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Food for the Soul: Feasting and Fasting in the Spanish Middle Ages

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Much has been written recently about the social capital of food in the Middle Ages. Although most writing concentrates on the French fabliaux, the British Arthurian romances, and on the Italian works of Boccaccio and Dante, current scholarship has finally turned to Iberia.

Food scholars tend toward a desire to write a history of foodstuffs and how this history relates to medical and religious treatises. It is through depictions of food in literature, however, that we may gain a new understanding of the ways in which society was defined by its culture of consumption.

Looking to medieval literary texts may be a controversial method of devising the true nature of consumption in the Middle Ages. Indeed, we can explore many historical documents like medical treatises, Inquisition documents, and cookbooks for a good understanding of the popular consumption of foodstuffs. But even historical documents are tainted by prejudice, folkloric notions, and fear. Thus, a thorough examination of food in literary texts may provide as much insight into the culture of consumption as historical documents.

There are a variety of ways in which the cultural complexity of medieval Iberia is emphasized by references to food and consumption. Following religiously-defined food prohibitions allows for the adherence to doctrine by its believers and also infamously allows for division and intolerance toward others. The depiction of foodstuffs, the consumption of said foodstuffs, or the abstinence from these same foodstuffs allows for the modern audience to read both a culture of complexity and a culture of prejudice.

In this article I will examine the concept of "Christian" eating, that is, eating that follows the precepts of the Christian calendar and also the recommendations of the Church. Both fasting and feasting are integral elements of the medieval calendar. Indeed, since saints' days abounded, one could imagine a fast or a feast on every day of the year. Generally speaking, however, there were at least two fasting days a week (Wednesdays and Fridays) as well as the 40 days of Lent. During these days meat was forbidden and, during Lent, prohibitions extended to animal products such as milk and eggs.

The concept of Christian eating took on a more serious tone after the establishment of the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Spain in 1481. Its purpose, to root out false converts, made habits of consumption an area of extreme scrutiny. Madera Allan writes, "By using culinary evidence to identify Crypto-Jews, Inquisitorial agents in the late 15th century attempted the violent enforcement of an imagined community of taste" (14). However, my focus in this article is the depiction of consumption and fasting in the centuries before the Inquisition.

There are two questions that must be examined in any study of medieval consumption: the relationship between food and the material body and the connection between food and morality. The former can be accomplished through an examination of medical notions of physiology and physiognomy and the latter through a consideration of theology and philosophy. There is no doubt, however, that food, morality and physiology are intimately connected in the Middle Ages.

The Galenic concept of human nature, on which many medieval medical texts were based, called for a mixture of warmth and cold with dryness and moistness, in various combinations. In humans, the four humoral agents were blood, choler, phlegm, and melancholy. The sanguine temperament combines warmth and moistness and is the essence of the air; the choleric or bilious

temperament results from a mixture of warmth and dryness, and is realized by fire; phlegmatic persons are both cold and moist, as is water; and the melancholic temperament mixes coldness and dryness, the qualities of earth (Scully 41). In the Middle Ages, physicians used this method as a means to define human temperament and health (Scully 42). The logic followed that if humans had a particular temperament, so did foodstuffs, which influenced humans as much as their environment did. And the art of cookery developed around the idea of improving the humoral qualities of the particular foodstuff.

Foods that increased the negative elements of one's temperament were, according to Scully, as "dangerous to one's moral health" as to one's physical health (59). Medical treatises called for a careful consideration of diet. Michele Savonarola's *De Regime Pregnantium* stated quite clearly and somewhat controversially that pregnant women could control various aspects of the child in utero including gender and complexion by what they ate (Marafioti 26).

Melitta Weiss Adamson writes that the field of dietetics made its way into medieval cookbooks, clearly delineating the interconnection between food and medicine in the Middle Ages (211). Much of the medical knowledge that reached the West came through translated Arabic texts. These medical texts included lengthy sections on the uses of spices and foods for healing purposes. In the thirteenth century, two medical texts circulated widely in Europe, bringing knowledge of dietetics to the general public, *the Secretum secretorum* and the *Regimen sanitatis Salernitanum*.¹ Both texts were translated into a variety of vernacular languages (Adamson 217-8).

