



How to Read a Cookbook: Unveiling Cultural, Historical, and Social Narratives Behind Recipes and Authorial Voices

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Cooking is perhaps one of the most essential human activities; we could even call it instinct. We don't know exactly when cooking first started, but we would be making a good guess if we connected it to the discovery of fire by humankind. At least, that is what anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss proposes in his seminal 1964 work, *Le cru et le cuit*. Thus, preparing food so it can safely be consumed and sharing it with others could be considered one of the first building blocks of human society. Given that we cannot survive without food, recording ways to prepare, conserve, and consume it safely is of the utmost importance for any community. When writing developed, preserving and sharing that knowledge in written form was the logical next step. To this day, that is what is behind every cookbook: the need to preserve and share a type of knowledge that is fundamental to our survival as a species. In that sense, cookbooks are far from being merely functional texts; they carry the voices of their authors, are born out of a time and a place, and reflect the historical circumstances that surround them. As a literature scholar, I believe that these texts can be approached as we approach other texts; there is a plethora of information that we can gather from them. Just like in the case of other texts, they can be

read and interpreted from different perspectives; we can examine issues of gender, ethnicity, culture, power, cultural identity, etcetera. I follow the lead of previous scholars like Susan Leonardi, Janet Floyd, and Laurel Forster, among others, who consider recipes—and by extension, cookbooks—to be textual forms worthy of study.

In the following pages, I will highlight the importance of cookbooks and the enormous potential of this line of research that has to do with writing, food, and culture. I will also share examples of my research on cookbooks to date and will present several recipes that exemplify the role played by these texts as repositories of culture and opportunities for cultural exchange. After all, the word “recipe” comes from the Latin verb *recipere*, “to receive,” which shows us that recipes are meant to be shared and passed around to others. As we will see, a recipe is never born in isolation; it is always part of a context.

COOKBOOKS AS TESTIMONIES OF HUMAN RESILIENCE

My personal awakening to the idea of cookbooks as texts with cultural meaning was the result of attending a talk by food

historian Cara De Silva (1939–2022). De Silva visited the University of Cincinnati to present a book she had recently edited under the title *In Memory's Kitchen. A Legacy from the Women of Terezín*. The book in question was a cookbook, but not just *any* cookbook. It had an extraordinary origin story, which the author relates in the work's Introduction. In 1941, during the Nazi occupation and expansion throughout Europe, Hitler opened a concentration camp called Terezín (or Theresienstadt) about sixty kilometers north of Prague. Today this camp is open to visitors and is one of the best known for Holocaust scholars since it was there that many writers, musicians, scientists, university professors, and other intellectuals were sent. For many of these prisoners, Terezín was just a temporary stop on their way to places like Auschwitz, Treblinka, or other camps where most did not survive. The ironic fact is that Terezín was presented by the Nazis as a model camp, making it appear as a safe ghetto for the Jews, a place where they could live happily under Hitler's protection. To that effect, and as part of a campaign to improve Hitler's image, the Nazis even shot a documentary there, portraying it as a nice and happy place, showing how there were concerts of classical music and even a library. The somber side of this, of course, is that it was a false reality, and most of the actors that participated in the documentary, among them women and children, were afterward sent to Auschwitz. Cara De Silva tells us that life in Terezín was no picnic. Statistics show that about "144,000 Jews were sent there; 33,000 of them died there, and 88,000 were sent to Auschwitz. By the end of the war, only 19,000 survived" (De Silva 10). According to this historian, a group of women prisoners decided to put together their family recipes in an attempt to forget their hunger and keep the hope alive to eat those dishes again one day. Mina Pächter, who was about seventy years old at the time, had the idea and collected the recipes, putting them together into a bound manu-

script. Mina gave it to a friend before she died, asking him to deliver it to her daughter, Amy, who had escaped the Nazi occupation. The manuscript was lost for several decades but was kept and passed on within the Jewish community, and finally, twenty-five years after having been written, it arrived in Amy's hands. One day, the phone rang in a Manhattan apartment, a female voice asked the tenant if her name was Amy Stein. When she responded in the affirmative, the person on the other side of the phone said, "Then, I have a package for you from your mother." When Amy opened the package, she found a photo of her mother with her grandson, Amy's son, taken in 1939, and a manuscript full of cooking recipes. These were the recipes written by the women at Terezín, their favorite family dishes and desserts, born out of their longing for freedom and happiness (De Silva xxxvi).

