

Food, Women, and Fear in Jaume Roig's *Spill*

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The fifteenth-century Valencian work, *Spill* or *Llibre de les dones* (see fig. 1), is a fictional account in lyric verse of the various adventures the narrator Jaume Roig experiences as he seeks and then finds a wife in order to have children. It begins with a narration, directed at the narrator's nephew, Baltassar Bou, recounting his youth in Valencia and adventures as a young man in France. The second section details the series of women he courts and, in a few cases, weds. In the third and final book, he seeks the advice of the biblical Solomon on the matter of marriage. This final book also includes mini lessons in biblical, Spanish, and Valencian history and culture. The first-person narrator, Roig, comes across in this satiric work as misogynist and he judges and condemns the people who enjoy the hospitality and conviviality of others in the anecdotes and vignettes he chooses to present.¹ The author of the work, also named Jaume Roig, was a Valencian physician and his medical knowledge, as well as the way he uses that knowledge as part of his anti-feminist discourse, has been studied by scholars such as Antònia Carré i Pons, Jean Dangler, Michael Solomon, Robert Archer, Antonio Cortijo, and others.² Roig's failed attempts at marriage lead him to shun women altogether—a position confirmed in the last section of the work in which the biblical Solomon appears to confirm this decision with a series of accounts of the evils of women. In the words attributed to the first person narrator, the Roig of the text, as well as the biblical king who appears as an authoritative guide in the third book, the author emphasizes time and again as central to his Christian faith the vows renouncing women and sex, an echo of clerical attitudes of the period; indeed, critics such as Rosanna Cantavella and María Celeste Delgado-Librero have noted that Roig's narration mimics the style of a pious sermon (Delgado-Librero 35-36; Cantavella 160).³

¹ An early version of this paper was presented at the annual North American Catalan Society conference in April of 2024.

² See Solomon, pp. 1-4. On the *Spill* as part of the Querelle des Femmes debate on the Peninsula, see Dangler (2013, 295-97). Dangler notes that in *Spill* Roig seeks to "demonstrate that what is amiss in conjugal relations, that is, how women's duplicity and pejorative traits negatively affect their husbands and threaten the social order" (2001, 36). Archer examines both Roig's construction of an anti-feminist narrative and modern critical stances (108-122). Cortijo suggests that Roig follows the rhetorical models of Boncopagno de Signa, known as *trufador maximus*, whose works were found in Iberian libraries of the fifteenth century (88, 100). In works such as *De la Amistad* and the *Rota Veneris*, Roig had at his disposal models of narratives told by pseudo-epigraphic narrators that confused the roles of narrator and author, as well as narratives on the themes of love and lovesickness that feature common places of misogynist literature and dream narratives similar to that in which Solomon appears to the narrator in *Spill* (Cortijo 90-108).

³ Michael Solomon places the *Spill* and the *Arcipreste de Talavera* in a web a contemporary antifeminist works and points to modern scholarship that perpetuates their misogynist content (1-16). He notes that "by collapsing all antifeminist writing into the transhistorical, this approach fails to ask why, in a particular historical moment, men choose to perpetuate traditional (mis)representations of women. It undermines attempts to analyze institutions and ideologies that foster misogynist discourse, and it fails to answer the most rudimentary question of all: what did Martínez and Roig hope to gain by writing treatises against women?" (3).

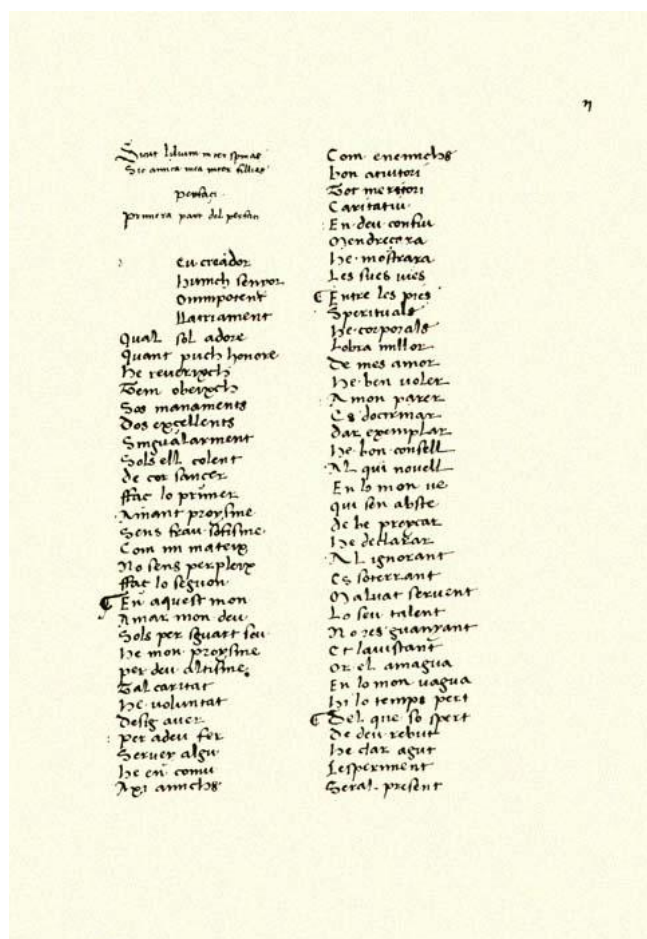


Fig. 1. The opening folio of the only existing manuscript witness of *Spill*. Biblioteca Virtual Joan Lluís Vives, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

Food plays a key role in creating scenes of hospitality (both positive and negative) in the *Spill*, and in this article we examine how the food that the fictional Roig and the women in the work are depicted as consuming and the people with which they choose to do so reflects the medical discourses related to the erotic and women's health that have been the focus of much critical attention. Roig in effect creates a fictional ethnography in which anxieties about care, whether it be food preparation or healer, are manifested through the vignettes and portraits of women intentionally subverting their roles as food provider and healer.⁴ A central way that Roig attempts to demonstrate that women are evil, and ultimately not worthy of his hospitality or the sharing his life, is through foodways—the women in this work consistently subvert what he considers as wholesome norms around food and foodways, thus revealing their base and, in his opinion, evil natures. From Roig's depiction of women involved in food preparation and consumption—including his own mother, his first wife, wet nurses and even French chefs—we see that Roig's relationship with food is as complicated as his relationship to women, and he often conflates them.