The connection between food and morality is somewhat more complicated. On one hand, gluttony, as one of the seven deadly sins, is associated both with overeating and lust. On the other, abstinence or fasting was seen as an *imitatio Christi*. Early Christian writers like Tertullian, Jerome and Isidore linked gluttony with carnal desire and encouraged fasting in order to ameliorate sexual desire. By around 400 AD, Christians generally believed that gluttony was the cause of the Fall (Adamson 185).

Fasting, then, became a time to control the excesses of one's particular temperament. This proved to be part of a healthy diet as well as religiously necessary. As Terence Scully writes, "The scientific argument that can be elaborated by the mid-thirteenth century in order to rationalize a long-established religious practice shows just how thoroughly a learned understanding of the physical nature of man could be incorporated into theological doctrine" (61).

Fasting was a way of imitating Christ and an accepted method of mitigating one's sins. It was also a requirement for Christians throughout the year, and most specifically during Lent. Regardless of religious conviction or medical advice, however, the people of the Middle Ages worked hard to augment the list of acceptable foods during Lent. As Bridget Ann Henisch writes, "belt tightening and salt herrings wreaked havoc on the human spirit" (39). Fresh fish was a delicacy that few could afford, but medieval cooks were clever in their ability to substitute almond milk for animal milk, and to create various "false" dishes, like mock eggs made of boiled almond milk and bacon made from shredded fish. Definitions of "fish" too were expanded throughout the Middle Ages. Fish included whale, dolphin, beaver's tale and barnacle goose (Bynum 42).

In the history of Christianity, two culminating episodes revolve around the act of eating: the Fall and the subsequent Eucharistic miracle that allows for our redemption. The thirteenth century is witness to the cult of the adoration of the Eucharist. The Fourth Lateran Council made transubstantiation explicit, thus confirming what theologians and the laity had assumed for

¹ For a brief history of the *Secretum secretorum*, see Adamson, *Medieval Dietetics*, 50-56 and of the *Regimen sanitatis Salernitanum*, *ibid.* 97-102.

centuries (Bynum 50). In 1264, the Feast of Corpus Christi was established, thus fomenting the idea of the Eucharist as object of adoration rather than an integral part of a communal meal (Bynum 53).

The Eucharistic banquet became fraught with meaning and anxiety as the laity were often denied the Eucharist and had the wine (Christ's blood) permanently taken away from them (Bynum 59). Both the spectacle and the ritual of Eucharistic devotion took on a more symbolic meaning in the 13th century as the focus of the Eucharist fell on SEEING rather than RECEIVING the host (Bynum 53).

The depiction of food, its consumption (or lack thereof) and its role in religious ritual play an important role in texts as varied as the doctrinally responsible *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* and *Lives of the Saints*, to the more loosely interpreted *Libro de buen amor*.

In Berceo's *Milagros*, both the spectacle and the ritual of the Eucharistic miracle are present. The introduction of the collection describes a paradise on earth in which our postlapsarian selves may find redemption in the fruits of the Virgin's miracles and also the fruit of the Virgin's womb: "El fructo de los árboles era dulz e sabrido,/si don Adám oviesse del tal fructo comido,/de tan mala mineral non sería decibido,/ni tomaríen tal danno Evan [nin] so marido" (15).²

Bread as spiritual and physical sustenance appears throughout the miracle tales. Gloria Beatriz Chicote writes that the Virgin is not only the Queen of Heaven, but also the "Madre del pan de trigo" (55). She is also depicted as "ella (que) nos dio el cevo de qui todos comemos (Berceo 35b). El cevo is a reference to *cibus*, an allusion to transubstantiation (75n.). If the Eucharist is bread and the bread is the body, then Christ is the best quality bread – pan de trigo. Christ appears as "pan de trigo" but those who are sinful receive "pan de avena" (Berceo 374c). Sins are also attributed to having ingested "mala farina" (Berceo 539b, 552d). The representations of bread (Christ) and the paradisiacal garden filled with fruit (the Virgin) demonstrate the most basic of Christian food imagery. As Bynum points out, the image of both sinful and saved humanity is the image of woman and of Christ (265). As the Eucharistic miracle became more awesome in the eyes of the laity, Christ became more associated with flesh and bread. To eat the host was to eat Christ and therefore to become suffering flesh (Bynum 54).