On that day, De Silva was presenting her recently published bilingual (English-German) edition of the manuscript. Published in 1996, about fifty years after it was written, it was clearly not just a cookbook, but rather a testimony of both human suffering and inner strength, and for us today, also a testimony of historical importance. What *In Memory's Kitchen* teaches us is that writing about food can become an act of psychological resistance and that food can sustain us not only physically, but also spiritually. I was shaken by the powerful story Cara De Silva told, but also by the powerful symbolic meaning of a humble cookbook. Some of the recipes from the book were prepared and served after the talk, allowing the audience to taste those flavors and vicariously experience the struggle and the hope for survival of the women of Terezín.

Learning this story and reading *In Memory's Kitchen* led me to realize the multiple readings and deeper meanings that a cookbook can have. Following De Silva's talk, I began researching the topic, expanding its scope while wondering whether

anybody had investigated these questions in the case of Spain, and what I found was an enormous research void. At that time, the bibliography was limited to traditional *historias de la gastronomía*, gastronomic history books, that did not provide a critical approach to any contextual issue. These works mostly repeated a list of canonical cookbooks but never “read between the lines” to explore any underlying elements, and they seemed oblivious to the social and historical nuances that surround all texts. With the aim of filling that void, I embarked on a long process that eventually resulted in my first book, *De la página al plato. El libro de cocina en España*, and I have since continued to write articles and give talks on different aspects of the relationship between food, culture, identity, history, and other aspects. My research is not aimed only to Spanish audiences, however. In order to make Spanish food culture approachable to an American audience, I wrote *Madrid: A Culinary History*, a monograph that focuses on the rich gastronomic history of Spain’s capital city. I’ve since been on a mission to spread the word and “convert” people to the importance of understanding the profound value and meaning of what we eat and what we write about food. These are ideas I strongly believe in and have been fighting for for over a decade now.

During my research, I found another example like the book edited by De Silva, a very interesting work that was also produced in the context of World War II, this time involving a group of male prisoners in the infamous Japanese prison of Bilibid in the Philippines. Their story was remarkably like the story of the women of Terezín; to forget their ever-present hunger, these prisoners would imagine food and talk for hours about cooking. One of them suggested to the others to write down their recipes, which they all did, and then he collected them. When he was set free in 1945 after three years of imprisonment at Bilibid, he returned to the US with very interesting

“souvenirs” from his time there: three bullets inside his body, a serious case of beriberi, and a bunch of handwritten notes containing cooking recipes. Back in the US, his aunt helped him test and organize the recipes, and the book was published in 1946. *Recipes Out of Bilibid* contains 165 recipes, specifying who provided each one and detailing whether they survived the war or the circumstances of their death in battle. This cookbook acts as a testimony of human suffering and the power of food as a tool for resilience.

I turned the focus of my research to Spain, specifically to the years of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939). The few cookbooks published during or immediately after the war reflected the extremely difficult circumstances endured by the populations of major Spanish cities like Madrid and Barcelona during that time. These books contain incredibly ingenious recipes to feed entire families when there was little to eat, and they are also fantastic sources of historical information about the Civil War. Even more interesting is the underlying ideological discourse that can be found embedded in them, if you know how to “read” a cookbook.

