

Abstract

Gastronomic Poetry: Food and Affect in a Catalan Setting

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This article aims to delineate the connections between food and affect as shown in a representative selection of poems that convey how affect can be expressed through gastronomic poetry. Central to affect theory is a drive to recognize the constant modulations of affective states and so assemble a fuller picture of life lived moment by moment. In the chosen examples, expression through poetry and the transmission of affect converge. Carner, Estellés and Rosselló-Pòrcel in some of their poems elevate food to a symbolic category associating gastronomy, sexuality, eroticism and religion. In the confluence of Food Studies and Affect Theory, the article discusses food as a way to reflect on and define a sense of belonging through metaphor and other strategies that express affect.

Resumen

Aquest article pretén delimitar les connexions entre el menjar i l'afecte que es constata en una selecció de poemes que mostren com l'afecte es pot expressar a través de la poesia gastronòmica. El fonament de la teoria de l'afecte és un impuls per reconèixer les modulacions constants dels estats afectius i produir així una imatge més completa de la vida viscuda moment a moment. En els exemples escollits, l'expressió de la poesia i la transmissió de l'afecte convergeixen. La tendresa de la vida quotidiana demostrada en compartir un àpat o la nostàlgia dels plats de la infància són fonamentals per desenvolupar una anàlisi de les pràctiques culturals socials. Així es veu a la poesia de Carner, Estellés i Rosselló-Pòrcel en poemes on el menjar s'eleva a una categoria simbòlica que associa gastronomia, sexualitat, erotisme i religió. En la confluència de *Food Studies* i *Affect Theory*, l'article parla de l'alimentació com una manera de reflectir i definir el sentiment de pertinença, a través de metàfores i altres estratègies que expressen l'afecte.

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Supprimer, corriger un mot, surveiller une euphonie ou une figure, trouver un néologisme, cela participe pour moi d'une saveur gourmande du langage. Roland Barthes

I have to admit, I remember better what I've eaten than what I've thought. Charles Simić

The American poets Mark Strand and Charles Simić are credited with coining the term 'gastronomic poetry'. In a memorable article, Charles Simić argues very convincingly about the unequivocal connection between food and happiness:

Sadness and good food are incompatible. The old sages knew that wine lets the tongue loose, but one can grow melancholy with even the best bottle, especially as one grows older. The appearance of food, however, brings instant happiness. *A paella, a choucroute garnie, a pot of tripes à la mode de Caen*, and so many other dishes of peasant origin guarantee merriment. (Simić 2015a; *emphasis* in the original)

He rejoiced in the fact that the best talk is around that table. Poetry and wisdom are its company: 'The true Muses are cooks. Cats and dogs don't stay far from the busy kitchen'. He linked the happiest days of his life with food and wine and a table full of friends. He concluded that such an obsession with food is 'the best proof we have of the existence of the soul. [...] When our souls are happy, they talk about food'. (Simić 2015a)

Eating and talking, and musing about food can be an obsession, and eating obsessively to the last crumb is what Walter Benjamin defined as 'gourmandizing':

No one who has never eaten a food to excess has ever really experienced it, or fully exposed himself to it. Unless you do this, you at best enjoy it, but never come to lust after it, or make the acquaintance of that diversion from the straight and narrow road of the appetite which leads to the primeval forest of greed. For in gluttony two things coincide: the boundlessness of desire and the uniformity of the food that sates it. (Benjamin 1999: 358)

Benjamin links the obsession with finishing eating some figs he gets from an Italian woman near Naples with the fate of a letter he was not sure he would send, thus attributing to the food experience a whole cultural meaning. He provides two valuable remarks about that kind of eating: unlimited desire and obsessive concentration on only one kind of food.

When Mark Strand died, Charles Simić explained their interest in food in this fashion: 'One wild notion of ours actually bore fruit. We started a new poetry movement that we hoped would make us famous. Every other poet was starting one forty years ago, so we thought, Why not us? Ours was to be called Gastronomic Poetry' (Simić 2015b). They had noticed at poetry readings that whenever food was mentioned in a poem 'blissful smiles would break out on the faces of people in the audience. Thus, we reasoned, in a country where most people hate poetry and everyone is eating and snacking constantly, poems ought to mention food more frequently' (2015b). Although they had some reservations about eventual criticism of their initiative:

Literary purists were bound to be shocked finding barbecued ribs or a slice of apple pie in some sublime poem of ours, but those millions of Americans who buy gourmet magazines and dream of eating the gorgeously prepared meals described in their pages, without ever bothering to make them themselves, would rush to buy our books and enjoy them in the same way. (Simić 2015b)

Two of their poems attest to this interest. Mark Strand's 'Eating Poetry' (1968) goes like this:

Ink runs from the corners of my mouth. There is no happiness like mine.
I have been eating poetry.

The librarian does not believe what she sees. Her eyes are sad
and she walks with her hands in her dress.

The poems are gone.
The light is dim.
The dogs are on the basement stairs and coming up.