Both feasting and fasting are depicted with an eye toward spectacle in many literary texts of the Spanish Middle Ages. The hagiographical tales of Santa Marta and Santa María Egipcíaca illustrate fasting as a righteous calling and, in Santa María's life, necessary for the forgiveness of her sins. In the *Libro de buen amor*, however, we may be closer to a more realistic portrait of feasting and fasting. Through parody, the author gives us a glimpse of the kinds of foods that were eaten, when and how they were prepared, and the consequences of gluttony and overeating.

The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were witness to a lessening of religious restrictions and asceticism for the general population and a strengthening of individual asceticism, especially in women. Caroline Walker Bynum tells us that food and fasting were mainly female concerns and "miraculous abstinence" was seen only in women, as were Eucharistic miracles (198-200). There are a multitude of arguments that tell us why women were obsessed with food and abstinence. Many focus on the misogynistic notions of certain female behaviors that "need to be cured" through fasting (199). Among these were menstruation and bodily desire of all kinds. The philosophical and theological arguments of Jerome, Augustine, and Aquinas seemed to be fully ingrained in the medieval mindset: women as flesh, matter, and therefore sinful; men as spirit, soul, and therefore existing on a higher plane. But Bynum argues that women in the Middle Ages

² All textual citations come from *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*. Ed. Michael Gerli. Madrid: Cátedra. 1988.

were able to use their radical asceticism to control their bodies and their destinies in a world that gave them little freedom over either (218).

The asceticism practiced by women, then, focused not only on their physicality or corporeality, but also on their spirituality and as an act of civil disobedience:

Women's food practices frequently enabled them to determine the shape of their lives – to reject unwanted marriages, to substitute religious activities for more menial duties within the family, to redirect the use of fathers' or husbands' resources, to change or convert family members, to criticize powerful secular or religious authorities, and to claim for themselves teaching, counseling, and reforming roles for which the religious tradition provided, at best, ambivalent support (Bynum 220).

Elizabeth Robertson writes that, “a woman's relationship to God can only be realized through the body” (273). Robertson implies that it is through virginity that women are brought close to God, although abstinence, fasting, and general disregard of the body also aided in the intimate relationship religious women maintained with God.

Bynum gives us some interesting statistics about female saints and the prevalence of fasting: “Although only 17.5 percent of those canonized or venerated as saints from 1000 to 1700 were women, women accounted for almost 29 percent of those saints who indulged in extreme austerities. . .” (76). Two examples of women who practiced these extreme austerities and who resonate strongly in the Spanish literary tradition are Saint Martha and Saint Mary the Egyptian. Both of these lives can be found in the loose collection of tales known as the *Libro de los huéspedes*. Saint Martha, biblically known as the sister of Mary and Lazarus, takes on a new incarnation as dragon tamer in the Gallic town of Tarascon. Her more famous sister, now conflated with Mary Magdalene, sets off to Vézelay to found that holy center. Martha, the model for the active saint, is depicted as manly, having a man's sensibility and a man's ability to take care of business. She is described as both apostle and disciple and her first tasks when she arrives in Gaul are to evangelize and heal.³

Her disregard for her corporeality marks her as both feminine and not feminine: feminine in the sense that she takes control of her life by taking control of her bodily needs; not feminine in the sense that she is not necessarily defined by her corporeality but by her actions. It would be good to re-state Walker Bynum's theory here on the power of women that stems through control over their own dominion: their bodies. In the text, Martha leads a hard life: . . .