The war years were years of hunger. Writer Miguel Ángel Almodóvar examines the hardships experienced by Spaniards during this period in a fascinating book entitled *El hambre en España (Hunger in Spain)*. Almodóvar points out that from the beginning of the war, the Republican zone was the most affected by food shortages. This was worsened by the fact that most big cities were Republican, while the rural areas that could produce food belonged to the Nationalist side. It is not surprising, then, that the few cookbooks published during the war years instructed the population on how to survive in a time of scarcity and how to make do with very little. Their titles bear testimony to their intention; for example, *Menús de guerra (War Menus)*, and *El menjar en temps de guerra. Problemas alimentaris que*

planteja la guerra (*Eating in a Time of War. Alimentation Problems Posed by the War*) were both published by the Catalan government. Another example is *Platos de guerra. 60 recetas prácticas, acomodadas a las circunstancias, para la conservación y condimento de la sardina* (*Wartime Dishes. 60 Practical Recipes, Adapted to the Circumstances, for the Preservation and Seasoning of the Sardine*), published in the city of Alicante, in Southeast Spain. The prologue to *Wartime Menus* is very revealing, as it reminds citizens that they should not let themselves be defeated by the circumstances. On the contrary, these very circumstances should be taken as an obligation and even as an opportunity:

War imposes restrictions on us that we need to accept as our moral duty. It is not a sacrifice to deprive ourselves at the table of what is superfluous, especially if we keep in mind that satisfying our gluttony is not everything. Satisfying our appetite is enough. . . . The great cooking masters always spoke of the convenience of creating delicacies with the simplest elements. (Guardiola, n.p.; my translation)

This desire for simplicity is reflected in the recipes contained in the book, which often have just a handful of basic ingredients and aim to maximize the amount of food available to feed many people. The effects of hunger on the population are also addressed in these texts. For example, *Eating in a Time of War. Alimentation Problems Posed by the War* contains abundant advice regarding how to deal with the worst consequences of food scarcity. Besides containing several sections devoted to informing about the caloric and nutritive content of different foods, the index of this short cookbook includes sections with titles such as “Being a little hungry after eating is healthy,” “Being a little hungry never killed anyone,” and “It is possible to resist hunger for a long time.” An entire section is devoted to explaining how to

substitute certain foods with others when the needed ones are not available. Finally, some chapters of the book focus on the most difficult consequence of food scarcity, disease: “Diseases caused by deficiencies” provides explanations to recognize a number of ailments, such as rickets, anemia, and the so-called war edema, caused by a deficiency of protein in the diet, along with nutrition advice on how to prevent and remedy these issues.

The third work mentioned earlier, *Wartime Dishes. 60 Practical Recipes, Adapted to the Circumstances, for the Preservation and Seasoning of the Sardine*, published in 1938, is exactly what the title says. The book is entirely devoted to one ingredient, the sardine, presenting the reader with sixty different ways to prepare it. The author, José Guardiola y Ortiz, justifies his choice of this product by saying that “among the very few kinds of fish with which markets are stocked, the sardine is the most affordable for people of modest means” (24). He also reminds readers that “war brings along several deprivations and sacrifices, among them not the least important are those regarding nutrition, and it is our patriotic duty to endure them” (33). Like the examples presented above, this is a work written in very specific circumstances, and it is both witness and product of a major historical event.

Another great example of the ingenuity of some cooks during the war is *Cocina de recursos. Deseo mi comida* (*Resourceful Cooking. I Desire My Food*), a cookbook/memoir published by a major culinary figure of the time, Ignacio Doménech i Puigcercós (1874–1956). Doménech had built his career working in Barcelona, Paris, London, and Madrid at the service of aristocrats and ambassadors. He was the founder and editor of a legendary gastronomic journal, *El gorro blanco* (*The White Hat*), and also worked as a cooking instructor for many years. He published over thirty books during his long career, many of which became popular and

