Feast Your Eyes on This: A *Gourmand* Explores the Provocative Culinary Delights of Seventeenth Century Guatemala

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Abstract:
Thomas Gage's *The English American, His Travail by Sea and Land, or New Survey of the West Indias* (1648) served British political interests in a territory long controlled by the Spanish Crown. Gage's text capitalizes on the intended reader's presumed inquisitiveness into Spanish colonial society and its subaltern populations to put food on display for this reader. As Thomas Gage positions himself as an adventurous eater and critic of seventeenth century New World food, he engages in what we may call today culinary tourism. While the layers of his privileged European position remain intact, Gage fashions himself as a sensible subject who nonetheless takes great pleasure in food. In all instances related to food, the Englishman displays his *gourmand* tendencies.

Keywords:
Thomas Gage – Guatemala – Travel Narrative – Chocolate – Fruit – Passion.

Thomas Gage's *The English American, His Travail by Sea and Land, or New Survey of the West Indias* (1648) was an ambitious project. Its overt objective, declared in the very title of the first edition of the text was to chronicle the author's voyage from Europe to New Spain, the twelve years he spent living among indigenous peoples in Guatemala, and his return to England through present-day Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia and Cuba. It was a travel narrative that blatantly served British political interests in a territory long controlled by the Spanish Crown. In the style of Western travel writing, the text "gave European reading publics a sense of ownership, entitlement and familiarity with respect to the distant parts of the world that were being explored, invaded, invested in, and colonized" (Pratt 3). Travel narratives allowed their intended readers to feel that they were actively participating in the expansion of the British Empire. Thomas Gage's account of the

Spanish colonial system and its subjects created the moral fervor and excitement about a project that could possibly begin in the isthmus and could extend to the Viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru.

Like other texts in the genre of travel writing, *The English American* unapologetically straddles the boundaries of "subjective" and "objective" reporting. Nowhere is this more evident than in Thomas Gage's singular approach to the edible delights of the New World. In fact, food emerges as a fortuitous and yet central element that departs from the anticipated political and ideological motives of the text. My central argument is that Thomas Gage's text capitalizes on the intended reader's presumed inquisitiveness into Spanish colonial society and its subaltern populations to put food on display for this reader. As Thomas Gage positions himself as an adventurous eater and critic of seventeenth century New World food, he engages in what we may call today culinary tourism. While the layers of his privileged European position remain intact, Gage fashions himself as a sensible subject who nonetheless takes great pleasure in food. In all instances related to food, the Englishman displays his *gourmand* tendencies.

My analysis dialogues with scholarly work on the political aspects of Gage's narrative while focusing specifically on the gratification in food that author finds during his travels. In this analysis, I demonstrate that Thomas Gage comes to personify the very title of his text—*The English American*—as he engages in a culinary journey that ultimately leads him to experience the intimate bond between food and passion. The rhetorical strategies that he takes to describe the experience are meant to entice the intended reader into partaking and submitting to the same pleasurable encounter with New World foods and developing a fuller palate. First, I contextualize the travel narrative and demonstrate that the author's approach to food shows a dramatic departure from that taken by chroniclers of the age. Next, I move forward with this observation and highlight key moments in the travel narrative that exemplify the pleasures of a culinary experience that takes center stage even as the text's political and social are negotiated by the author. Finally, I assess the extent to which Gage submits to the lure of New World foods and invites the European reader to do the same—even as he upholds a claim to his quintessential European identity. Taking these steps leads us to a problematized reading of imperialist subjectivity where the fruits, meats and delicacies of the New World touch the European tongue.

Submitting to Pleasure and Awakening the Senses

Thomas Gage was an English aristocrat whose social status would have allowed him to partake in culinary delights out of reach to the English masses. Gage writes at a time when carbohydrates in the form of wheat, rye, buckwheat, oats, barley and beans were central to the average English subject, while a meager supply of protein from domesticated fowl and animals as well as wild game supplied additional nutrients (Mintz

75). Working people in this context greatly feared the effects of fresh fruit, which were supposedly dangerous when eaten in large quantities. Bread and beer characterized their diet, which remained meager and inadequate even as sugar and other commodities obtained from the colonies became prevalent in England (Mintz 77). It is in light of these dietary practices that Thomas Gage's references to the bounty of food in the New World can best be understood.