Their eyeballs roll,
their blond legs burn like brush.
The poor librarian begins to stamp her feet and weep.

She does not understand.
When I get on my knees and lick her hand, she screams.

I am a new man.
I snarl at her and bark.
I romp with joy in the bookish dark. (Strand 1980)

The speaker's voice acts as a quiet commentary, telling the reader that ink is running from both corners of his mouth, as if it were some sort of exotic juice. It is an act of gluttony that scares the female librarian (Spacey 2017). Strand makes poetry edible. Through a series of metaphors that transform the voice in the poem from a human state to an animal one, a dog. Eating poetry has a bewilderment effect on him, and it changes dramatically the way he relates to poetry: his affections are thus transformed. In Charles Simić's 'Café Paradiso' we witness another kind of transformation:

My chicken soup thickened with pounded young almonds
My blend of winter greens.
Dearest tagliatelle with mushrooms, fennel, anchovies, Tomatoes and vermouth sauce.

Beloved monkfish braised with onions, capers
And green olives.
Give me your tongue tasting of white beans and garlic,
Sexy little assortment of formaggi and frutta!
I want to drown with you in red wine like a pear,
Then sleep in a macédoine of wild berries with cream. (Simić 1996)

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In this case, a series of dishes served at a very special restaurant named none other than 'Paradiso', became an allegory for sensuality and making love. Human bodies are impregnated by the smells and tastes of what they are eating, a supper becomes a description of lovemaking enticed by the paradise of the senses. It is almost a recipe, or at least a menu. What these examples demonstrate is that food (and the way it is included in poems) performs at least at two levels: a direct one, feeding us, fulfilling our hunger, chronicling an unforgettable eating experience; and at a figurative level, being used as a metaphorical expression for many human effects and affects: happiness, doubts, reading poetry, eating and sex. Marrone and Giannitrapani have delineated the link between 'sensi' (senses) and 'senso' (meaning) when discussing food:

il luogo –fisico e simbolico al contempo– in cui il corpo di ciascuno di noi, senza perdere le proprie specifiche istanze, si fa essere sociale, elemento costitutivo di una qualche forma di intersoggettività: i nostri processi sensoriali, superando le anguste vie del bisogno alimentare, accedono senza soluzione di continuità verso i più ampi lidi del piacere del palato e della multiforme patina di significazione che, fondando, ne deriva. Dai sensi si accede così al senso, ai valori sociali e culturali, in un via vai ininterrotto dove la dimensione somatica e quella collettiva finiscono per rivelare la loro comune derivazione semiotica e, perciò, il loro essere un'unica, troppo umana realtà. (Marrone and Giannitrapani 2021: 8)

[the place – physical and symbolic at the same time – in which the body of each of us, without losing its specific instances, becomes social, a constitutive element of some form of intersubjectivity: our sensorial processes, overcoming the food need, access the pleasure of the palate and of the multiform patina of signification that, founding it, derives from it. The senses thus access meaning, social and cultural values, in an uninterrupted coming and going where the somatic and collective dimensions end up revealing their common semiotic derivation and, therefore, their being a single, all too human reality.] (my translation)

In the poems I discuss in the following sections, poetry is used to evoke eating scenes or a remembrance of tastes which together build a 'derivazione semiotica' [semiotic derivation] that can be read from an affect perspective. I present below several examples of poetry as a written or performative practice, where expression and the transmission of affect converge, and these are very close to the gastronomic poetry theorized by Mark Strand and Charles Simić. The tenderness of everyday life expressed with the accompaniment of any meal or the nostalgia of childhood dishes are instrumental in developing an analysis of social cultural practices – as seen in the poetry of Josep Carner, Bartomeu Rosselló-Pòrcel, and Vicent Andrés Estellés, among others. They provide a glittering example of how Catalan poetry (in Catalonia, Majorca and Valencia) has developed a genuine interest in food and its centrality in a definition of identity that goes beyond the commonality of a Mediterranean diet. In their poems food is elevated to a symbolic category associating gastronomy, sexuality and eroticism, and religion. In the confluence of Food Studies and affect theory, my goal is to discuss the incorporation of food as a way to reflect and define a sense of belonging, not merely in identity terms, but more so through metaphors and other strategies. Food Studies

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provide a set of critical tools that allow us to examine the relationship of individuals and society with food.¹

Central to affect theory is a drive to recognize the constant modulations of affective states and, in the process, produce 'an inventory of shimmers', to assemble a more complete picture of life lived moment by moment (Ahern 2019: 8). As Stephen Ahern asks, '[w]hat explanatory power is affect theory affording me here as a critic? What can the insights of the theory help me do with a text?'. These are obvious questions due to the still tentative nature of affect theory and its many applications. I am particularly interested in two of the questions posed by Ahern: What are the sensual resonances, the aesthetic engagements, the affective investments of readers and writers? What identities, what affective assemblages – queer, hybrid, transnational – take shape in the spaces opened by heightened emotion? (2019: 2). Thus, I include below a few representative examples of poems that fall into the gastronomic poetry category, where the literary text works as a register of the ineffable sparkles of embodied being, set forth especially in moments of heightened affective charge. What is remarkable is that the authors examined in the following three sections – Carner, Rosselló-Pòrcel and Estellés – provide a rather complete and complex view of using food in three different historical moments and with a very distinctive yet complementary aesthetic approach to the subject. Together they draw a Mediterranean triangle (Catalonia, Majorca, Valencia) with three distinct aesthetic approaches (*noucentista*, post-symbolist, and realist).