came to be considered classics, such as *La nueva cocina elegante española* (*The New Elegant Spanish Cuisine*). *Cocina de recursos*, however, is not a work of high cuisine, but rather an example of pure survival cooking. Published in 1941, it can be considered one of the most interesting cookbooks published in Spain during this time; it combines the classic role and structure of a recipe book with elements of autobiography and essay, making it closer to a memoir. Furthermore, under the appearance of an “innocent” cookbook lies a devastating depiction of Spain during the war and postwar years and an implicit criticism of Franco’s dictatorial regime. However, Doménech employed a double discourse to outsmart the regime’s censorship and be able to publish his book, praising Franco and the new regime while denouncing the terrible consequences of the *Alzamiento* (the uprising led by General Francisco Franco that began the Spanish Civil War in 1936) and the war itself. During Franco’s dictatorship, all books published in Spain had to be examined by a committee of censors who would veto any works that attacked the values of the regime or presented it in a negative light. Even though Doménech’s book had been written during the war, in 1938, as the recipes and stories in it reflect, it was published in 1941, two years after the end of the war, indicating that it successfully passed the censors’ scrutiny. Considering its content and the denunciation embedded in its pages, it is to some extent surprising that it was allowed to see the light. The fact that it was a cookbook, which was seen as a non-threatening genre, may partly explain the ease with which it passed the censor’s evaluation.

In the first place, the title of the book is very telling of its content, with the word “recursos” (“resources”) and the very expressive “deseo mi comida” (“I desire my food”). It is a detailed document about how people ate, and how they cheated hunger, during such a critical time. The voice of the author guides us through heartbreaking

pages in which we witness the people’s suffering. It provides readers with advice on how to detect the food adulterations and frauds that were common at the time. The reading of this cookbook presents us with a new portrayal of the Spanish Civil War, in which the main protagonists are hunger and food scarcity, and war is the background. *Cocina de recursos* contains some of the most amazing recipes that I know of; not because of their flavors or complexity, but because of their ingenuity and the amount of information that they provide about their historical circumstances. Some of these recipes are “Tortilla sin huevo” (“Eggless omelet”), “Calamares fritos sin calamares” (“Fried calamari without calamari”)—which were fried onion rings—, “Mayonesa falsa” (“Fake mayonnaise”), “Selecto café de guerra” (“Select wartime coffee”)—made from “algarrobas” (“carob beans”) and roasted peanut shells—, “Girasoles rebozados fritos” (“Tempura-style fried sunflower heads”) and “Chuletas de arroz” (“Rice steaks/chops”)—made by forming a paste of cooked rice that was then put into a mold in the shape of a pork chop, and later coated with breadcrumbs and fried. The simulation and deceit of these dishes consisted of an ingenious switch of ingredients, substituting those that were not available to most of the population, such as eggs or potatoes, with others that had a similar consistency and could pass more or less unnoticed. After all, the real goal was to fill the stomach with familiar flavors, textures, and shapes, a goal that was attained with recipes like the ones mentioned above and the following “Tortilla sin huevo” (Eggless omelet):

Take a few potatoes, onions, green beans, zucchini, and artichokes. Cut/chop in small pieces. Place in a container that has been rubbed with garlic, add 1 tablespoon of finely chopped parsley, a pinch of paprika, 1 tablespoon of baking soda, 6 soup spoons of flour, some salt, 10

or 12 soup spoons of water, 1 tablespoon of oil. Let the mixture rest for 15 minutes, mix everything well, and make the omelet. (62)

According to Doménech, this type of omelet became extremely popular during the war years, being made by the thousands and almost replacing traditional omelets made with eggs. With this peculiar recipe, which uses flour, water, spices, and vegetables to hide the absence of the egg, success was guaranteed—says Doménech—, and the dinner guests would not notice the difference at all. Taking this idea a step further, Doménech gives us the recipe for “Tortilla de guerra con patatas simuladas” (“Wartime omelet with fake potatoes”). In this now famous recipe, he shows how to make a potato omelet without using eggs or potatoes by using the same concoction of flour, water, parsley, garlic, and paprika just mentioned, but the sliced potatoes (as the traditional Spanish recipe calls for) are substituted with orange peel, or more specifically, the white spongy layer between the outer skin and the flesh, the pith. This peculiar ingredient needs to be soaked in water for two or three hours to eliminate any possible bitterness or orange flavor, before it can be fried as if it were a potato.