Unlike the landed elite of England who had no other choice but to wait for the delicacies of the New World to cross the Atlantic and make their way to their table, Gage was faced with a singular opportunity. As an envoy of the Crown, he stepped off the vessel in the Caribbean and set foot onto the very paradise from whence an array of fruits and vegetables were readily available. His consumption of these was neither restricted nor limited by the laws of trade and commerce, allowing him to partake of their bounty. It was here that an entirely different cuisine, with flavors and textures unlike any Gage had ever encountered, originated. As his palate acquired the taste for the plentitude of delicacies on this side of the Atlantic, Gage experienced pure pleasure—and wrote about the experience.

Thomas Gage's fascination with the foods of the Americas is evident from the first pages of the narrative. To this man, even the taste of the water is sublime. "Temptation" is an appropriate term for what he feels as he taking stock of what the New World has to offer and "submission" is an appropriate term for his response to this. Gage's approach to the bounty of this context differs from that of other travel writers to the extent that he actually *responds* to the allure of new foods. Ilona Katzew explains that the classification of colonial flora, common in natural history tracts and travelogues since at least the sixteenth century, encapsulated the colony's role as the provider of natural bounty and the generator of objects of curiosity (185). Yet fruits and vegetables, according to Thomas Gage, were not meant to be commodified or admired. These products had a power of their own. Thus, Gage's descriptions of food engage in the reader in an all-encompassing and engrossing discussion of the extent to which a "sensible" European could allow himself to be consumed by the desire to devour these new items.

In one of his compelling descriptions of the abundant food available on the *hacienda* San Jacinto, Gage begins by describing what he considers to be beautiful streets lined with lemon and orange trees, explaining that "había con abundancia granadas, higos y uvas, con piñas de América, zapotes, chicozapotes y todas las demás frutas de México" (Gage 51). Finding himself surrounded by such delicacies, Gage cannot contain his joy as he describes how these luxuries became an aspect of his daily life:

> Gozábamos de estas delicias fuera de la casa, mientras en lo interior nos regalaban toda clase de pescados y de viandas, causándonos maravilla la abundancia de los dulces, y sobre todo de conservas de que habían hecho acopio para nosotros. Durante el tiempo de nuestra permanencia,

> nos llevaban a cada uno todos los lunes por la mañana, media docena de cajas de codoñate o carne de membrillo, mermelada, jalea y frutas en almíbar por no hacer mención de los bizcochos, para que fortaleciéramos nuestros estómagos tomando un *tente en pie* por la mañana y lo restante del día. Y a decir bien, lo habíamos menester, porque sentíamos que nuestros cuerpos se desfallecían, si pasábamos mucho rato sin comer alguna friolera. (Gage 52)

Developing a craving for the culinary delights of the New World initially seems strange to Thomas Gage, who recognizes that he is exhibiting dramatically different behavior in this hemisphere. He and his European peers would have been satisfied with three mealtimes in England: breakfast typically consisted of bread, beer and butter and was available between 6 and 8 in the morning; the main cooked meal was called midday dinner and was served at noon; finally, supper was an informal and simple meal taken between 5 and 9 in the evening (Flather 62-63). It was assumed in Gage's culture that what people ate and how much they consumed was predicated on the factors of status, age and place (Flather 66). The prescriptive English rules that implied that the male of the highest rank should consume the best and the most of the food available were rendered obsolete in a context where the rule of the day was abundance.

Though the ubiquity of fruits and other delights did not concern Gage, his insatiable appetite troubled him. Finely attuned to this, he writes that he does not eat in response to hunger but to a force greater than this basic need. This results in reaching beyond practical call for nourishment and venturing into the uncharted terrain of "food for pleasure." Recognizing his exorbitant appetite, he begins an interesting introspection into his own eating rituals and wonders why he consumes so much more in the Americas. He explains that eating three meals a day and, upon occasion, eating only a heavy lunch and a heavy dinner suffices for the average European. In the Americas, however, he finds that even when he and his companions had been served, "tres of cuatro platos de carnero, vaca, ternera, cabrito, pavos y otras aves y animales de caza," they feel faint and weak if they do not eat again two or three hours later (Gage 52). Gage is puzzled because he finds these meats just as appealing and succulent as those he has had in Europe. His need for an explanation leads him to ask a doctor about this "curious" problem, his insatiability.

The respected doctor informs Gage of the "inferiority" of the products in the Americas. The climate, the learned informant explains, is responsible for producing meats and produce that are appealing to the naked eye but lack the substance to really nourish the individual. Gage is satisfied with the response and concurs: "Son tan hermosas a la vista y tan gratas al paladar, pero de ninguna virtud nutritiva por dentro; y que no hay ninguna de cuantas veíamos por gruesa que fuera, la cual pudiese dar la mitad de la sustancia que contiene una camuesa de España o una manzana de las más pequeñas de Inglaterra" (Gage 52). Gage concludes that if Europeans cannot be

adequately nourished by the food of the New World, then it is only rational that that they as much as they see fit. In Gage's estimation he is in the midst of a plenitude of succulent foods that overwhelm the senses in such a way that the most natural consequence of their availability was for the subject to be overpowered by them. The abundance of the New World merits enjoyment.