⁴ Teresa Vaughn has explored the centrality in modern scholarship of ethnography in early food studies, which has been useful in examining food and gender, and particularly "the informal culture held among women," a culture that involved the "making and sharing of food" as well as women's roles in the family as "healer and first line treatment of illness," requiring knowledge of ingredients, herbs, illnesses and treatments (25).

In the first part of the work, in his account of his youth, Roig claims that he never saw his parents “eat together or have a good time” (281; “Ell ab ma mare / vixqué poc temps, / e mai ensem / los viu menjar / ni festejar”; Book 1, verses 814-18; 98).⁵ His mother kicked him out of the house as a teen, after his father’s death (from consumption and a series of illnesses), telling him, “I can’t have you: go on out. [. . .] don’t think that you’ll find a table or a bed at my house” (282; “No et puc tenir, / vés a seguir! / taula ni llit / —ti-t’ho per dit—”; Book 1, vv. 904-07; 102). The rejection by his mother is succinctly presented in terms of food, namely her unwillingness to provide it for him. This denial extends to other female members of his family. The narrator tells him he was rejected by both his mother and his aunt/s: “Great poverty soon took hold of me and a great illness struck me. Neither mother nor aunt welcomed me, nor did they ever boil barley for me” (282; “La gran fretura / prest m’atengué, / e’em reprengué / gran malaltia: / mare ne tia / ni m’acolliren, / ni mai bulliren / ordi per mi”; Book 1, vv. 912-19; 102). Such rejection by his female family members pushes him to hit the road.

For Roig, the hospitality and medical/gastronomic knowledge of women (including the denial of it) can be deadly. In the third book, he compares the suffering of a sick husband, bed-ridden and alone, with that of his wife, who, after a long period of caregiving and lack of sleep also falls ill, but who, when sick, can rely on friends—treatment he resents. This scene lays bare the notion, underscored by Michael Solomon, that women’s evil nature is a threat to men’s health and well-being (78-79). Roig here claims, through the character of Solomon, that once the sick man is in bed and has already provided for his wife in his will, she no longer visits him and claims to be exhausted and faint after long vigils taking care of him. She then takes to her bed: “Another woman assists and supports them, preparing a better bowl for her. Sleeping, eating, drinking, resting her beautiful body, she stays in bed” (345; “al llit se gita, / pus no el vesita. / Altra els servix / e costeix, / millor per ella / fent l’escudella. / Ella dorment, / menjant, bevent, / donant repós / al seu bell cos, / al llit s’està”; Book 3, vv. 8245-55; 340). Solomon’s description paints a picture in which, once again, food and commensality are key aspects of the woman’s healing—something once again denied to the narrator. To add insult to injury, this exchange of food can be read as a demonstration of female solidarity: the sick man’s wife, although her “beautiful body” clearly requires less care, is given better food by the woman who ostensibly takes over what should be the wife’s duties to her husband.

Noble Habits

This negative depiction of women through food continues in Roig’s presentation of the women he meets as he seeks a wife. In the second book of the work, Roig begins by presenting his own infelicitous and unsuccessful marriage attempts, prompted by his advancing in age (having turned 32 years old) and his desire for a legacy. In one case, he is married to a young maiden whose horrible habits he only discovers after they move in together. Before being married he is attracted to her youth and beauty, but once married he expends some 1150 verses on her many flaws. Roig complains of the lifestyle of this wife, who, as he recounts, imitated aspects of the lifestyle of Muslim women. She spent hours making herself up, “like smart Moorish women do” (97; “era afeinada [. . .] com van les mores / que són savies”; Book 2, vv. 2548-52; 156) in order to go to Church and she would spend hours at the public baths, dancing in her under garments. She would

⁵ We cite throughout María Celeste Delgado-Librero’s English translation and Antonia Carré’s Catalan edition of *Spill*.

also drink wine and eat delicacies such as sweet chicken, partridges and eggs with ginger and pepper.⁶ There she would dance on tapestries and eat luxuriously:

She frequently went, at night, to the new bath of Mister Sanou or Mister Suau in the Palace. After taking off her clothes you would see her dance on beautiful tapestries [. . .] Partridges, hens, small chickens with juleps [*jarabe*] or stews; eggs with ginger, hard-boiled eggs with pepper; Greek wine and claret without delay, and Malmsey in goblets as a courtesy. (296)

Sovint anava
de nit al nou
bany d'en Sanou,
o d'en Suau;
en lo palau
de despullar
vereu ballar,
en bells tapits,
aücs, salts, crits,
ab ses veïnes.
Perdius, gallines,
pollets petits,
juleps, solsits,
ous ab gingebré,
los durs ab pebre!
Grec e clarea
sense perea,
la malvasia
per cortesia
en gobellets.
(Book 2, vv. 2646-65; 158-60)

We know from the contemporary Catalan medical treatise, the *Speculum al foderi*, that the foodstuffs that Roig mentions (ginger, sweet wine), as well as the bath itself, were considered part of diets prescribed by physicians from the time to aid in sex:

I say that those men whose temperaments are cold and dry need to eat hot, humid foods and drink wine when they copulate. [. . .] They should turn to wheat breads, mutton, and sweet red wine. The spices they should use are ginger, cinnamon, and long pepper. [. . .] They should take a warm bath, work little (chp. 2, section 2; 5)

⁶ Scholars such as Francesca Español Bertrán and Ryan Szpiech (126) have pointed to Roig's anti-Muslim discourse, most notably in the description of a woman who sought the help of the Valencian *alfaqui* in order to conceive. In an adaptation of the pervasive and false anti-Jewish story of host desecration, the *alfaqui* supposedly instructs her to bring him the communion wafer (Book 2; vv. 3500-3578). While also an anecdote involving consumption, conception and anti-Muslim sentiment, this tale centers not on the erotic or pleasurable aspects of food, but on what Olivia Remie Constable characterizes as the Christian perceptions of the "dangers of contact over a shared dinner" with Muslims in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Castile (2013, 208). See also Freidenreich (197-208).