In his attempt to present a thorough account of the calamities in Spain during the war years, Doménech decided to visit an extensive list of eating establishments in the cities of Madrid and Barcelona to give the readers an assessment of the situation. During the year 1938, he visited numerous restaurants, taverns, and a variety of places, from the upscale to the humblest, and recorded what he ate, the quality of it, and how much it cost. His testimony paints a detailed portrait of a country at war. For example, the author tells his readers of a place in Barcelona that had an eloquent sign hanging at the door, which read (in capital letters): “WARTIME MEAL. WE ONLY SERVE ONE PLATE. IT IS USELESS TO ASK

FOR MORE.” Doménech also notes that in most restaurants there was no bread available, which resulted in people bringing their bread along, carrying it in their back pockets, or, in the case of the ladies, in their purses, well-wrapped in white paper. He also expresses his outrage about the high prices of basic foods such as milk, eggs, and bread, constantly comparing prices before and after the *Alzamiento*. Finally, he warns about eating meat at any restaurant, recommending avoiding it at all costs, because, according to Doménech, “even though they would call it beef or ox, I knew that it came from horse, donkey or mule, which were then very often used for this purpose” (153).

WOMEN’S VOICES: FROM DOMESTIC SPACE TO PUBLIC DISCOURSE

In her seminal 2022 work, *Eat My Words: Reading Women’s Lives Through the Cookbooks They Wrote*, critic Janet Theophano explores cookbooks as historical sources for women’s social history research. Her book illustrates the wider meaning and additional purposes of cookbooks beyond their main use as cooking manuals, exploring issues of memory, identity, literacy, domesticity and authorship that have historically shaped women’s lives and determined their role in society. Wanting to explore similar issues about the female experience in my own area of research, I soon realized that finding published cookbooks by women in Spain before the nineteenth century was an impossible task. Despite being the person in charge of all kitchen tasks in most households, women’s access to literacy and publication were unsurmountable barriers that for centuries precluded them from gaining access to the social capital and public recognition for their work in the kitchen that could be achieved by their male counterparts. This quickly became evident with a look at the bibliographical records: checking María del Carmen Simón Palmer’s compre-

hensive *Bibliografía de la gastronomía y la alimentación en España* (*Bibliography of Gastronomy and Food in Spain*), an encyclopedic bibliographical reference work that compiles more than 5,500 works, yields the following facts: of the 309 entries corresponding to culinary works published during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, there are none written by women. Nor are there any among the 325 entries of the seventeenth century or among the 441 published in the eighteenth century. It is not until the end of the nineteenth century that cookbooks written by women can be found, but the proportion remains minimal: out of a total of 2,507 books published during that century, only eight of them were possibly women's works. And I say "possibly" because this fact would still have to be qualified, since all that glitters is not gold. Among the published works, many are translations of foreign works, in this case French, signed by pseudonyms that possibly hide a male author, and thus must be put into question or discarded.

The reasons for this paradox of the presence/absence of women in the canon of cooking manuals and treatises are not hard to imagine; they are the same reasons that explain the almost total absence of literary or artistic works authored by women throughout the centuries. Cookbooks were often written by professional cooks who worked at the service of royalty, and therefore reflected a very specific type of cuisine. A few unpublished manuscripts written by women exist, however, some of which have seen the light in recent years and have been the object of study and critical attention. My own research at the National Library in Madrid yielded a handful of manuscripts, some of which had been written at convents in Mexico during the eighteenth century, where young women from the upper classes were sent to receive an education. I also found several manuscripts in antiquaries, such as a handwritten notebook that contains recipes from the Spanish region of

La Mancha. One of the most interesting elements of these manuscripts is often the autobiographical component; in the case of this manuscript, dating from 1918, it provides insights into the author's regional traditions, such as the traditional practice of *matanza* or pig slaughtering. The text details the manner to make the traditional blood sausages, hams, chorizos, etc., that became central to the culture of Spain since the fifteenth century, as a way for Jewish and Muslim *converso* populations to prove their true allegiance to the Christian faith and thus avoid prosecution from the feared Inquisition.