As Gage makes clear in the title he gives to this chapter—*Cuenta el autor algunas particularidades del clima y de los alimentos del país, los cuales sirven de entrada para la descripción de la grande y famosa Ciudad de México tal cual estaba en tiempos pasados, y como se hallaba después, con especialidad en el año 1625*—such descriptions and conclusions are a necessary bridge to a more general conversation that will focuses on the geography and the culture of the territory he now inhabits. Gage posits that the pleasure of consuming New World foods serves as a gateway to understanding the cultural and geographical complexities of the land. This is a rhetorical strategy that serves Gage very well. It is perfectly acceptable, then, for an English *envoy* to write to speak of the pleasures of food. The travel narratives written from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century explored food as an essential component of nature and because mapping was so important to colonial powers, and in these it was important to know what fruits and vegetables grew in the new territorial acquisitions. Gage's precursors understood that the social construction of abundance was intimately tied to amassing knowledge about the subject. Yet there is a slight departure from this position in Gage's *The English American*, for it obliges a "subjective" encounter with the knowledge gained through the palate and the senses rather than "objective" observation.

In contrast to other chronicles of the period, Gage goes a step further to articulate his fascination for the new flavors and *délices de la table*. The reader can even glean from his narrative that he has a sweet tooth, as already evidenced in the description of the delicacies he prefers. In a chapter dedicated especially to the fruits of Mexico, Gage uses the opportunity to discuss just how much more the Spanish enjoy fruits, particularly figs. Gage adds a brief anecdote in which he describes the Spanish predilection for a variety that stains urine and affirms that they play tricks on newcomers by giving them such figs and leading them to believe that they were hemorrhaging. Thus, Gage observes New World humor as one of the many pleasures that one can derive from food. As incongruity theorists suggest, humor is based on the difference between what people expect and what they receive in a text or encounter. In the words of Schopenhauer, "the case of laughter in every case is simply the sudden incongruity between a concept and the real object which have been thought through it in some relation and laughter itself is just an expression of this incongruity" (qtd. in Berger 235). Food, as Gage observes with keen delight, can be a source of gratification in multiple ways and contexts.

Gage's position is clearly opposed to that upheld by the critical thinkers of his time. John Milton, renowned early modern English intellectual, was fascinated by food and responded to it by advocating temperance in the face of gluttony. Milton focused

his attention on eating because he considered that, "food, the substance that sustains life can seduce on into moral decadence and physiological death" (Schoenfeldt 132). Gage's estimation couldn't be any more different. A reading of Gage's *The English American* demonstrates an equal preoccupation with food as a substance that supports life but also demonstrates a departure in the values ascribed to food. For Gage, it is of particular importance that the subject delight in the matter that nourishes the body in order to reach what might even be considered an altered state, one that will heighten the senses.

Where there is an attempt at bridging one world and another, there is of course a steady focus on the pleasure of food. Thus, there is this preemptory descriptions of figs and other fruit, but Gage is keenly focused on the pleasures of food and for that reason is ready to delve into this matter with great interest after providing the expected information. He himself cues the conversation:

> Hablando de las frutas de México, me sería imposible olvidar las piñas, no las de los pinos sino las piñas que llaman de América […]. Para comerlas, suelen antes cortarlas a tajadas, y dejarlas por espacio de media hora en agua y sal, a fin de corregir su frigidez y crudeza, y luego las ponen en agua fresca, y la sirven de este modo. Mas la mejor manera de prepararlas es hacerlas en dulce, y es la confitura más delicada de todos aquellos países. (Gage 82)

True to fact, Gage has been attentive to the details of how best to prepare pineapples! He likes them sweet, a confirmation here of a recurring predilection for sugar. Though he follows this observation with a description of the maguey plant and its many uses of its fibers—from making paper, to shoes, to belts, to alcohol, to their curative properties—he does not linger long on its commercial value. The scant attention he gives it contrasts sharply to his proclamations of the pineapple's extraordinariness; the all-encompassing nature of the maguey plant has already been subsumed by the status given to pineapples. The incorporation of brief discussions on the pleasures of food moves forward as Gage continues on the path towards even more delectable foods of the Americas.