Dich que aquells qui han les compleccions fredes e seques, quant usen molt lo foder, han mester que Mengen les viands caldes [e] humides, e [que beguen] del vi [. . .]; deuen acórrer ab viands de pa e de trigo, e carn de moltó, e vi vermell dols; e ses spicies sian gingebre, canella, [e] pebre lonch. [. . .] E usa lo bany temprat e treball poch” (chp. 2, section 2; 49)

In this treatise, ginger, soft-boiled eggs, as well as well as “poultry prepared with aged honey, fragrant wine or raisin wine” are all foods considered to be conducive to coitus (“carn des aucells adobada ab vi olent o ab vi de panseso ab mel veyla”; chp. 2, section 3; 6, 50).⁷

In addition to noting that his wife consumed wines, eggs and chickens, he states that she also partook of partridges and hens, specifying that the chickens she consumed were small. Such delicate foods are those appropriate for people of higher social rank as dictated by thinkers of the era such as Rodrigo Sánchez de Arévalo and Enrique de Villena (Gómez Bravo 60-62) and precisely the foods that his wife refuses to consume with him at home.⁸ In fact he tells us that while she is out at the baths eating such delicacies, he waits at home alone: “I waited for her while everything burned. How many bad days and worst suppers I endured in silence! And how many bad days!” (295; “Jo l’esperava: / tot se cremava! / Quant mal dinar, / pijor sopar, / n’haguí callant / e suportant, / i quant mal dia!”; Book 2, vv.2575-82; 156). Her love of delicacies and sweets in particular eventually leads him to have to settle a significant debt with the town baker and pastry chef at the end of their relationship: “the confectioner, and the fritter and *casqueta* baker kept tabs for her, and I paid” (299; “e confiter / La bunyolera / e casquetera /tenien talles, /segons les ratles / jo padador”; Book 2, vv. 2982-85; 170).

His wife also exerts her independence from him by insisting on using her own dishes, as well as controlling the substances she consumes. The narrator tells us she insisted on her meat carved with a carving fork or *broca* (see fig. 2):

She had a specific plate, a certain bowl, a separate cup, untouched salt, and her own napkin. She did not allow carving without a carving fork. She would not eat meat from the market if there had been a hanging, nor did she allow fruit to be brought home. (295)

Senyalat plat,
certa escudella,
tenia ella,
tassa apartada,
sal no tocada,
son drap de boca.

⁷ Recommendations of food, wine, and baths appear in several places in the treatise. In chp. 2, section 11, the anonymous author of the *Speculum al foderi* describes appetites for wine and food as part of a healthy libido and prescribes bathes as well: “Men who find great pleasure in coitus should eat a lot of food and drink a lot of wine; they should be well rested and take baths” (8; E aquella qui han gran sabor de foder, usen molta vianda e molt vin e rapòs e banys e bones odors; 51). The recommendation to consume ginger and wine can be found in chp. 2, section 2 (5-7, 49-50). Eggs are mentioned in several places, including in the chapter entitled “Medicines that Arouse the Desire for Coitus,” where eggs with salt are described as a “marvelous food”/“menjar marvellós” (chp. 7, section 25; 26, 70). When weak from illness, the author further advises the consumption of food in small quantities, including “soft-boiled egg yolks, leavened bread, the juices from roasted meats” (chp. 2, section 4; 6; vermellsd’ous scalfats [e que sian blans] e el pa fresch de forment e el such qui qui hix della carne n ast). On the shifting attitudes to bathing in Iberia during the Middle Ages, see Constable 2018 (75-91).

⁸ Gómez Bravo notes that, “In his *Arte cisoria*, Villena paints a fuller picture of a world order necessarily based on the human differentials that food consumption supports” (61).

Tallar sens broca
 No consentia
 ni menjaria
 carn del mercat si hom penjat
 algú hi havia,
 ni permetia,
 fruita en portassen
 (Book 2, vv. 2474-2487; 154).

The latter insistence upon using a fork to assist with carving relates to what Enrique de Villanueva tells us in his *Arte cisoria* about the social significance of having food properly carved (fig. 2), noting carving as a feature of life among the urban upper classes and the clergy, as opposed to the poor and those who live in the country and who cut their meat any which way:

como en este cortar se departe la policía de los que hurbanamente e curial viven de los rústicos e plebeyos, que aquellas así adobadas viandas non las cortan por regla sabida con tanta limpieza, sinon que fazen d'ellas partes e pieças a su talante variamente e las comen como las bestias inmundamente. Por eso non han con ellas otra diferençia sinon de crudo a cocho. D'esto les nasçen lo mascan mal e peor digieren, nudriendo con ello rudas complisiones e inflexibles miembros, sentidos ebetados, engeños perversos con agudezas bestiales e non humanas. Lo contrario d'esto acaesçe en los que lindamente e bien cortado comen, faziendo buena e fácil digestión, a mejoramiento de sus complisiones e operaciones vertuosas. (214)

Villena notes in his treatise that the fork/*broca* allows the carved meat to be transferred to the plate without being touched by the hand, neither dirtying the diner's hand not being touched by the server, who presumably would have been of a lower social rank: Las brocas sirven “para tomar la vianda y ponerla delante sin tocar con las manos” (214).⁹

⁹ On *brocas* as an essential part of the carving process and as inherited symbols of generational wealth and status, see García Marsilla (35-37).