Early twentieth-century Catalan literature was dominated by the idea of modernization, whose attainment was interpreted by writers with two very different approaches: those who supported a model of bourgeois culture on the one hand; and the supporters of a proletarian culture on the other. On many occasions this difference of opinion became extremely violent, reaching a peak during the Spanish civil war (1936–1939). The moment of near normality that had been attained in the years prior to the civil war contrasts sharply with the period of the Franco dictatorship. Poetry was considered to be the only literary genre that could be used to express the *noucentista* project: a European-oriented, classicist literary taste. The elaborate poetry of Josep Carner (Barcelona 1884–Brussels 1970) portrayed an ideal vision of reality. Post-symbolism in the work of Bartomeu Rosselló-Pòrcel (Palma de Majorca 1930–Barcelona 1938) embraces the expression of pure poetry and elaborate images, and embodies a certain conception of poetry common among various modern authors. Following the examples of Jorge Guillén among others, Rosselló-Pòrcel displays in a fully absorbed and developed form the post-symbolist conception of poetry, thus exploring human consciousness and the interaction between the human and non-human worlds.

The civil war and the long dictatorship that followed stopped the trend towards normalization for many more years. Catalan literature was forced underground. During this period of censorship, poetry, the best genre to express double meaning, was the literary genre that helped keep alive the idea of Catalonia and its

1 See Quero Toribio 2006; Wilson 2006; Parasecoli et al. 2012; Young 2012; Pollan 2014; Shahani 2018; Bou 2021: v–xxv.

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rich cultural heritage. With its ease of distribution, its inherent abstractness, and its genuine ability to stick to the message, poetry outpaced long books of prose and became once more the Catalan literary genre par excellence. Vicent Andrés Estellés (Valencia 1924–Valencia 1993) is a representative poet of the mid-century generation who went beyond expectations based on non-problematic and transparent language. The poem stopped being an 'immutable repository of meanings' to emphasize 'the text as part of discovery by both writer and reader' (Oller 1986: 78–84; Bou 2004: 11).

As we see in the following three sections, these authors strive to represent such moments of the extraordinary, of a surfeit or surplus of affect, in which forces of encounter kindle a sense of potential, of promise, of something profound in play beyond the narrow confines of the self, something that baffles bare cognition, let alone full comprehension (Ahern 2019: 8). Affect is born in in-between-ness and resides as accumulative beside-ness (Gregg and Seigworth 2010: 2). And here is where Roland Barthes's use of the neutral can be extremely valuable. He uses the neutral as an attempt to forge an ethics or 'discourse of the "lateral choice"' (Barthes 2005: 8) Such an approach afforded him 'a free manner – to be looking for my own style of being-present to the struggles of my time' (Gregg and Seigworth 2010: 8). Barthes argued that critical practice is a neutrally inflected, immanent *pathos* or 'patho-logy' that would

be an 'inventory of shimmers, of nuances, of states, of changes (*pathè*)' as they gather into 'affectivity, sensibility, sentiment', and come to serve as 'the passion for difference' (Barthes 2005: 77). Gregg and Seigworth (2010) addressed affect theory from a dual perspective: on the one hand as an 'inventory of shimmers' and, at the same time, as 'affectual composition', as 'an ontology always coming to formation but also, more prosaically, as creative/ writerly task' (2010: 11).

Affect theory is crucial because it stresses a passion for divergences as continuous, shimmering gradations of intensities. Making an inventory of singularities, but also making space to unfold a pathology (of 'not yet') (2010: 11). Gregg and Seigworth (2010) explain how Lone Bertelsen and Andrew Murphie illustrated the ethico-aesthetic paradigm and its consequences for affect: it is at once a twin manoeuvre of inventory ('the infinity of little affective events that make up our everyday lives') and of durational pathology (the development of new 'regimes of sensation') (2010: 15). Nevertheless, we should take into account the notion that affect always exceeds subjective experience and may represent both the theory's greatest strength and its greatest limitation. Affect theory is an attempt to give voice to a crucial something, a haunting that is traceable but always slipping (Robinson and Kutner 2019: 117).