A recently published cookbook under the title *Reliquias culinarias* allows us to learn about the remarkable woman who authored it. Her name was Celestina, and she worked her entire life as a cook and maid at the service of the Marquis de la Calle in Cádiz, Southern Spain, during the nineteenth century. The family belonged to the Andalusian nobility, and the Marquis, Don Bernardo Manuel de la Calle Caballero (1827–1887), was a prominent figure in the political life of Cádiz, actively participating in it as commissioner of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce, as a provincial deputy, and even as mayor of Cádiz. Don Bernardo was therefore a man deeply involved in politics at a time when the instability of the country manifested itself in the persistence of the Carlist wars, the quarrels between conservatives and liberals, and the imposition, rejection, and final abdication of a universally rejected monarch, Amadeus of Savoy. Celestina, whose photograph suggests she was perhaps of mixed racial ancestry, as was common amongst the servants of the Andalusian nobility at the time, was taught how to read and write as an adult—according to the family of the Marquis—and went on to produce a voluminous manuscript containing about four hundred recipes. The turbulent politics of the time in Spain are reflected in some of Celestina's recipes, with

dishes that refer in their name to political factions and figures (such as *bizcochos republicanos*, *alfajores carlistas*, and *timbal amadeísta*, a dish that referred to the disgraced monarch Amadeus of Savoy). This unique manuscript was kept by the de la Calle family for several generations, and they finally published it in 2005.

Another woman author who deserves mention is Encarnación Pinedo, who lived, cooked, and wrote between two cultures in nineteenth-century California. Her lengthy cookbook *El cocinero español (The Spanish Cook)* was published in San Francisco in 1898. Written in Spanish, it may be the first cookbook published in that language in the United States by an American author. Pinedo belonged to the California upper class and was well educated, something that becomes apparent when reading the book. It is a lengthy work, containing eight hundred and eighty recipes, including some Spanish delicacies such as horchata and bacalao, Mexican recipes such as tamales and enchiladas, as well as French, Catalan, and Italian dishes. Pinedo wrote her work in Spanish at a time when California had become integrated into the US, and the Spanish language was in clear demise, along with Californio culture of the Spanish colonists and their descendants during the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries before California was annexed by the United States. In addition to this, the year of publication coincided with the year of the very brief Spanish-American War, 1898. At the time, there was a clear anti-Spanish sentiment in the US preceding the war, and to publish a book in Spanish precisely then is something that merits analysis. We can view the writing in Spanish and the push to preserve these recipes as a form of cultural resistance. Scholars like Victor del Valle consider this work to be the first Chicano cookbook; Nicole M. Guidotti-Hernández, on the other hand, disagrees with what she views as a reductionistic label based on a Chicano nationalistic discourse, pointing out

instead the complexity of Pinedo's cultural identity as reflected in her recipes: "Pinedo's European cooking influences and middle-class status further problematize discourses of Chicano nationalism because they do not neatly conform to contemporary celebrations of Indianness and mestizaje (racial mixing of Spanish, Indian and African peoples)" (452).

Yet another example of an unpublished cooking manuscript by a woman author is the one I refer to as "The Santa Cruzada manuscript." While teaching a course in Mexico a few years back on the topic of food and culture, a student shared with me a manuscript that belonged to the Mexican family that was hosting her. After close examination and thorough reading, I was able to determine that it was an eighteenth-century manuscript belonging to an upper-class family of Spanish descent from the state of Guanajuato. Like Encarnación Pinedo's book, this manuscript reflected the post-colonial context that made food a strong signifier of social class and racial identity. With a strong presence of recipes and ingredients of Spanish origin, it constitutes an excellent example of *novohispano* cuisine. In addition, the manuscript was bound in a Papal Bull, specifically a *Bula de la Santa Cruzada* dated for the years of 1794 and 1795 for a woman named María Ramona. This fact provides us with valuable information to place it chronologically, while helping to draw the social, racial and religious profile of the family to which she belonged. It gave a name, María Ramona, as the possible author or owner of the manuscript, and the dates of 1794 and 1795 as approximate estimates to date it. The comparison with other works indicated that the recipes in the manuscript are original and not copied from other sources. From all this it can be deduced that we are dealing with a document conceived in the domestic sphere for daily use and consultation. In addition to the purpose of preserving culinary knowledge to be a daily reference, the possibility of a prescriptive