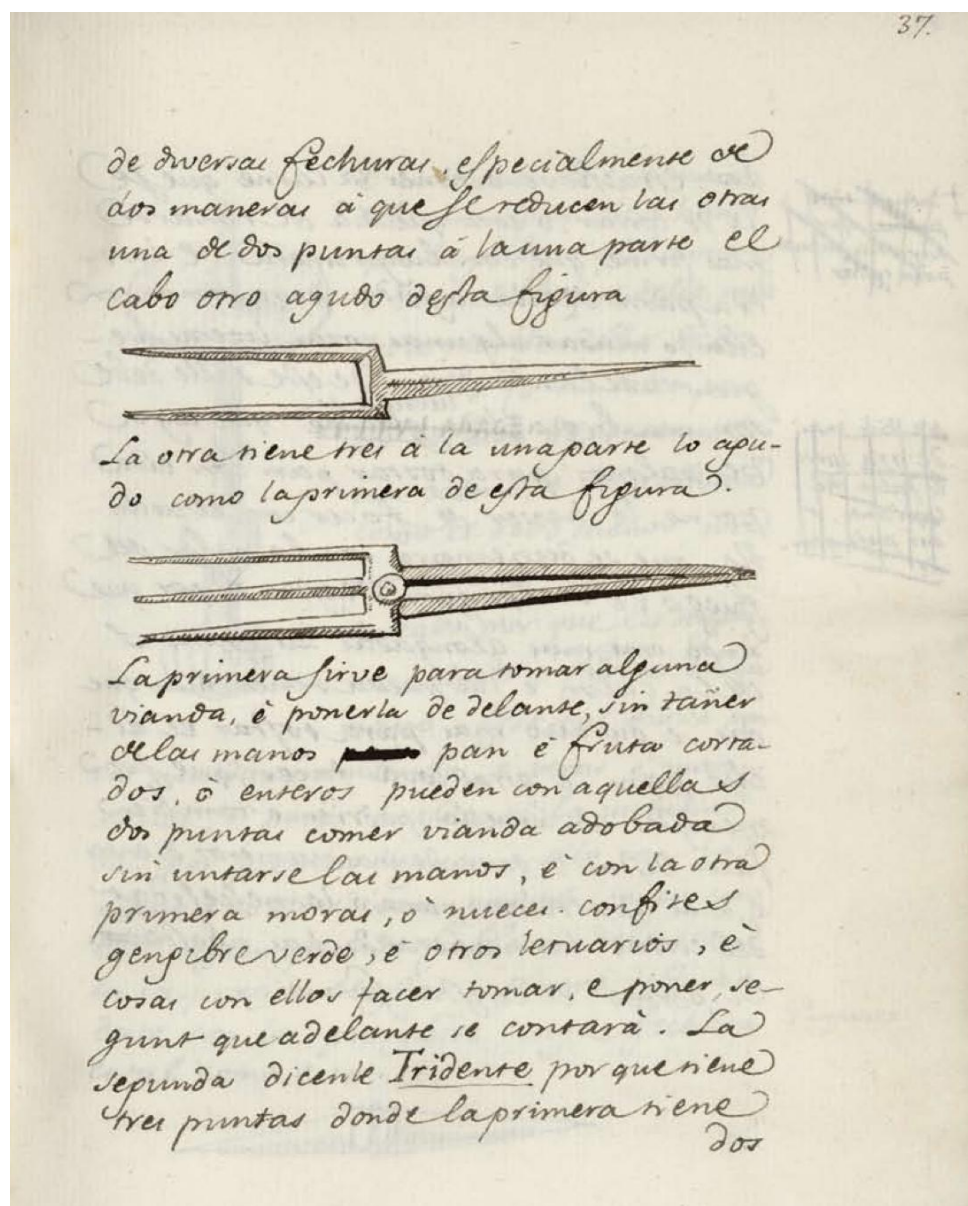


Fig. 2. Images of carving forks. Enrique de Villena, *Arte cisoria*, 1423. Mss 7843, Biblioteca Nacional de España, copia de Francisco Javier de Santiago Palomares de 1763, page 37. <https://bdh.bne.es/bnearch/detalle/bdh0000070831>.

Ana María Gómez Bravo has called attention to medieval Iberian nobles' focus on carving as a means of constructing social significance, underscoring Villena's position that: "carving is what separates courtly, educated people from rustics and plebeians, who cut food in whichever way, eat like beasts, and do not chew or digest food properly, which results in their having rude complexions, inflexible bodily members, and perverse intellects with powers that are beastly and subhuman" (qtd. in Gómez Bravo, pp. 66-67).¹⁰ Furthermore, as Sol Miguel-Prendes points out, Villena asserts the importance

¹⁰ In this, Gómez Bravo follows Sol Miguel-Prendes who proposes that Villena's *Arte cisoria* is a product of Villena's concern about the perceived breakdown in aristocratic norms and nobility in the larger late medieval courtly world. She argues it is designed, along with his other works, "to educate an aristocratic elite that will function as the arms of the social body" (308).

of the art of carving “on the grounds that it has serious medical ramifications . . . it hardens the body and prevents ethical conduct” (313).