As Gage completes his tour of Mexico, he leaves with the certainty that the pleasurable encounter he has had with the produce of the region is stamped in his memory and remains incomparable to anything he has seen. Moments after describing the fruits, he states:

> Nada falta a México de cual puede hermosear una ciudad; y si los escritores que han empleado sus plumas en alabar a las provincias de Granada en España y de Toscana y Lombardía en Italia, hubieran visto el Nuevo Mundo y la ciudad de México, no habrían tardado en

> desdecirse de todo lo que han dicho a favor de aquellas tierras. (Gage 83)

With every new encounter with the delicacies he finds in the New World, Gage's experience seems to be suspended from the political imperatives that presumably drove the very undertaking of writing *The English American*. Even the transatlantic struggle for power—competing French, Dutch and Spanish interests—cease to be important as the text develops. The seventeenth century was a time in which pirates, corsairs and buccaneers lay claim to disputed territories and riches; it was a time when England sought to expand trade and influence. Where Gage might have been expected to explore these matters in depth, the reader finds instances in which New World flavors consume text and author. As Marcy Norton explains, "not quite so abstract as ideas and not so tangible as goods, taste—understood here as embodies habits and dispositions—formed part of the 'Columbian Exchange.' These habits and aesthetic dispositions were in relation to—but not dependent on—other historical phenomena. Food became one of the primary points of contact between Europeans and Indigenous people, leading them to become keenly aware of their development of taste and the transformation of their palate.

Thus, as Gage makes his way through the city that was then known as Cobán, now Copán, he finds an uneven and mountainous terrain and here again, reason to speak of food. Here he observes that, "los principales géneros que allí se encuentran son el achiote, que es el mejor de todo el país de Guatemala, el cacao, el algodón, la miel, el café, la zarzapilla y el maíz en gran cantidad; pero no se encuentra trigo" (Gage 197). The author is enthralled with what he sees and expands his descriptions to include the other wonders of the landscape, its flora and fauna. Gage reminds the reader that indigenous insurrection has prevented the Spanish from settling the province, opening his intended reader's mind to the virgin terrain and abundance of the plantations and the fruits that he subsequently describes. This lays the groundwork for the very temptation he seeks to arise in his intended reader. As Gage makes clear at this juncture, even the most sensible European can and should submit himself to the ecstasy of New World foods.

Eating Otherness: Subjecting Oneself to Delights Unknown

In Thomas Gage's estimation, the colonial self was not under threat of dissolution even when the subject allowed himself to be consumed by gastronomic gratification. He had traveled in the New World with a full understanding of his role as a British informant, arriving in this hemisphere in 1625. This was the same year that England, France and the Netherlands almost simultaneously began to establish of colonies in the West Indies (Barbour 537). Therefore, ensuring an advantage over England's competitors was of essence—all the Caribbean islands, with the exception of

Dominica, St. Vincent and Santa Lucia, had been claimed by one or multiple European powers (Barbour 537). As an envoy commissioned with the task of gathering information, Gage's account is politically and religiously oriented. In his attention to food throughout *The English American*, the author steadfastly holds on to the task of providing a solid piece of intelligence while demonstrating that pleasure in partaking of food is greater than the pleasure of participating in matters of defense.

Rebecca Earle notes that, "food was in fact central to the early modern discourses that structured European efforts at understanding the Americas and their inhabitants" (690). In fact, it is imperative to note that the approach most commonly taken with respect to food was one of flexibility instead of rigidity. Europeans quickly found that they should suspend their expectations similitude, for even their relationship to food in the New World was unlike any they had had in their motherland. The new context placed them closer to the production, circulation and consumption of edible goods. In one of his early discussions of food, Thomas Gage writes that his principal task aboard the vessel heading to Veracruz was to organize their pineapples:

> La principal ocupación que tuvimos los dos primeros días, fue la de guardar nuestras ananas. Esta fruta les gustaba a todos y nadie dejaba de estimarla cuantas había comido en España. Las ananas no se cogen maduras sino verdes, se cuelgan en el techo por espacio de algunos días, y de ese modo se sazonan y toman con el color de oro que las hermosea, un sabor más dulce que la miel. (Gage 23)

Pineapples were already widely distributed across South America and the Caribbean before the arrival of the Spanish, with many varieties having already been domesticated by the indigenous people. It was a fruit that fascinated Europeans and had been featured in the travel narratives since the 1500s. As Rorhbach, Leal and Coppens d'Eeckenbrugge note, this admiration led to the interest in developing the pineapple trade—facilitated by the fruit's drought tolerance and ease of transport (2). Yet Gage's attention to the fruit wasn't commercial or political, it was on the taste of the fruit. From his earliest passages to those at the conclusion of the voyage, the reader notes Gage's interest in communicating to his intended reader that the pleasure garnered from New World gastronomy is far more satisfying when it is suspended from practical concerns. Gage uses the discursive space of *The English American* to focus on the extent to which the delectable food items within his reach do not pose a threat to his loyalty to Europe. In fact, divulging the extent of his enjoyment in pineapples and other foods allows him to express how closely a European can come to know another context while remaining steadfastly committed to his colonial purpose on another shore.