Josep Carner's fruits and kitchens

The publication in 1906 of Josep Carner's book, *Els fruits saborosos*, was an indication that modernist vagueness, its truculence, and brilliant individualities or geniuses were beginning to fade out. Catalonia needed modernization. *Noucentisme*

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proposed the foundation of a solid, modern and transmissible culture, of a serious Catalan culture comparable to the most advanced European cultures of the time through the organization of the language (the work of Pompeu Fabra)² and solid instruments to create tradition: 'El 1906 es van donar una sèrie de símptomes que mostraven que alguna cosa començava a passar. I *Els fruits saborosos* va ser un d'aquests símptomes' (Comadira 1906). In the poems we identify idyllic scenes, in a Mediterranean setting – white houses, pink roofs, gateways with a parral, the use of Greek classical names for people mentioned, and so on, and the use of alexandrine verse is instrumental. Comadira (1906) draws attention to

la idea formal d'aquests idíl·lics carnerians, el to familiar trasplantat al món clàssic o bé el món clàssic trasplantat a la ruralitat catalana, els alexandrins, fent díctics o quartets rimats, bé poden emmirallar-se en els de Samain (i Carner així ho va reconèixer), l'originalitat carneriana és que Carner escriu tot un llibre amb un sol correlat, els fruits, que pren com metàfora dels seus personatges o d'algunes de les situacions en què es troben.

Readings of *Els fruits saborosos* say that in his two previous books of sonnets, Carner already showed a thematic inclination towards motifs that pictured idyllicism and that elevated family and domestic everyday life to the happy condition of a poem and, therefore, of beauty. The persistent idyllicism is one of the elements of unity of the eighteen poems in *Els fruits saborosos*. Thus, the poet traces the paradigm of conformity by human beings with sensuality, reflection and mortal condition (Centelles 1986; Gustà 1987). The book opens with two lines from poem CXXII by Ausiàs March that provide the reader with some background:

Qui d'arma e cos junts ateny sentiments,
com perfet hom sent tota la sabor. (March 2004: 370)

March's verses point to the fact that there is an unavoidable blending between soul and body leaning towards a perfect amalgamation of a different kind, what in affect theory terms we could call a durational pathology (or the development of new 'regimes of sensation'). Critics have stressed appreciations of this kind:

[E]ls poemes carnerians, amb figures de nom grec i paisatges estilitzats i benignes, es convertiren en l'emblema del classicisme noucentista. [...] Cadascun dels poemes d'*Els fruits saborosos* conté una relació analògica amb un element

natural, el fruit, i un aspecte de la condició humana que pot encarnar-se en el personatge que en aquell moment la representa. (Gustà 1987: 160)

In *Els fruits saborosos* Carner relates the fruit to a real, idealized state, in different spaces and different connotations where there is always a common element: the incentive to enjoy the little things in an idealized world, Arcadia, characterized by a kind nature, which bears fruit. In addition, it is a man-made nature: gardens, fields, etc. The author uses it to make a vital journey through all stages of life: childhood, youth, maturity and old age. From a critical-historical perspective this can be true. But it does not take into account the centrality of feelings or affects

2 Pompeu Fabra (Barcelona 1868 – Prada de Conflent 1948) was a grammarian and a key reformer of the Catalan language.

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and its fusion in a new meaning that includes taste (savour), as was the case in the examples discussed above by Strand, Simić, and Benjamin. A reading of one of Carner's poems, 'Les prunes d'or', may provide some insight:

En un incomparable triomf, Migdia mor. Passada pel flameig, la terra s'activella. Aglaia seu a l'ombra de la prunera vella. Relluen delitoses, endins, les prunes d'or.

Oh cos d'Aglaia, bru com saonada fruita, cimat de cabellera com d'una nit mortal!
Els llavis se li baden per a la dolça lluita
i té en els ulls un caire brillant com de punyal.

Les prunes d'or a Aglaia reüllen temptadores. Són en una illa verda, cenyida de claror;
en el redós, a penes hi ha fesses torbadores: un fregadís de mates, l'insecte en bonior.

Aglaia sent un mot. ¿És ella o el brancam?
I l'aire es torç, ardent d'una flama frisoa,
i la calitja parla d'una terrible fosa.
L'agost com es rebolca, tot sol, damunt del camp!

Aglaia té una set que eixuga el seny, la parla... Superbament aixeca, damnant el seu descans, i enfonsa en la prunera les cobejoses mans
i enlaira tot el rostre, com si volgués besar-la.

I l'arbre, que amb un lleu serpejament de branques sembla oferir-nos l'or, la mel d'algun pecat, s'estremeix un moment de la ferocitat
del gran perfum impúdic i de les dents tan blanques.

(Carner 2010: 69)

The first four quatrains in the poem reveal the turning point in the life of a woman, – Aglaia, who stands by a golden plum tree. Her body is compared to a seasoned/ mature fruit and black hair adorns her head ('cimat de cabellera com d'una nit mortal!'). Her lips and eyes encapsulate a moment of sweet violence ('la dolça lluita'; 'té en els ulls un caire brillant com de punyal'). These golden plums are tempting fruits: 'Les prunes d'or a Aglaia reüllen temptadores' – a first allusion to Eve and Paradise.

