SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE RESEARCH GROUP (SPRG) FORUM
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Veronica Menaldi
Magic Morsels: Food in Morisco Aljamiado
Incantations

This paper explores the ways in which food, be it in traditional or otherwise, plays an important role in a selection of early 16th-century morisco aljamiado spells—those found in Madrid, MS reserve 22 and MS 11/9416 (caja 18). As Mary Elizabeth Perry has explored in “The Handless Maiden: Moriscos and the Politics of Religion in Early Modern Spain,” food played an important role in the Iberian morisco community, serving as one way to preserve their culture within the relative safety of the home. Though the quotidian function of food explored by Perry differs with the magical practices discussed in this paper, in both, food is presented as a part of the creation and preservation of morisco identity. Several of these spells require the use of apples, saffron, oil, onions and honey, among other foodstuffs. And a few incantations, depending on the desired effect, require the spell-caster or the intended target to consume the concocted ingredients. In this paper I will focus on a few particular spells. One requires words and symbols be written on the peel of an apple and later consumed. Another requires the preparation and consumption of the heart of a hoopoe, a common and colorful bird, well-known in European folklore and magic—particularly that of Arabic origin. This materiality and talismanic nature of these spells themselves makes the connection with food readily apparent. But with these examples of magical morsels I intend to show the interplay between common day and supernatural practices showcasing how the pseudo-Muslims in Spain living under Christian rule were able to continue their practices with the use of easily accessible consumable goods.

Heather Mawhiney
Monstrous Transformations: Dictating Identity in El otoño del patriarca and Yo, el Supremo

When reading through the lens of monsterology, the creation of monsters is often seen as a political act of propaganda, a means of creating an Other, an Outsider, a Them. These instructive tales (Who is fearful? Who is dangerous?) create a societal understanding of where the line between inclusion and exclusion lies, and what happens if you cross it. This is especially prevalent in the formation of a national identity, such as during a dictatorial regime, where the creating of human monsters serves as a warning in order to maintain the social structure built on exclusion and fear. The creation of human-monsters is not only prevalent in tales where they are described as fantastical giants, witches or vampires, but exist even today in, for example, the irrational fears bourn of homophobia and ethnocentrism. The creation of what we are made to fear in human form is often purposeful and always political, in this sense. However, the monstrosity I plan to discuss in this paper takes on a different form, a twist to the norm. In García Márquez’s El otoño del patriarca and Roa Bastos’ Yo, El Supremo, we see two instances where this very strategy, this same act of manipulation, is reversed as a subversive tactic, where the hegemonic order is not being upheld, but rather disintegrated. The very identity of the dictator is translated from the real (or at least what he believes/purports to be real) and into the realm of the fantastic or mythic, exposing it as such — a fantasy or myth. Ambiguities between fact and fiction allow us to question the nature of national political mythmaking and the heroes and villains that are created in the process. Therefore, this translation, this fantastical rendering, of the dictator-monster exposes the malleable nature of his identity formation, the logic that needs to be suspended in order to accept the fantasy, and served as a warning of this widespread societal crisis.

In memory of our group’s co-founder, Isabel de Sousa Ramos