The preference of the narrator’s first wife in *Spill* to have meat carved using a carving fork reflects the values of fifteenth-century Aragonese and Iberian nobles more generally, the social circles in which Roig moved as personal physician to María de Castilla and Joan II as well as by virtue of being general examiner of physicians for the city (Carré 2006, 26-28). As Gómez Bravo shows in detail, based on the work of García de Castrojeriz, carving was also part of the larger medical discourse of the time, according to which nobles and people of the higher classes needed different foods than those of the lower classes because their physical constitution was thought to be fundamentally different—they had to eat delicate foods in order to “‘ennoble’ their bodily complexion and nature” (64). José Luis Martín contextualizes Villena’s description of the proper carving of meat as essential to the health and status of the nobility within the medical discourses of the day—the carver ensuring that the guests could eat moderate sized pieces without dirtying their hands, clothes or beards. The *brocas* of two or three points were an essential part of the carving and consuming experience (206-209). Roig would have been intimately familiar with both the medical notions and the social implications of carving and the use of the serving fork as court physician.

Fear and Magic

While the author Roig would have been aware of the social and medical attitudes surrounding the wife’s preference for the use of a carving fork, the narrator associates with several dietary preferences that he associates with superstition and ignorance. He tells us above that his wife also would not eat meat bought in the market a day there was a hanging, nor allow any fruit from the market in the house. In the following verses he goes on to say that, “It was all right to buy rabbits, partridges, and live fancolins at night in the dark, when flies do not ever land on them” (295; “bé que hi comprassen / conills, perdius, / frnacolins vius / --de nit, a fosca, en ells la mosca / nunca s’hi met!—”; Book 2, vv. 2474-2488, 154). In this section the narrator implies that his wife thought her foodstuffs could be contaminated by events of mal portent, such as a hanging, or by creatures associated with filth, such as flies. Maintaining her food free from both physical and moral filth seems to be the motivation he ascribes to her preference to use her own dishes, to not eat fruit from the market, presumably handled by others, or to have meat sold on the same day as a hanging. The narrator does not clarify the reasons for this, but the reader may assume either she wants to avoid bad mojo or perhaps the unwitting consumption of human flesh, marketed by a nefarious butcher as animal meat. The narrator does, in fact, provide other tales of cannibalism (as discussed below), as well as murder brought about through poisoned foods that could have been avoided had people stayed in control of their dishes and foodstuffs. For example, in the first book detailing his youthful exploits traveling in Provence and Northern France, he includes the story of a woman he had an affair with and who, in an attempt to make her husband sleep so deeply she could entertain Roig, accidentally killed him with a drugged wine and suckling pig (287; Book 1, vv. 1537-1603, 122).

The narrator’s first wife’s wariness concerning fruit brought from the market, implying handled by others outside of her surveillance, may be read in the context of contemporary magic spells and medical treatises that used fruit as their vehicle. From contemporary collections of folk medicine such as the *Libro de dichos maravillosos* and the *Book of Women’s Love* (*Sefer ‘ahavat nashim*), we know that people in fifteenth-century Aragon used apples for love spells. For example, in the *Libro*, a collection of Morisco magical healing copied in Almonacid de la Sierra in Zaragoza in the sixteenth-century that contains centuries of local beliefs and practices according to Ana

Labarta (0.13),¹¹ we find that apples, as well as serving vessels could be used for spells designed to coerce women into loving and having sex with people they did not want to:

Capítulo para amorío:

Escrebirás en una manzana estos sellos, y dar l'as a comer a quien querrás; y son éstos¹²:

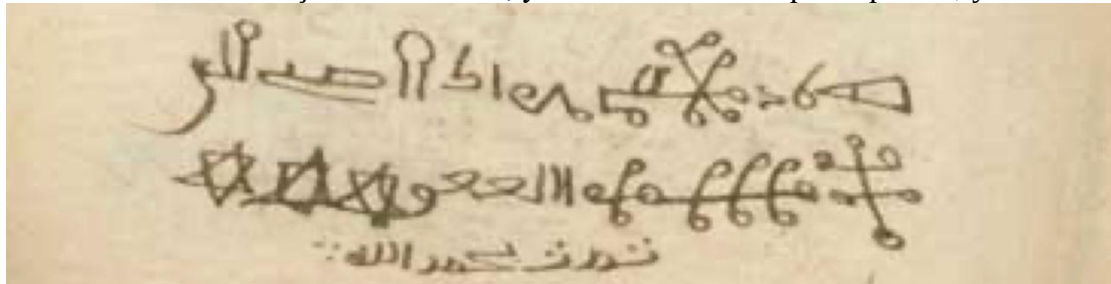


Fig. 3. Sigla to be written on apples from the love spell in the *Dichos amorosos* followed by final line in Arabic, “Acabó; alabado sea Dios.” Folio 59r. Junta XXII, Fondo antiguo, RESC 22, ©CSIC, CCHS, Biblioteca Tomás Navarro Tomás.

The narrator in *Spill* may be alluding to such contemporary customs in his discussion of his wife’s preferences, suggesting to the readers that she seeks to avoid the potential moral and physical dangers of such a spell. Her desire to eat from her own plates and drink from her own cups would allow her to avoid spells like those detailed in the *Libro de dichos maravillosos* in which people are made to fall in love through *filtros* in which words are written with saffron or rose water and then rinsed with water which is later given to another person to consume—often without their knowledge, sometimes on clean, white plates (“platos blancos y limpios”) and on bowls (“escudillas”) (55-57, 60). Such spells were thought to be done secretly, without the person whom the spell-caster wanted to enchant knowing about it. In order to cast such a spell, someone needed access to the plates and foodstuffs that the person would come in contact with. One example is a love spell which requires the person casting it to write the name of the person they hope to make fall in love along with a phrase with magic symbols on sugar cane that they then dissolve in rainwater, which they then give to drink to the person to drink:

Capítulo para que se amen marido y mujer u otros qualquiera que querrás.

Escrebirás en fojas de cañas—en las más altas—el nombre de quien querrás, y desferlo as en agua de pluvial; y darle-nd’as a beber en agua a los dos, a marido y a mujer, y si verás más, que [a] todos aparejos aprovechará bienquerer; y es esto lo que as d’escrebir; y es probado¹³:

¹¹ Like Roig’s *Spill*, the wisdom of the Morisco *dichos maravillosos* is based on the authority of the biblical Solomon, who offered his wisdom with blessings to protect and heal people (“para guardar y medezinar en sus personas” (3).