The last four quatrains are intensely sensual: Aglaia has heard a sound but she does not know if it has been emitted by the tree or herself. Introduced by a hurried polysyndeton, the air twists ('ardent d'una flama furiosa'), the haze speaks 'd'una terrible fosa', both insinuating the vivid moment of a warm embrace. It is hot, the end of summer, as we see in a first personification: 'L'agost com es rebolca, tot sol, damunt del camp!'. In these four lines a fusion of bodies is anticipated. Aglaia is so thirsty that her

reasoning, her voice, disappear, reduced to elementary senses. Thirst is also a metaphor for sexual desire. Aglaia embraces the golden plum tree

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'i enlaira tot el rostre, com si volgués besar-la'. There is a remarkable reference to the biblical episode of paradise in Genesis. Coincidentally, the movement of the branches is described through metonymy as 'un lleu serpejament de branques'. For a moment the golden plums in the tree are indirectly compared to Eve's apple in a moment of temptation: 'sembla oferir-nos l'or, la mel d'algun pecat', mixing the colour and sweetness. The situation is so intense that even the tree, through a second personification, becomes fearful of the intense erotic embrace of Aglaia, 's'estremeix un moment de la ferocitat/ del gran perfum impúdic i de les dents tan blanques', abruptly bringing down the curtain on that outburst.

The Greek name Aglaia (in English, Aglaea or Aglaia) means 'splendour, brilliant, shining one', and she is one of the three Charites in Greek mythology. She is the Greek goddess of beauty, splendour, glory, magnificence and adornment. She is the youngest of the Charites and is one of three daughters (the others are Euphrosyne, the goddess of joy or mirth, and Thalia, the goddess of festivity and rich banquets) of Zeus and either the Oceanid Eurynome, or of Eunomia, the goddess of good order and lawful conduct (Grimal 1996: 99). Therefore, in Carner's rendering one can infer an idyllic hymn to sensuality around this middle-aged woman while she contemplates a fruit tree, which is known for its delicious, yellow, medium-sized plum with sweet and juicy flesh that is golden in colour. This sensual embrace also recalls an instance of gourmandizing: unlimited desire and eating only one kind of food. Comadira recalls Marià Manent's opinion on this poem, where

encertadament, hi veu una clara influència baudelairiana. És un poema sobre com s'imposa el desig eròtic, i la descripció que fa Carner d'on porta aquesta imposició, de fet, a una iniciativa femenina cap a la possessió de l'arbre, el masclé. (Comadira 1906)

But going back to Stephen Ahern's questions, discussed in the section above, I stress that the sensual resonances and the aesthetic engagements in this poem are clearly an exhibition of the perils of excess and its response in terms of *noucen-tista* self-control. Affective assemblages proposed by Carner offer a hybrid identity that takes shape in the spaces opened by heightened emotion (Ahern 2019: 2).

In the last poem in *Els fruits saborosos*, 'Els raïms immortals' Carner addresses the passage of time using the figure of the poet as some alter-ego ('El poeta en el cim se sent cantar'), and using a well-known topos – hair – the passage of time:

-Oh Cronos, déu de la vellesa austera,
la barba trista i la mirada errant,
la meva juvenesa palpitant
tu te l'emmenes per la cabellera. (Carner 2010, II: 85)

Introducing an interesting transformation: his blood becomes wine:

No vull el lent i desvavat destí
de dar al no-res mon oci inconegut;
val més ésser esclafat i escorregut,
la sang inútil trasmudant en vi. (Carner 2010, III: 86)

16 *Enric Bou* bchs, 4 (2022) To end with a further transformation. His remembrances are left at a cave to be

used in the future by other people:

¡Malenconia al fi de la diada
i cremadissa d'ales dels instants!
Treni garlandes amb els pàmpols blans
i rigui dalt dels carros la gentada.
No em plau corona de tot vent joguina,
sinó deixar, per a no nats humans,
un poc de sol de mos amors llunyans,
clos al celler, colgat en teranyina. (Carner 2010, V: 86)

In these two examples by poet Josep Carner we can detect not merely the actualization of an aesthetic program linked to *noucentisme*, but more decisively, instances of ineffable shimmerings of embodied being because the moments portrayed are of heightened affective charge, that in the manner of Barthes, gather into 'affectivity, sensibility, sentiment', and come to serve as 'the passion for difference' (2005: 77). The durational pathology (the development of new 'regimes of sensation') can be observed in the manner that the simple operation of eating plums hanging from a tree, become an unavoidable suggestion of sexual intercourse, something that maybe the author had not deliberately included.

In another poem, 'La cuina i la posta', published in a book from his early maturity, *El veire encantat* (1933), Carner constructs an ekphrastic piece with obvious references to a Dutch style painting:

Tintes de coure pel ponent propaga
el disc taronja en hàlits de tardor
i les rogents peroles amanyaga
d'una cuina d'Holanda, amb més lluor.

Entre polsina d'or, una aura vaga festeja amb el cabell arporador, flamissat, d'una vídua que apaga la set, bevent suau, contraclaror,

del bell pitxer topazi. I ella esmenta com és l'instant d'un bell ablaïment; golut? amant? son llavi s'atalenta.