Thomas Gage describes how the New World treasures are prepared and assures his intended reader that despite their strangeness, they are utterly delicious. Following his passage on pineapples, Gage recounts his discovery of a new type of meat while

aboard the same vessel heading towards Veracruz. Gage is astonished, to say the least, that he enjoyed sea turtles so thoroughly. Neither he nor his European shipmates had encountered these creatures before and, "como no las habíamos visto jamás, nos parecían monstruos de la mar" (Gage 23). The comparison can be perceived as a strategy that served to establish rhetorical common ground between Gage and his intended reader, since both would have been familiar with the literary, religious and prognostic European traditions dating back to the medieval period wherein monstrous bodies were amply featured (Olsen and Olsen 13). For both, monsters represent a tangible representation of persistent otherness. Yet here he was—Gage tells his reader—staring back in shock at the monster whose meat he found superior to those he was used to consuming:

> Cuando las abrieron por primera vez, nos quedamos atónitos del gran número de huevos que crían, teniendo la que menos mil en su cuerpo. Nuestros españoles hacían excelente sopa de tortuga con varias especies. La carne de estos animales parece más bien ternera o gallina que pescado, y estando salada y colgada dos o tres días al aire sabe realmente a cecina. Muchos días dejábamos a un lado nuestras aves, nuestro carnero, nuestra vaca y nuestros jamones, cuando teníamos para satisfacer el apetito de nuestros estómagos abundancia de nuestra *ternera marina*. (Gage 23)

Gage opens the discussion to the monstrosity of other delicacies, going so far as to engage in a comparison of tastes: Indigenous people prefer alligator meat, while the Spanish opt for shark meat. The author avoids the man vs. nature trope and, in doing so, suggests that the threat of otherness is minimized when the subject literally consumes the unknown.

As a privileged European who witnessed the slaughter of an animal and participated in the process of bringing it to the table, Gage defied English standards of civility and social class. Norbert Elias explains that the frequent use of the word *civilité* at the beginning of the sixteenth century marked the advent of a new order of social relations and of a transformed subject out of which emerged, two hundred years later, the modern "civilized" individual (45). The notion of *civilité* established material and psychological boundaries, a division that led to the displacement of power from a plane of place of the church to one that exalted the power of the monarchy. The instances in Gage's narrative that describe the taste of turtle meat, that allude to his wonder and excitement as he tasted this strange flesh, transgress the boundaries of the above mentioned notion of civility. Furthermore, his enjoyment of this meat while in the company of Spanish and other Europeans—who are not only his enemies but also men of a lower rank and file—would have been reprehensible in England. Yet so overwhelmed is Gage by the delicacies before him that he gleefully enters a space is

significantly altered by a common enjoyment of food. Thus, he happily reports: "No apreciábamos menos nuestras cañas de azúcar, y chupábamos con delicia el zumo para refrescarnos la boca" (Gage 23). Far from being a problematic remark in the context of the political or economic imperatives that drive the text, this is a celebratory statement that praises the tastes and textures that grace the author's palate.

The foods of the New World seem to possess the power to transform social relations, enabling European subjects to understand the fluidity in the cultural meanings associated with food in this context. This is clear in Gage's anecdote about a town in the state of Chiapas where chocolate led to the women-led mutiny against the Catholic Church. According to Gage, the women in this town often complained of stomach pains and stubbornly insisted on drinking jars of hot chocolate during mass. These were wealthy women whose indigenous servants catered to them, bringing them not only the hot chocolate but also the sweets that accompanied the drink. The bishop, who felt that it was blasphemous to eat and drink in the Lord's temple, demanded that these ladies be excommunicated if they continued to defy the Church and God. Archival records indicate that this was not an isolated incident. One priest in Santiago, hundreds of miles from Chiapas, stated that his female parishioners brought with them servants and slaves who carried cushion pads, chairs, missals, jeweled boxes with fans for their mistresses. The greatest abuse was that these ladies were served hot chocolate, "con gran lujo," disrupting the mass (Estrada de Monroy 299). In *The English American*, the offended ladies responded to a similar situation by pleading with the bishop, the prior and Thomas Gage himself to no avail. Faced with the bishop's threat, they stayed home and devised a plan.