purpose could also be added, if the text was written with the secondary idea of transmitting such culinary knowledge within the domestic sphere. Furthermore, the comparison with other books of the time revealed coincidences of dishes common in the Mexican eighteenth century and consistent with the cuisine of an upper-class *novohispano* family, such as *manjar blanco* and *huevos mejidos*, as well as sweet treats like *mazapanes* and *torta de almendras*. Interested readers can find an in-depth analysis of the text in my article “El manuscrito Bula de la Santa Cruzada: Un recetario mexicano inédito del siglo XVIII,” which can be accessed through *Culinaria*, an online journal published by the Universidad Autónoma de México.

I’ll close this essay by sharing a recipe from *Cocina ecléctica* (*Eclectic Cuisine*), a book edited in 1890 by Argentinian author Juana Manuela Gorriti (1818–1892) that compiled contributions from across Latin America and overseas (all but one of the contributors were women). Gorriti was no mere housewife, but rather, a writer and intellectual deeply committed to women’s issues who even held the position of First Lady of Bolivia from 1848 to 1855. It is not surprising, then, that according to Vanessa Miseres, *Cocina ecléctica* illustrates “how culinary practices represent a channel for larger reflections on gender struggles and women’s rights” (208). Along the same lines, Nina Scott reads it as an example of how women writers of the nineteenth century “designed strategies to give lip service to the woman as keeper of home and hearth while simultaneously breaking out of private into public discourse” (310). This recipe included in the book for *helado de espuma* (foam ice cream) is highly peculiar, but also representative of the gastronomic sophistication and means available to the upper classes:

Rise at five in the morning, fill two tin containers halfway with milk, [...] wrap them in sheep skin soaked in salt water

[...], place them on the back of a mule, make the mule trot up the mountain for one league, and then trot back down. The milk will shake like a stormy sea [...] at the same time the ice will take hold of it [the milk] and will freeze it into a foam [...] Add sugar and cinnamon before serving. (Gorriti 348; my translation)

CONCLUSIONS

Although it may not seem evident from a superficial reading, cookbooks are in many ways like other types of texts, that is, they are products of the time and circumstances in which they were written. They often reflect the historical context to which they belong and even provide a glimpse into the psychology of their authors. Thus, the argument behind the examples provided here is that cookbooks should be considered texts with multiple meanings embedded in them according to a variety of factors. Reading a cookbook means, then, to unveil the many cultural, historical, and social narratives that lie behind the recipes; and to realize that the circumstances that prompted their publication, as well as the reality they portray, make them valuable historical documents that deepen our knowledge of important events. In sum, these texts complement the collective memory and are of unquestionable importance as repositories of information for the use of historians, sociologists, anthropologists and just about every student of the human condition. It is therefore essential to consider the embedded discourses that articulate them, the context where they were produced, their authors’ purposes and circumstances, etc. Issues of gender, class, identity, ideology, reflections on the formation of the canon, or questions of literary methodology can be explored through the study of these texts if we approach them with a critical eye, looking beyond their practical function and paying attention to the many other aspects that form them. Cookbooks present a goldmine of

potential for a richer understanding of historical and sociological issues and processes and constitute a valuable resource for the field of cultural studies that we are now beginning to utilize. Lastly, these humble recipe books matter because they act as time capsules that preserve testimonies of our shared cultural history, often bearing witness to the strength and resilience of the human spirit.

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