ca ella non comja carne njn huevos njn queso, njn beuja vjno njn comja mas de vna vez enel dia. Enel jnbierno bestia vn pellote e cobria vn çulame. Enla calentura vestia vna garnacha e vna camisa de cannamo. E sienpre andaua descalça e traya enla cabeça vna cofia blanca e tenja vna cynta de sedas de cauallo gruesa, e apretauase tanto enella quela podreçia, assy que muchas vezes le cayan gusanos. (131-136)⁴

³ See Martha Daas. “From Holy Hostess to Dragon Tamer: The Anomaly of Saint Martha”. *Literature and Theology* (2008) 22(1): 1-15 for a fuller discussion on Martha and corporeality.

⁴ All citations of the Lives of Saint Martha and Saint Mary the Egyptian come from Moore, John K. Jr. Ed. *Libro de los huéspedes* (Escorial MS h.I.13). Tempe: ACRMS. 2008.

Brigitte Cazelles writes, “In contrast to the representation of male sanctity, which essentially entails self-assertiveness, female perfection appears to be grounded in bodily pain, silence, and passivity.” (9). Saint Martha, along with Saint Mary the Egyptian, embodies the suffering of Christ. But neither of them could be described as passive. Martha is the model of active saints in the Middle Ages, and Mary is the model of the eremitic female saint.

The life of Saint Mary the Egyptian gives us a glimpse of both the penitential diet and the influence of these diets on women. Mary begins her life as a loose and sinful woman: “Todo su cuydado era de bien comer e de bien beuer e de ser sienpre en luxuria” (36-7). Her lustful ways are equated to being intemperate in her food and drink. After her epiphany, Mary buys three loaves of bread and lives in the desert like a beast for eighteen years subsisting on the bread, herbs, and water. After she finishes her bread and herbs, however, she lives thirty more years only on what the angels bring her. When the devil appears to tempt her, he does so with food and drink:

El primer anno la veno a tentar el Diablo por muchas vezes, e faziale venjr emjente los Buenos manjares e las buenas cosas en que solia auer sabor e los grandes viçios en que solia beujr. (197-200)

In the case of Mary, she is given the choice of continuing on her sinful path or mitigating that sinfulness. Although she is instructed by the Virgin Mary to go to the desert, it is her desire to be cleansed that allows for this instruction to be heard. Martha, on the other hand, begins life as the holy hostess to Christ, and ends her life living as an ascetic. Again, it is her choice to live free of all worldly desires. In both of these saints’ lives there is an eagerness to fast in order to become a “better” person. Mary becomes a desert hermit and Martha an ascetic. These roles tell us as much about what was considered truly holy in the 13th century as they do about gender issues.

The heavy-handed treatment of food and consumption in the saints’ tales is offset by the transgressive (and hilarious) depiction of food in the *Libro de buen amor*. The *Libro de buen amor* has provided the richest material for food scholars. Most of the food references in the book relate to the seven deadly sins, to a penitential diet and to the differences (and similarities) between religious and hedonistic lifestyles. They also parody the concept of hospitality, abstinence and fasting, and the hypocrisy of the religious lifestyle.

Since the number of food references is so vast in the text, I will concentrate only on two specific sections of the book: the Carnal/Cuaresma scenes and one of the Trotaconventos/Garoça scenes. The most spectacular of demonstrations of food and subsequent penance can be seen in the famous battle of Carnal and Cuaresma. Bridget Ann Henisch writes that in the Middle Ages, Lent was considered “a long and dreary stretch of time, to be endured as a penance; a quite considerable sacrifice to be offered up to God in gratitude for His mercies, and sorrow for man’s inadequacies” (31). Along with eschewing foods that were “overly warming” in their effects, sexual pleasure was also curtailed. These 40 days of fasting were an important *imitatio Christi* that all Christians were required to perform before the joyous feast of Easter. The privations of Lent, especially to those who could not obtain a variety of vegetarian foodstuffs or fresh fish were harsh at best. And the punishments to those who dared to break the fast ranged from whippings to pulled teeth.