¹² See Labarta’s edition, *Dichos maravillosos* (24) and folio 59r of the digitized copy of the manuscript available at: http://aleph.csic.es/imagenes/mad01/0006_PMSC/P_001227532_650939_V00.pdf (MS RESC 22, fol. 59r).

¹³ See Labarta’s edition (24) and folios 59v-60r of the digitized copy of the manuscript available at: http://aleph.csic.es/imagenes/mad01/0006_PMSC/P_001227532_650939_V00.pdf.

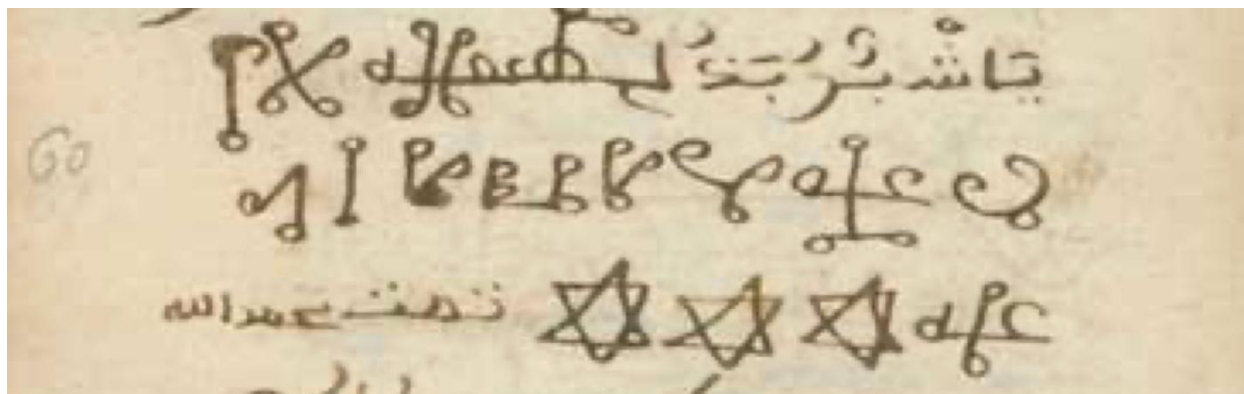


Fig. 4. Sigla from the love spell in the *Dichos amorosos* introduced and followed by Arabic lines. Folio 60r. Junta XXII, Fondo antiguo, RESC 22, ©CSIC, CCHS, Biblioteca Tomás Navarro Tomás.

The wife described by Roig in *Espill* may be attempting to avoid any such love spell by staying in control of her cups and dishes.

The *Book of Women's Love*, a compendium of recipes and spells based on practical medical and magical knowledge from fifteenth-century Provence and Catalonia, also includes a spell using apples analogous to that of the *Libro de dichos maravillosos*.¹⁴ This work was written in a Hebrew that is highly influenced by its context in Northern Spain: it contains several Catalan terms and “ease of comprehension by possible readers prevails over all else and is provided by a great number of transliterations and loan translations mainly related to the preparation of remedies, which readers probably knew better in the Arabic, Latin or Romance forms, than in those of Hebrew, if they existed” (Caballero-Navas 16).

This spell is clearly written for a male reader to perform on a woman and it uses the apple as the vehicle for making a woman fall in love passionately:

A love formula that comes from the town of Rhodes that is so strong that she will run after you: write [the formula], and also the name of the man who makes it, on an apple however you like but take care that the letters are clear and identifiable... The Sages of Roses also said that even if the woman just smells the apple, the man who gave it will be loved passionately [by her]. (108)

This contemporary love formula, in addition to those found in the *Dichos maravillosos*, suggests that when Roig describes the superstitions and fears that his wife has around food and the objects it touches—for example, by portraying her as not eating fruit over which she has not been in control and using her own plates—he is alluding to contemporary beliefs about fruits such as apples and of plates and bowls being used to effect love spells on unwitting women. Being in control of the fruit she consumes and as well as the plates and cups used to consume food and beverages would allow her to avoid becoming the victim of such spells and to maintain control over her own body.

What is clear, apart from whether she fears being put under a spell or not, is that his first wife has no interest in eating with her husband, the narrator. He informs the reader:

¹⁴ For more on apples and their use in the *Book of Women's Love*, see Verónica Menaldi's “From the Apple of Ein-Sof.”

With me she was always disgusted and without appetite. She demanded other foods, which were certainly impossible to get. The tasty dishes that were cooked did not please her—she was so disgusted, disdainful, and delicate. (294)

tostemps ab mi
 enfastijada
 e desmenjada,
 d'alters viandes
 feia demandes
 cert impossibles.
 Menjars plaïbles
 dels que es coïen,
 no li plaïen,
 tant fastijosa
 com desdenyosa
 e delicada! (Book 2, vv. 2447-57; 152)

In Maurice Bloch's view such a refusal of commensality is, "one of the clearest marks of distance and enmity" (133). And while it seems clear that the wife does not care for her husband or want to eat with him, Gómez Bravo also points out that "shared food practices" and food consumption transcended the personal and were important performances of nobility, noting that new counts "would sit at the king's table, drinking from the same cup and eating from the same plate" symbolically instantiating their new social rank. These are exactly the acts that Roig's first wife, who insists on her own cup and plate, will not partake in with him. The social significance of such acts may help explain her attitude (and what the contemporary reader may have made of it). She may not have considered him of the same social position and therefore she refuses to share a meal (including the dinner plates and cups) with him.