Within weeks, news spread across the town that the bishop had fallen ill and died. Gage surmised from hearsay and the women's loaded commentary that they had managed to poison him through his own daily ration of hot chocolate. Gage's sentiment is expressed in the following lines: "Ese lance dio origen a la cantaleta que después se oyó por todas partes: 'Cuidado con el chocolate de Chiapa'. Yo por mi parte no me atrevía, después de la muerte del Obispo, a tomarlo en ninguna parte, si no estaba muy seguro del afecto de toda la familia" (Gage 147). *The English American*, written at a time when hot chocolate had become available to all members of colonial society, highlights the varied the cultural associations with this apparently simple food staple. As Martha Few explains, chocolate had an ambiguous status in this period: on the one hand, it was widely available and could be consumed daily at meals or on special occasions; on the other hand, it was central in certain emotionally and/or sexually charged contexts of daily life such as revenge, spousal conflicts and disobedience (674). Inquisition records and historical documents and Thomas Gage's own account demonstrate that the pleasures associated with chocolate—and by extension other delightful foods—involve a broad spectrum of emotions, not the very least of which include anger, jealousy, gratitude and pride. Gage was fascinated with the taste of chocolate, but more so was he bewildered by the emotions its consumption could elicit. As a true *connoisseur* of the

drink, he unapologetically explored its cultural dimensions at length without infusing into the discussion the slightest trace of regret at omitting politics and commerce in his commissioned account.

In a similar fashion, politics don't impede Gage from revisiting the topic of food when he is once again *en route* to England. This is a critical juncture that puts Gage in a position to assess his experiences in the New World. Amidst the socio-political commentary, we find that his reflections on meat at the end of his travel narrative carry the same *gusto* for the delicious flavors and his love for learning about food as they did at the beginning of his text. If anything, he has not ceased to learn about food at all moments of his grand tour of the Spanish territories. Gage finds himself back on a vessel in the final pages of *The English American*—this time heading back to England—and is still contemplating the culinary treasures of the New World. He explains that he made another gastronomic discovery while aboard this vessel: "esto me dio ocasión de aprender lo que no sabía todavía, cual era la carne que los mejores médicos de la Habana ordenaban a sus enfermos cuando estos se purgaban" (Gage 298). Gage expected chicken soup after falling ill and even refused the pork he was served on his sickbed. He had to be reassured by a Cuban doctor that it wouldn't make him ill before he took a bite. Gage is forced to suspend his European beliefs and accept another approach to food and healing. As he explains:

> Esto era contra la práctica de todas las naciones, porque la calidad de esta carne era de soltar el vientre. Más él me respondió que el Puerco hacía todo lo contrario en aquel lugar de lo que hacía en todas partes, y que yo debía comer de lo que me había ordenado asegurándome que no me haría cualquier mal. Así es que en creen que la carne de Puerco es muy nutritivo en aquel lugar, y que no hay otra que la exceda más que la de Tortuga, de que todos los buques hacen sus provisiones para el viaje a España. (Gage 298)

Gage cedes to medical opinion both because he has developed this flexibility and because his own observations lead credence to the Cuban doctor's recommendations. Pork is a treat onboard the ship; a pig is killed once a week and served at the table of the most prestigious officers of the ship. He is on a ship that, like all others heading to Spain, carries turtle meat and chicken, but he comes to appreciate the idea that in this context pork is considered the best treatment for a man of his caliber.

By this time Gage acquires this last gastronomic lesson, he has confirmed that there are foods that are more delicious in the New World and that European standards keep individuals from taking pleasure in what the New World has to offer. Thus, he accepts the advice and expands his *gourmand*'s experience as a direct result of that experience. Thomas Gage returns to England a changed man, but he is far from having been transformed into a benevolent humanist before his time. The change is much

more subtle and cannot be framed in the context of the political or religious spheres. What *has* changed is Thomas Gage's conception of food and European subjectivity. Critics have stressed that "diet lay at the heart of early modern European ideas about identity, the body, and civilization itself" because Europeans worried about "the physical integrity of their bodies, and about the maintenance and dissolution of the most fundamental colonial divisions: that between the bodies of the colonizers and the colonized" (Earle 712). Yet in Thomas Gage, we find a remarkable challenge to the rule. This Englishman saw in food a certain "pure" pleasure that was entirely free of any threat of dissolution of the colonial self.