Pre-Lenten feasting led to excesses of every sort. As quoted from a sixteenth-century text on Jack a Lent, “Always before Lent there comes waddling a fat gross bursten-gutted groom, called Shrove Tuesday. . . He devours more flesh in fourteen hours, than this whole kingdom doth. . . in six weeks after” (Henisch 38). This is precisely when the battle between Cuaresma and Carnal begins, just after Carnal has partaken of a particularly large meal on Shrove Tuesday:

Desque vino la noche, mucho después de çena,
 que tenía cada uno ya la talega llena,
 para entrar en la fazienda con la dueña serena,
 adormieron se todos después de la ora buena.

. . .

Faza la media noche, en medio de lass alas,
 vino doña Quaresma: “¡Dios Señor, Tú me valas!”
 dieron bozes los gallos, batieron de las alas;
 llegaron a don Carnal aquestas nuevas malas.

Commo avía el buen omne sobra mucho comido,
 con la mucha vianda mucho vino ha vevido;
 estava apezgado e estava adormido;
 por todo el su rreal entró el apellido. (1097-1100)⁵

The troops are a spectacular reminder of the dietary impositions that are to come for the next 40 days. Doña Cuaresma has on her side the “white-necked leek” and the great dogfish, the Valencian eels and the vermilion lobsters. On Carnal’s side are Don Tocino and Don Lardo, along with suckling pigs, capons and deer. Although the variety of Lenten dishes (troops) seems pleasing to the palate, the reality was much harsher. Unable to afford delicacies like sweetmeats, dates, figs, and fresh fish, the common people who were not fortunate enough to live by the sea were inevitably stuck with beans, legumes and salted fish.

Vasvari writes:

“In medieval society, characterized by the dialogic and contradictory coexistence of two cultures, traditional oral culture and official clerical culture, these mythic figures become Christianized and bowdlerized: Carnival or Flesh comes to stand for the world of sin. . ., while Lent propagandizes the piety and abstinence promoted by official culture.” (1)

The battle scene and its subsequent scenes in which Don Carnal is made to confess and follow a strict penitential diet are examples of the way in which the author combines three separate elements: the ecclesiastical or religious, the gastronomic or gustatory and the spectacular. The first scenes in the Carnal/Cuaresma episode demonstrate the chasm that must exist between the demands of the Church and the desires of the people. The humorous descriptions of the fierce battle between Carnal and Cuaresma and their respective troops were clearly meant as diversion even if the reality of the Lenten season was certainly met with some trepidation.

Don Carnal’s penitential diet would have been looked upon with amusement and empathy. It was common to eat only one meal during Lent, which is what Carnal is obliged to do. And each of his meals rings a specific religious and folkloric note. For example, Sunday’s dish of chickpeas cooked in oil resonates ecclesiastically and folklorically: chickpeas were considered to have a moderate or temperate humoral complexion, which worked well for those who were weak and sickly. Yet they also served to soften the excesses of Carnal’s temperament. The emphasis on the use of oil would resonate with the reading/listening public in that lard would not have been permitted during Lent.

⁵ All LBA citations come from *Libro de buen amor*. Ed. G.B. Gybbon-Monypenny. Madrid: Clásicos Castalia, 1988.

Spinach was, like chickpeas, also considered a “sick-dish” and therefore helpful toward weakening Flesh’s lustful tendencies. Friday’s dinner of bread and water is telling in that it is both a monastic meal and also a “cure” for gluttony. Gluttony often battled with Pride as the worst of the seven sins, and, as I mentioned above, was popularly considered the sin that led to the Fall.

The friar’s insistence in the outward signs of penitence such as wailing and beating one’s breast, as well as the diet itself, demonstrates a hypocrisy that existed among religious and lay folk. Alan of Lille wrote that abstinence must be both an inner and an outer experience; that “mere obedience to the law is not enough”. Rather, this kind of spectacle is “morally indifferent” (Bynum 44). The parody, then, makes its point: to perform penitence is not the same thing as to truly feel penitent. The spectacle of ritual penitence is just that, spectacle, rather than true religious feeling.