The relationship between food, gender, and social class is further underscored in Book 3, in which the fictional Solomon "educates" the narrator about the grave harm that mothers may inflict upon their babies by choosing not to breast feed or by choosing improper wetnurses, such as women who are Jewish, who are not smart, who drink, or who are prostitutes—all leading lifestyles and having qualities that he claims will be transmitted to the babies through breastfeeding:

Moral virtues and bad habits (I will say it, to sum up) derive much more from that which they feed from (their mother's milk) than from their fathers. Milk alters not only the moral aspects, but also the natural ones. If a little colt drinks a donkey's milk, it will never be able to become a light horse [. . .] The wet-nurses that are not moderate in their behavior do worse than that. The drunk wet-nurse infests the little one with her vice, and the one who is a harlot causes a similar thing. The Jewish nurse brings him up fearful; the one who knows little makes him silly; the one who has no milk makes him thin and skinny, and starves him. (353)

Virtuts morals,
 males costumes
 --diré-ho en sumes—

molt se deriven
 ab de què viven
 llet de les mares
 més que del pares.
 no sols moral,
 mas natural
 la llet altera:
 si de somera
 mama la llet,
 lo xic potret
 mai porà ser
 cavall llauger,
 [. . .]
 Pijor fan dides
 mal comedides:
 dida embriaga
 lo xic ne plaga
 e la bagasse
 semblant atraça:
 dida juïa
 pauruc lo cria;
 la poc sabent
 fa'l innocent;
 que no té llet,
 flac e magret,
 de fam lo mata. (Book 3, vv. 9086-9125; 366-67)

According to Solomon, moral virtues and character are imparted to children through breast milk. As Antònia Carré notes, Roig's assumption that the wet nurse's character or ethnic identity directly impacted the nature of the breast milk she produces, as well as the moral qualities imparted to the baby through that milk reflects widespread medieval medical beliefs (Carré 1996, 88).¹⁵ As noted above, such medical beliefs would have been intimately familiar to Roig the author, who was not only the personal physician of María de Castilla and Joan II, but also in charge of licensing physicians in the city of Valencia as well as practicing medicine in the city's hospitals (Carré 2006, 27-28).

Food and Death

The idea that social class and many other aspects of identity were dependent on which foods one consumed was thought to begin in the first moments of one's life. Roig's discussion of breastfeeding, filled—as most of the work is—with vitriol and hate, depicts this first nutritive and natural act as rather an opportunity for women to scar their children and introduce a form of emotional and physical separation that will haunt them for the rest of their lives. He argues that women hate their children and will anything to get rid of them, describing ways in which mothers murder their own children seemingly by any means, including boiling and burning them or even

¹⁵ According to the twelfth-century anonymous medical treatise *Trótula*, the mother or wet nurse's moral and social qualities were transmitted through breast milk (Carré 1996, 88).

cutting them up and feeding them to pigs (Book 2, vv. 8998-9016; 352). Roig claims that mothers find breastfeeding disgusting and try not to do it in order to protect their figure, but argues that God punishes them accordingly:

They make some of them [their children] drink the milk from animals and they remain like that later on. [. . .] If they don't have milk, why do they undertake such destruction? If their milk is bad [. . .] why don't they give up, those inhumane, non-Christian women? God pays them and gives them a plague for such harm with an act of nature—if the milk from their breasts comes out red and not white, it is not long before they become insane. (352)

D'ells fan mamar
llet d'animals
e resten tals
per temps avant.
[. . .]
Puis llet no tenen,
per què ho emprenen,
fer semblant tala?
Si han llet mala,
com no se'n deixen,
puis la's coneixen
les inhumanes
no cristianes
[. . .]
Déu les ne paga
e dóna plaga
per tal nocura
obrant natura:
si llet vermella
De llur mamella
ix, e no blanca,
molt prest no els manca
del tot ser folles (Book 2, vv. 9146-9185; 368-70)

Solomon's misogynist generalizations confirm the negative portrait of women as manifest in their foodways discussed above in various examples, supposedly from the narrator's memories, recounted in books one and two. In the latter, the narrator offers his readers the example of the woman he married after his failed marriage to the beguine, a young novice who leaves the order to marry him and with whom he has a child. He blames her, though, for causing the death of their child because of the many wet nurses she employs one after another and because of the strange diet she insisted the wet nurses follow:

With lunches and snacks, testicles, goat meatballs, gizzards, new cheeses, muscatels, Greek wines, and strong fine wines that she made her taste every morning, she ruined her good milk. (318)

ab almorzars
 e berenas
 turmes resoles
 e lleteroles,
 formatges frescs,
 muscats e grecs
 e forts fins vins
 que tots matins
 feia tastar,
 li féu gastar
 la bona llet. (Book 2, vv. 5229-5239; 242)

While the wife's preference that her wetnurse consume meats and fine wines does conform to notions about what nobles should eat (Gómez Bravo 55-56), thus presumably also a diet that would ensure that the qualities of nobility would transfer to the baby, Roig nevertheless claims it ruined the wetnurses milk.¹⁶ Such a diet, replete with soft cheeses and lots of wine is, as Carré points out, now considered unhealthy for a nursing mother (1996, 88); notably, though, the aforementioned *Book of Women's Love* recommends similar foodstuffs in its section of recipes to promote the production of breastmilk.¹⁷ The wife's choices as depicted in the *Spill* therefore do not seem out of step with contemporary theory and one would assume praxis.

Further proof of the dire consequences that result because of women's evil inclinations and how these manifest in their choices concerning food is found toward the end of the first book in which the narrator recounts an experience he (supposedly) had in France. The tale is another example of how Roig falls victim to the maliciousness of women, in this case when he unwittingly becomes a cannibal.