Food: Negotiating a European Position/Palate

The English American appeared well before the practice of drinking tea became central to British identity. In fact, tea was introduced in Britain the 1650s and was imported from China through Dutch merchants. Like the Chinese silks, Caribbean sugar and other luxury items from the colonies, tea originally signaled status and wealth in English society before it became accessible to the popular classes in the nineteenth century (Fromer 5). Thus, the intended reader of Gage's travel narrative would have been unfamiliar with the particulars of both the cacao bean and the drink. Gage seizes the opportunity to share details and delight the reader with an extensive explanation of how the cocoa bean becomes chocolate; in other words, how it becomes edible and above all, delicious. Gage leads the reader from the grinding of the cocoa bean and the additional of a dizzying array of spices, explains the means by which these ingredients become a paste that is later formed into small bricks left in the sun to dry, describes the many ways these bricks can be covered and preserved, and finishes with specific directions for melting these bricks in hot water in order to prepare a wonderfully smooth and satisfying drink.

> El modo más común es calentar bien el agua, llenar la mitad de la taza, o jícara que se va a tomar, y disolver una pastilla o dos, hasta que el agua se espesa, y cuando está bien batido con el molinillo y cubierto de espuma, acabar de llenar la taza de agua caliente, echarle azúcar necesaria y mojar algunos dulces o mazapanes en el chocolate. (Gage 156)

In the last line, as in many passages before it, Gage expresses his predilection for sweets. What is remarkable about his account of chocolate, however, is that Gage has provided the European reader with a recipe to follow. As some critics argue, recipes are embedded discourses within a variety of relationships within the social context: amongst friends, neighbors, relatives or even wider communities (Leonardi 130). Thomas Gage's recipe can be seen as an attempt to engage his intended reader in a conversation that

ultimately results in making this "otherworldly" food item a product that his community of readers across the Atlantic can more easily imagine eating, preparing and enjoying.

Chocolate is a paramount example of a food that allows Gage to negotiate his European position of privilege even as his palate is shaped by the flavors of the Americas. Gage's love for chocolate and other quintessentially New World foods brings the author to develop a cultural history of exchange, contact and appropriation by a European chronicler who is conscious that the discussion of food offers a rich terrain for cultural exchange. As Edmund Valentine Campos argues, "chocolate and its source cacao provide ideal contexts in which to explore Gage's transatlantic subjectivity, for they were signature American foods that helped shape Europe's apprehension of the New World" (183). Chocolate became Thomas Gage's drink of choice in the Americas, as evidenced by his own admission of the exorbitant quantities that he consumes on a daily basis:

> Yo puedo asegurar por mi parte que en doce años que constantemente lo he usado, tomando una jícara cada mañana, otra antes de comer entre nueve y diez, otra una hora o dos después de comer, y otra sobre las cuatro o las cinco de la tarde, me ha ido muy bien. Sobre todo, cuando quería estudiar por la noche, tomaba otra jícara a eso de las ocho que me tenía despejado y sin dormir hasta las doce. Pero si por casualidad o descuido me faltaba a las horas acostumbradas, no dejaba de resentirme al momento de flaqueza de estómago y como de desmayos o ansias de vomitar. (Gage 157)

Gage is passionate about chocolate acknowledges that he suffers symptoms of withdrawal when he does not take it at the appropriate times. Chocolate, as the reader comes to understand, is a mood-enhancer and an energy drink. Yet while Gage may caution against the overindulgence of chocolate and sugar, he advises that it be adopted in England where alcoholism has become a grave problem.

Writing with the destiny of his countrymen in mind, Gage was not concerned about how this product could boost revenue from imports but rather how a delectable drink could come to replace beer as the beverage of choice across social classes. *The English American* contains an entire chapter dedicated solely to this novel proposal. As Charlotte McBride notes, "seventeenth century England saw the emergence of two distinct drinking cultures: a home-based, home-brewed activity for women in their newly defined roles as homemakers, and a public activity for men to strengthen their social and economic bonds (182). The key to quelling the vices that result from the entrenchment of alcohol in the daily lives of Englishmen, Thomas Gage realizes, is substituting a drink that is bitter to taste with one that is irresistibly pleasant. That is to say, promoting a drink that the palate can readily accept and can still serve the social purposes that beer had amongst men and women, the upper and lower classes.