Roig caçador, de púrpura contenta,
un faisà li lliura, que és talment
fet de colors de fullaraca ardent. (Carner 1933: 42)

In this case the setting is exploited to the limit, mixing the sunset colours and the time of the year, autumn. It is another kind of embrace by the colours of the sunset that produce a mixture: 'tintes de coure', and 'el disc taronja en hàlits de tardor' pampering the pots and pans of a Dutch kitchen. Imma Forino has underlined the fact that in the 1700s the kitchen could have a double contradictory meaning: associated with lust and gluttony, but at the same time, in the Netherlands everyday life followed a pattern of 'imperturbabile moderazione, stima per



Figure 1. *The Hunter's Present*, Gabriel Metsu (c. 1658–1661) www.wikiart.org/en/gabriel-metsu/the-hunter-s-present

il lavoro, una prudenza finanziaria che sconfinava a volte nell'eccessiva parsimonia' (Forino 2019: 47) [unabashed moderation, esteem for work, financial prudence that sometimes borders on excessive parsimony] (my translation). Kitchens at the time were represented as half temple, half museum (2019: 50).

The two quatrains establish a contrast between the exterior (the sunset) and the interior (the kitchen). The first one stresses the impact of sunlight on the pans. The second quatrain introduces a second colour, gold, the hair of a thirsty housewife in the kitchen, a woman who holds in her hand a topaz glass. The sensuality of the moment, the vibrancy of colours, makes her muse about 'abrandament' a word that has two senses: literally set a fire, but also to exalt (exaltar, inflamar l'ànim), in the sense of elate. Her lip 's'atalenta' (*donar talent o desig intens*) when she thinks on an instant of 'abrandament': 'golut? amant?'. The scene ends

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abruptly with the arrival of a *roig* [red] hunter who offers a pheasant of matching colours 'de fullaraca ardent', burning leaves. In Dutch paintings of the time such as Gabriel Metsu's *The Hunter's Present* (Figure 1) there is an association of bird/ *vogelen*, meaning sexual intercourse³ implications linked to the figure of a hunter, the man maybe 'hunting' (see Franits 2017: 226–28). The intensity of the light, the sensuality of colours have the effect of transforming affects, and introduce a very different reading of the scene to what the reader at first had in mind.

Bartomeu Rosselló-Pòrcel: Fruits, longing and religion

In the poem 'Sóller', Bartomeu Rosselló-Pòrcel included a poignant association between fruits and current events of the time, but he went much further because he managed to produce something similar to a marmalade of remembrances based on the typical fruits that grow in the Sóller valley. Written in 1937, this is the last poem that he wrote (Paré 2015: 5). The entire piece is permeated by a sense of longing expressed through a transformation of the 'I' in the poem, who becomes a giant-sized character that is in total empathy (or affinity) with the orchards in the Sóller valley, which are among the most famous in the entire island of Majorca.

A Robert F. Massanet

El cel prepara secrets
murmuris de mandarina.
I les riberes del vent
esgarrien taronjades.
Jo tasto vergers. M'ajec
damunt valls encoixinades.
Les fulles alcen frescor
i aixequen ventalls de gràcia,
cortinatges de perfum,
cortesies tremolades.
L'oratge pinta perfils
de caramel dins l'oratge.
El cabell se m'ha esbullat
i tinc l'ombra capgirada.
El sucre de l'aire em fa
pessigolles a la cara,
amb confitures de flor
i xarops d'esgarrifança.
Unes cuixes de marquesa
em repassen l'espina.
Quan el setí es torna gel,
sembla que es faci de flama.
El vicari compareix
amb un vas de llet glaçada.
La suor de les aixelles
li travessa la sotana. (Rosselló-Pòrcel 1991: 114–16)

3 During the seventeenth century 'vogelen' (literally 'to bird') was slang for sexual inter-course. (Franits 2017: 226–28).

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Some historically charged readings have stressed the impact of the civil war:

A part de tot el joc d'antítesis que permet, en l'aparició i el tipus de tractament de la marquesa i el capellà [...] hi ha una clara dimensió satírica en les connotacions sensuals que reben uns personatges que encarnen dos dels sectors que donen suport al *alzamiento* en els moments en què el poema és escrit. (Balaguer 1991: 116)

It could be. 'Sóller' is the poem located at the end of the section 'Fira encesa' in *Imitació del foc* (1938), and it exploits the Majorcan landscape and a sense of distance and longing. Rosselló-Pòrcel had the first symptoms of tuberculosis at the time he was writing it and was living at a sanatorium near Barcelona, far from his native island. Sóller had recently been taken by Francoist troops. The poet thus looks at Sóller from afar and recreates it as if it were a lost paradise in a double sense, ideological and emotional. The first quatrain focuses on the smells of 'mandarina' and 'taronjades', offering a synaesthetic and pleasing view of nature, in line with the island's tradition, the so-called *Escola Mallorquina*. The wind is responsible for spreading these scents. As was the case in the examples of verse by Carner, a

personification of nature is crucial to express the linkage between affect and nature. The voice in the poem swiftly intervenes, exposing a physical contact with earth, a direct contact that contrasts with the sumptuousness of the sensory images related to smell. Rosselló-Pòrcel uses poetry to make contact metaphorically with a distant reality: poetry allows essential reality to materialize.