After participating in a tournament in Paris, Roig has a huge banquet:

I had everyone who had jousting invited over for dinner. We had all kinds of stews, wild meats, fowl, and very refined pastries—of the most famous of all of Paris. In one pastry, chopped and ground, the fingertip of a man was found [. . .] there was also the tip of an ear. We thought we were eating veal before we found the nail and the finger. (288)

Jo tinguí el reng,
 fiu convidar
 tots a sopar
 qui junt haviem.
 Allí teníem
 de tots potages,

¹⁶ Here and elsewhere in the *Spill*, we find that the author Roig weaves together notions about medicine, food and human character. As Gómez Bravo observes, "Contemporaneous medical theory put food at the core of identity formation by involving it in conception, embryological development, and biological and psychobiological formation throughout life" (55). Gómez Bravo points out that authors like Pero Mexía applied these medical discourses of fifteenth-century Iberia to constructing a biological theory of nobility. According to humoral theory, diet was related to the purity of blood, and should be cared for via a proper, "noble" diet.

¹⁷ In the section of recipes designed to promote milk production in the *Book of Women's Love*, the compiler notes that the nursing mother "should always eat the breasts of cows and goats that are breast-feeding" and that she should eat electuaries with "aromatized wine" (140).

de carns salvatges,
 volateria,
 pastisseria
 molt preciosa,
 la pus famosa
 de tot París.
 En un pastís,
 capolat, trit,
 d'hom cap de dit
 hi font trobat.
 Fon molt torbat
 eui el conegué,
 regonegué
 què hi trobaria:
 més hi havia
 un cap d'orella.
 Carn de vedella
 créiem menjàssem
 ans que hi trobàssem
 l'ungla i el dit
 tros mig partit!
 Tots lo miram
 e arbitram
 carn d'hom cert era.
 La pastissera,
 ab dos aidants
 –filles ja grans–,
 era fornera
 e tavernera.
 Dels que hi venien,
 allí bevien,
 alguns mataven,
 carn capolaven,
 feien pastels,
 e dels budells
 feien salsisses
 o llonganisses
 del món pus fines. (Book 1, vv 1652-1695; 126-128)

Roig tells us the pastry maker was also a tavern keeper and she, with the help of two other women, had killed some 100 people at the tavern and then chopped them up, making sausages and pies. Roig goes on to both condemn the women, but praise the taste of the meat:

In a soft hole, as deep as a well, those deceitful women put the fleshless bones, legs, and skulls, and they had almost filled it, those wild, cruel, and depraved females, those infidels, those evil, criminal, and abominable women. I certainly believe that the devils and Satan

must have helped them when they killed them. I give testimony that I ate plenty of them and that I never tasted meat or a broth, partridges, hens, or francolins of such flavor, tenderness, and sweetness. (288)¹⁸

en hun clot tou
fondo com pou,
descarnats ossos,
comes e tossos,
allí els metien,
e ja l'omplien
les fombres braves,
cruels e praves,
infels, malvades,
e celerades,
abominables.
Cert, los diables
com los mataven,
crec los aidaven,
e lo dimoni.
Fas testimoni
que en mengí prou,
mai carn ni brou,
perdius, gallines
ni francolines,
de tal sabor,
tendror, dolçor
mai no senti. (Book 1; vv. 1707-29; 128)

Just after telling this horrible story, the narrator Roig talks about how much he loved France. “I was very pleased by that country. I never saw discord, banditry, or fighting.” (289; “Molt haguí grat / d’aquell país! / Mai viu divís, / bandolejar / ni breguejar”; Book 1, vv. 1742-46; 129-130).

What are we to make of this scene and what Roig tells us? While he sought to be hospitable, his banquet becomes a scene of horror where the finest nobles of Paris become unwitting cannibals. In the preceding verses he tells of how the inn keeper and her helpers had murdered and dismembered some 100 people—surely making them some of the worst serial killers of the Middle Ages. This obvious lie and the fact that he ate human flesh and declared it the testiest meat he ever had, forces us, the readers, to question his judgement. It also sets up in great detail a foil for the criticism he levels against women and their hospitality (or lack thereof). Do the women who prepare stews and broths for their friends who fall ill, even though they may not cook for their friends’ husbands, as discussed above, seem evil in comparison to this narrator who, instead of hiding the fact that he unwittingly ate human flesh, declares it the tastiest of delicacies? And what of his first wife—also discussed above—who so enjoyed the very meats and delicacies he thought he was consuming in Paris and who had her wetnurses indulge in fine cheeses and wine—and for

¹⁸ The contemporary artist, Raimon recorded this passage at the Liceu in 2012; see *Raimon al Liceu - "Espill."* Posted by jasabet2, 2012. *YouTube*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=jcmmmpCBeXbY, (1:26-3:11).

which he criticizes her harshly? Does he have the moral authority then to condemn her culinary preferences? Should she further be condemned for refusing to share cups and plates—and even a table—with a self-professed cannibal? We suggest that Roig the author uses the images of hospitality, food and consumption in *Espill* to further his misogynist discourse, but also to undermine the narrator's authority itself.

The depiction of these French women as the impetus behind such a poor choice of foodstuffs is but another of the several examples in *Spill* in which Roig depicts women as consciously harmful, often channeling their evil natures through the food choices they make. We can read this example along with those discussed above, his mother's rejecting to feed him, the woman who accidentally murdered her husband, the wives who ignore and refuse to feed their sick husbands, his wife's choices about diet for the midwives, and his first wife's choice to eat with friends rather than him, as leading eventually to the dissolution of the marriage and a denial of the narrator's hope for children, all leading to rejection and sometimes death. Roig's insistence on turning shared meals, acts of commensality, whether between friends and colleagues, between child and mother, or between his wife and her friends into fodder to reflect upon women as evil, bestial and depraved belie the larger misogynist tone of the work. The narrator makes food another forum for expressing his anti-feminist vision and his failure to see women as anything but evil and working against men, whether his position be satiric or not. That they are mothers, wives, and caretakers, like the Virgin Mary, is both unsettling and left unsaid.

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