Another example of the parody of the religious diet in the *Libro de buen amor* can be seen in the conversation between Trotaconventos and Garoça. Garoça tries to maintain her virginal state while Trotaconventos attempts to lure her out to meet with the Arcipreste. Garoça states: “Mas vale en convento las sardinas saladas,/E faser a dios servicio con las dueñas onrradas,/que perder la mi alma con perdises assadas/E fyncar escarnida con otras des-erradas” (1385). Trotaconventos retorts: “Comedes en convent Sardinas e camarones,/verçuelas e laseria e los duros caçones,/dexades del amigo perdizes E capones/perdedes vos coygadas mugeres sin varones.”(1393). The author not only demonstrates the commonly held notion that meat bred lustful thoughts, but he goes even farther by equating fasting or abstinent women with unpalatable dishes such as salted fish and the sensual male with partridges and, ironically, capons. Sarah Gordon writes that in the fabliaux, “poultry, fish, and bacon become objects in the endless gender tug-of-war, a sort of currency in an economy of sexual and culinary exchanges” (506).

Through the examination of the ideology that lies beneath the farcical façade of the food episodes in the *Libro de buen amor* we may be able to strike at the heart of the popular spirituality that allows this episode to resonate so strongly, both with modern audiences, and, we assume, with its contemporary public. Ideologically, performance and spectacle play an important role in meals both sacred and secular. The sacred meal, communion, and the doctrine of transubstantiation made food a more powerful symbol in the Middle Ages (Bynum 54). Indeed, the appearance of food in the Middle Ages was as important as the taste. Both feasting and fasting in text were given to spectacular tendencies. Carnal’s meals are monastic in theme but so exaggerated, like the emphasis on his outward confession, that the theatrics of it would allow the public to truly empathize with his character (even though they outwardly condemn him). Sarah Gordon writes, “the pious man eats for necessity rather than pleasure” (46). Don Carnal is shunned by good Christians during Lent, yet his triumphant return at Easter proves that although gluttony was seen as disharmonious to the social order, the people preferred his company to that of Doña Cuaresma. Albeit exaggerated, these characters are meant to emphasize the contradictions that inevitably exist between the practice of a religion and rigid doctrine.

Eva Kimminch writes that before 1400, Flesh is the figure that dominates the text. However, after 1500, it is Lent who dominates (193). The 13th and 14th centuries were witness to individual devotion rather than spectacular abstinence. Bynum writes that the *exempla* of this time period urged moderation rather than outright fasting or ascetic feats (46). Both Martha and Mary the Egyptian were literary models whose extreme abstinence set them up to be admired rather than imitated. To imitate or to admire, *imitatio* or *admiratio*, this was a legitimate choice. And the individuality of devotion of the 13th century made this choice possible.

To examine the ascetic way of life as modeled in literature is to begin to understand how women could use food to control the outcomes of their lives. Both Saint Martha and Saint Mary

controlled their destinies. It is true that the general medieval misogyny of the time could have influenced these depictions: woman as unholy and fasting as a method of mitigating that unholy. These theories, however, are not mutually exclusive. These women knew that they were unholy, unworthy creatures; not necessarily because they were women, but simply because they were human.

Humanness abounds in the *Libro de buen amor*. Our faults and foibles find expression on the pages of the Arcipreste's text. But through this text, we can understand not only the kinds of foods that were consumed in the 14th century, but also the attitude toward that food and towards its lack. Famine in 14th century Spain was a very real experience. Thus feasting and the celebration of life were appropriate reactions to this terrible lack.

The later Middle Ages brought with it a whole new set of problems related to consumption and the perception of food. As can be seen in Inquisition documents, food, its preparation, and its consumption were fraught with anxieties. Madera Allan writes that Spanish Catholicism found expression in the transgression of kashrut (46). The Spanish obsession with pork can be seen as an extreme reaction to the "tocino-fobia" of the Jewish and Muslim people, although much of the food eaten by Christians was arguably Jewish and Muslim influenced during the late Middle Ages (alfajores, berenjenas, empanadas), which, according to Gitlitz, is "indisputable evidence of Iberian culinary *convivencia*" (550). Food became a way to distinguish between cultures and religions. Lope de Vega describes the *moriscos* as "gente que come arroz, pasas, higos y alcuzcuz" (Espadas Burgos 545).