After the physical dimension, 'cortinatges de perfum' rise: behind the 'perfiles de caramel' hides the need to relive childhood in order to express the emotion of nature. It is the wind that transforms the poet's physical appearance: 'El cabell se m'ha esbullat/ i tinc l'ombra capgirada'. Fruits, sweetness, perform the poet's transformation, with two by-products of fruits in contact with sugar: marmalade and syrup. The latter introduce a sensation of fear, 'xarops d'esgarripança'. Right away an element of sensuality is introduced: 'Unes cuixes de marquesa/ em repassen l'espina'. The poem also mentions the vicar (a figure contrary to the sensuality of the female thighs), associated with a glass of cold milk and the sweat in his armpits. There is a noteworthy oxymoron: fire and ice, an extreme opposition that is mirrored in the priest's appearance: he has in his hands a glass of cold milk and his armpits sweat through the black cassock, which diverges from the white in the glass of milk. Rosselló-Pòrcel accomplishes another gastronomic feat in enlarging our catalogue of shimmering gradations of intensities. In his case, historical and personal realities are subtly present through metaphors that develop a landscape (a foodscape) based on sensuality and food references that reconstruct a childhood world, because affect is born in in-betweenness and resides as accumulative beside-ness (Gregg and Seigworth 2010: 2). The poem puts something profound in play beyond the narrow confines of the self, something that baffles bare cognition, let alone full comprehension (Ahern 2019: 8).

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Table manners with Vicent Andrés Estellés

Estellés's impersonation of Latin poets through his work allows him to speak of nearby realities, or about the present, posing behind the voice of another, in a manoeuvre of confusion devised to mislead censorship (Ruiz Navarro 2014). In his case, the approach to everyday life takes on a special level. It is a complex operation, mixing realities and verses that seem ancient but that refer to present time, when these poems were written, in the midst of a dictatorship. According to Amador Calvo

aquests clàssics [...] són un reflex especular del jo, i que interfereixen de manera diferencial com a *auctoritas*, en minúscula quasi sempre, produint interaccions autorials en les ficcions poètiques de Vicent Andrés Estellés. Però també són icones –codis metafòrics complexos– de l'anticonformisme i de la subversió d'Estellés contra el poder omnímode, que imposa uns preceptes canònics, o una ortodòxia, i una censura textual que es disfressa amb les nobles robes d'una tradició, vista com a fre d'una evolució expressiva normal. (2013: 123–24)

In 'Res no m'agrada tant...', the first poem in his collection *Horacianes* (1974) (Andrés Estellés 2017 IV: 123–215), Estellés praises the roasted pepper and develops a series of guidelines on how a pepper should be cooked and also a modality for eating it. The poem thus elevates to a symbolic category one of the simplest and tastiest dishes in popular Valencian cuisine.

res no m'agrada tant
com enramar-me d'oli cru
el pimentó torrat, tallat, tallat en tires.

cante llavors, distret, raone amb l'oli cru, amb els productes de la terra.

m'agrada molt el pimentó torrat,
mes no massa torrat, que el desgracia, sinó amb aquella carn molla que té en llevar-li la crosta socarrada.

l'expose dins el plat en tongades incitants, l'enrame d'oli cru amb un pessic de sal
i suque molt de pa,
com fan els pobres,

en l'oli, que té sal i ha pres una sabor del pimentó torrat.

després, en un pessic
del dit gros i el dit índex, amb un tros de pa, agafe un tros de pimentó, l'enlaire àvidament, eucarísticament,

me'l mire en l'aire.
de vegades arribe a l'èxtasi, a l'orgasme.
cloc els ulls i me'l fot. (Andrés Estellés 2017, IV: 126)

He associates the red pepper with carnal, sensual pleasures. The line 'res no m'agrada tant' refers to food as one of life's most important pleasures. We are

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in the realm of everyday life: 'm'agrada molt el pimentó torrat', l'enrame d'oli cru amb un pessic de sal i suque molt de pa, com fan els pobres...', stressing the characteristic of the dish: it is poor's people fare. Through an operation of exaltation and elevation of the gestures of the moment of getting ready to eat a pepper, the author seems to want to communicate to us simplicity and humility in the face of life. As is usual in his poetic world, Estellés makes various associations between gastronomy on the one hand and sexuality and eroticism on the other. This is one of the most repeated leitmotifs in his work: 'sinó amb aquella carn mollar que té', 'l'expose dins el plat en tongades incitants' [...] 'de vegades arribe a l'èxtasi, a l'orgasme', being tempted by the pleasure of eating in the same way that he feels tempted by sexual pleasure.

