.)

"I learned how much I had to learn" (Line Cook: Chapter 10, pg. 105.)

"Implicit in my role, a pupil whose presence the kitchen tolerated, was that I was to be the one expressing gratitude. To be thanked-this, for me, was a big deal" (Line Cook: Chapter 14, pg. 160.)

"I was now preoccupied by the question of when, in the long history of food on the Italian peninsula, cooks started putting eggs in their pasta dough" (Pasta-Maker: Chapter 16, pg. 177.)

"I'd concluded I needed to return to Italy and be there properly: for a long time" (Apprentice: Chapter 19, pg. 215.)

"Also, I couldn't remember another job where people sang while they worked. I liked that they did. I liked that I was here, making this strange food" (Apprentice: Chapter 20, pg. 234.)

"It was not your normal parcel of urban shopping. It was not your normal green market purchase either, and many people looked at me as though I were a bad man" (Apprentice: Chapter 24, pg. 255.)

"I am not persuaded that Catherine de Medicis taught the French how to cook, but I now believe she was one of several important culinary influences" (Dinner with Mario: Chapter 29, pg. 315.)

"I'm not ready, I told Mario" (Dinner with Mario: Chapter 29, pg. 315.)



Topics for Discussion

Who is Bill Buford? Why does he want to learn to cook in Mario Batali's restaurant? What does Bill do for a living? How does Bill have time to learn to cook? What does Bill learn that he did not already know? Why does Bill continue his education outside of Batali's restaurant? What does Bill's wife think of his actions? How does the reader know this?

Who is Mario Batali? How did he become a chef? Why does he dislike French cooking? Why does Batali open a restaurant in New York? Why does he allow Bill to work in his restaurant? What is his relationship with Bill? What kind of a boss is Batali? Why is he infrequently in the restaurant? How many restaurants does Batali own in New York at the time in which the book is set?

Who is Marco Pierre White? What impact did he have on Batali's career? What kind of food does White cook? Why? What impact does this have on Batali? Where does Bill meet White? What does he learn about White? What disability does White have? What hobby does White indulge while Bill is visiting him? Is there anything odd about a chef having such a hobby?

Who is Miriam? Why does Bill become so fascinated with her? What did Miriam cook for Bill that he likes so much? Why does Miriam refuse to teach Bill to make pasta? What does Bill think about this admission? Does it mean Miriam's pasta is not fresh or authentic? What else does Bill learn from Miriam? How does Miriam impact Bill's desire to continue his education in Italian cooking?

Who is Betta? Why does Bill go to her to learn pasta? Why does Bill want to know how to make pasta? What question bothers Bill about pasta recipes? How does Bill finally find an answer to this question? What recipe does Betta teach Bill that she refuses to teach Batali? What is special about this recipe to Betta? What does this tell Bill about Betta or about her opinion of him?

What is the difference between Italian and French cooking? Why do many people believe that Catherine de Medicini gave away Italian cooking secrets to the French? What does Bill conclude about this assumption? Why does Bill become fascinated with Catherine? What does Bill plan to do about this fascination?

What is polenta? Why is Bill excited to learn to cook it? What was it originally made from and for what reason? What caused a change? What is it made of now? What is ragu? What are the differences in the many recipes available? Why does Bill note that Betta's husband panicked after their wedding because he had not tasted Betta's ragu yet?