The religious complexity of medieval Iberia is discernible through the depiction of food and its consumption. Manifestations of so-called "Christian" eating range from the severe to the ridiculous: from Santa María Egipcíaca and her *tres panes* to Don Carnal and his meaty troops.

Jacques LeGoff tells us that the 13th century was witness to a new order of the sacraments. Confession and penitence rose to the top of the hierarchy, thus reflecting the triumph of the morality of intentions (182). The spectacle of religious ritual, as depicted in the literature discussed in this article, allowed the reading/listening public a clear understanding of this morality of intention. In the *Milagros*, the interiority of the spectacle of the Virgin as garden and the Eucharistic miracle demonstrates how the *exemplum* spoke directly to an individual. Christ as the host was the most powerful food imagery of the Middle Ages. The splendid and horrific spectacle of the privations in the hagiographical tales of Martha and Mary admonished the public to admire rather than imitate. The spectacle of this penitence is linked to a sincere desire to attain holiness. Food in the case of Martha and Mary represents bodily desires, and therefore was to be shunned.

Carnal and his gluttonous ways occupy the opposite end of the spectacle of the food spectrum. The vast list of delicious foodstuffs battling it out for victory would have been a welcome diversion during a time of extreme privations. Kevin Poole writes,

Unfortunately for those of the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the time in which the Archpriest of Hita composed his book, widespread famine heightened this "importance of eating." Fear of starvation may have led many to eat in excess, as the psychological impact of impending doom due to climatic conditions and lowered grain production became more and more acute in the fourteenth century. (148)

The superficiality of Carnal's confession and penance also lays bare his true intentions. Carnal escapes as soon as possible to reside in the Jewish quarter until Lent is over. Although the text is humorous, his penance would be a reality for the listening/reading public.

Spectacle reigns in the processions that end the episode of Carnal and Cuaresma. Don Carnal returns to the city on Easter Sunday accompanied by Don Amor who, like Carnal, had gone into hiding, awaiting his chance to return. Meanwhile, Doña Cuaresma slips away to begin her pilgrimage, after rejecting Carnal's challenge to another battle. The jubilation with which Carnal and Amor are met signifies the end of the Lenten season and the end to all of its restrictions. Juan Ruiz details the kind of celebration that they meet, as well as the activities in which Carnal and Amor themselves engage. There was hunting, slaughtering and eating of meat:

Posó el enperante en sus carneçerías;
venían a obedeçer le villas e alcarías;
dixo con grand orgullo muchas bravas grandías;
començó el fidalgo a fazer cavallerías.

Matando e degollando, e dessollando rreses,
dando a quantos venían, castellanos e ingleses;
todos le dan dineros e dellos le dan torneses;
cobra quanto a perdido en los pasados meses. (1223-24).

as well as implications of engaging in sexual relations:

Desde que fue y llegado don Amor el loçano,
todos inojos fincados besaron le la mano;
al que ge la non besa tenían lo por villano.
Acaesçió grand contienda luego en ese llano.

Con quáles posarié ovieron grand porfía:
querría levar tal huésped luego la clerizía;
fueron le muy contrarios quantos tienen freilía;
tan bien ellas commo ellos querrían la mejoría. (1246-47).

Each of these celebratory acts, expressly forbidden during Lent, is described in glorious and gleeful detail. The entrance of Don Amor reflects, on a textual level, both the influence of popular culture on the formation of an ideology-driven text, and the inability of the greater Church to empathize with its members. The implications behind the permissiveness of the end of the Lenten season and the diabolical leanings of Don Amor rely upon the acceptance of the rituals of the liturgical cycle: with Lent comes the necessary cleansing of the soul; with Easter comes the celebration of life and all that this celebration implies.

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