In the poem he also establishes an association between gastronomy and religion. In an almost irreverent movement he compares the moment of tasting the food with the gesture made by a Catholic priest in the Eucharist: 'després en un pessic/ del dit gros i el dit índex, amb un tros de pa,/ agafe un tros de pimentó, l'enlaire àvidament,/ eucarísticament'. In this way readers are deliberately confused by the mix-up of two ceremonies. To elevate the eating of the simple meal to the status of sacred communication between heaven and earth, he introduces something that belongs to the register of the magical or the sacred. In Estellés's work, the confusion of tone is very characteristic. It is perceived in the use of peculiar vocabulary, with a mixture of cultured words with other, popular and colloquial, even crude, ones that lead the reader to premeditated confusion. Thus, in these poems the colloquial expression 'me'l fot' introduces a discursive tone where the intention of the Valencian poet regarding the spontaneous, familiar and popular externalization of words is clearly reflected. In the same way, we can see a very abundant use of adjectives, offering countless nuances in the way they are used to describe everything around them: 'oli cru/ pimentó torrat/ cante, llavors, distret/ crosta socarrada/ tongades incitants'. The colloquial aspect, with an emphasis on everyday life, is detectable in the same metrical model chosen, free verse, without rhyme, with the use of lower-case letters as in all the poems of *Horacianes*. The apparent formal disorder only underscores the idea of simplicity, spontaneity, and breaking with the demanding, rigid, and complicated rules of conventional poetry, which seeks to make a poem easy, accessible, and comprehensible to all. As stated by Simona Škrabec:

Allò que realment commou en la poesia d'Estellés no és el missatge que podríem aïllar i descriure, sinó la seva veu poètica única [...] que atrapa la infertilitat, la violència i la repressió d'impulsos més bàsics i els contrasta amb la puixança de voler resistir tots els embats. [...] Estellés descriu i inventaria fins i tot allò que ja no hi és, que està a punt de desaparèixer, parla de tots aquells que potser ja no els queda ni la fe per veure el seu propi rostre en el mirall. (Škrabec 2013: 360)

It is remarkable that in the vein of Strand's and Simić's gastronomic poetry, Estellés' poem contains a detailed explanation of what he eats – a recipe or a menu – and of the right way to eat it, as an introduction to common table manners, thus stressing some of the characteristics of the Mediterranean way of food: a table at

which to eat, recipes and rituals (Marstelle 2010). Estellés achieves an affective definition of identity, stressing sensuality and a characteristic amalgam bordering sacrilege with religion. In his case Ahern's (2019) 'affective investment' by readers conflicts with a traditional recipe book or the description of a sacred moment in the Catholic Mass. Estellés also echoes magnificently Benjamin's (1999) 'gourman-dizing' concept: banality of desire and uniformity of the food.

Conclusion

In the examples discussed one can figure out how different Catalan authors in different moments have represented food, thus (re)creating a specific foodscape, which includes institutional arrangements, cultural spaces, and discourses that mediate our relationship with food, with special attention to the sensual resonances, the aesthetic engagements, the affective investments of readers and writers. As stressed in the introduction to this article, we have detected the different instances in which gastronomic poetry through affect stresses a passion for divergences as continuous, shimmering gradations of intensities, providing an inventory of singularities, but also making space to unfold a patho-logy (of 'not yets') (Gregg and Seigworth 2020: 11).

We have seen positive examples of gastronomy, where eating has a good impact and food is readily available. Affect and food can be related to the affection for a childhood dish, the nostalgia for certain foods – a particular dish, say, at a time when it isn't available to eat, or possible to eat it – and with it, praise for an ingre- dient, however humble it may be; the tenderness of everyday life expressed while eating everyday food, such as bread, rice, the humblest vegetables. Or, in a more sophisticated way, as we have seen here, the resource of alluding to a fruit or other food, using all the connotations that it can produce, lust and gluttony. The difficulties associated with the expression of affect are enhanced when dealing with poetry. The poems analysed in this article are still far from the eco-poetical approach, turning poetic attention to dimensions of global environmental turbu- lence beyond the nuclear threat, the catastrophic speed of ecological destruction that reconfigures everyday affective life, but one can foresee an attention to relin- quished ways of existence that are kept alive through literature.

The poems discussed here by Carner, Rosselló-Pòrcel, and Estellés activate a shimmering inventory associated with nature's fruits and vegetables, or are used as a correlative that expresses a durational patho-logy, that is, a new regime of sensations. Sensual love, longing through fruit and sweetmeats, learning how to eat a simple roasted pepper that becomes an irreverent imitation, a secularization, of a sacred act. I would like to end with one reference to Spinoza:

Central to Spinoza's *Ethics* is the call to active, relational ways of being in the world that strive to rise above the passions, those external forces that obscure rather than clarify understanding. Indeed, that the words 'passion' and 'passive' both derive from the Latin *pati*, meaning to *suffer*, calls our attention to the ethical force of Spinoza's philosophy. (Robinson 2019: 115)

To be joyful about and affected by food has its counterpart in being hungry and in great despair, or suffering. These authors express three different instances, *a loro insaputa* [unbeknownst to them], of a version of the gastronomic poetry proposed by Strand and Simić that is both innovative and crucial as a definition of identity through food and affect.

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