In presenting this solution to alcoholism, Gage assumes a position of authority that stems from book knowledge as well as personal experience. His proposal is founded on the medical evidence widely circulated by Doctor Antonio Colmenero, author of *Chocolate: or, an Indian Drinke* (written in 1650, translated in 1652). The translator of this text addresses the "Gentry of the English Nation" in a preface that emphatically lists the virtues of the beverage:

> Besides that it preserves Health, and makes such a drink it often, Fat, and Corpulent, faire and Amiable, it vehemently incites Venus, and causes Conception in women, hastens and facilitates their Delivery: It is an excellent help to Digestion, it cures Consumptions, and the cough of the Lungs, the New Disease, or the Plague of the Guts, and other Fluxes, the Green Sickness, Jaundise, and all manner of Inflamations, Opilations and Obstructions. (Colmenero 4)

Doctors like Colmenero, observes Gage, have lived in the West Indies and have observed these benefits and many others described throughout the seminal text. Having lived in the region for over twelve years, Gage has come to consider himself an expert who can speak with as much authority on this subject as medical doctors. Besides, Gage adds, his homeland wouldn't be the first to adopt it in Europe: "Yo no alcanzo la razón de no usarlo en Inglaterra como se usa en los otros países, ya cálidos ya fríos: en todas las partes en que más se consume, sea en las Indias, sea en España, en Italia y aun en Flandes, se halla que se acomoda a cualquier temperamento" (Gage 157). Gage is supremely aware of the rhetorical maneuvers he must adopt throughout his narrative in order to sell this present himself as a *connoiseur* of the drink and the adequacy of chocolate in a European's daily nutritional regimen.

Thus, Gage goes beyond the medical explanations of his time to appeal to folk beliefs that date back to the Greeks in regards to the properties of all matter. Citing Galen, known as the father of modern medicine who examined the digestive system among other bodily functions, Gage focuses on the specific properties of chocolate and how these are critical to maintaining balance in the human body. What makes chocolate special, Gage argues, is that it possesses both cold and dry qualities at the same time as it exhibits the qualities of air, making it simultaneously warm and humid at the same time. In a sexually nuanced description, Gage explains:

> Cuando el cacao está molido y revuelto, las diversas partes que le han dado la naturaleza se mezclan y le han dado la naturaleza se mezclan y se confunden con las terrestres, las reprimen y temperan, y disminuyen su virtud astringente, templándolas y poniéndolas más en conformidad con el temperamento cálido y húmedo del aire que con la condición fría y seca de la tierra. (Gage 153)

Gage finds it reprehensible that critics have ignored or even criticized the qualities of chocolate. This is a grievous mistake, he argues, because the astringent quality of chocolate is tempered by "la mezcla íntima de todas las partes que lo componen, cuando está molido" (Gage 154). Gage impends on a dizzying explanation of the many spices that can be mixed along with chocolate: peppercorns, chiles, sugar, cloves, anise, annatto and vanilla. Pausing to reflect on the combination he prefers, Gage exalts the drink that results from it: "La canela se tiene como el mayor de todos los ingredientes de que se compone el chocolate, y nadie la excluye de su confección, porque es cálida y seca en tercer grado" (Gage 155). Yet not all foods are created equal, as evidenced by the succession of ideas in this central chapter on New World gastronomy and transatlantic connections.

In the closing line of the chapter that contains Gage's proposal about chocolate, the author mentions atole in passing and explains his neglect of this food in the following manner: "Mas como no sea cosa que en Europa se haya gustado ni visto, dejaremos de hablar de atole, a fin de emplear más útilmente la pluma, y emprenderé desde luego mi viaje hacia Guatemala, que ha sido como mi segunda patria" (Gage 158). After his years of travel across the Americas, having jícara after jícara of chocolate, Gage has come to recognize that there are foods that merit recipes and descriptions while others deserve nothing more than a passing mention. As he covers the specifics of his proposal and sings the virtues of a virtually unknown edible delight, Gage has asserts his authority over the topic of chocolate and posited it as a food that complements the English diet. Furthermore, he has repositioned himself as a European who is willing to contradict public opinion to speak well of a product that is misunderstood and could very well become highly desirable. Gage's selectivity in regards to food can be understood in the context of contemporary critic Joy Adapon's suggestion that, "we can better get at the meaningfulness of food in everyday life first by considering cooking as an artistic practice (and recipes as artworks), and second, by taking into account the production, consumption and exchange of foods within social networks (29). In selecting the most appetizing foods and beverages to describe at length to his intended reader, Gage presupposes common ground with a reader whose palate he believes must match his own.

In Gage's account, meditations on taste are often linked to reflections on the social meanings of food in colonial Guatemala. In one notable instance, Gage critically assesses the position of indigenous people vis-à-vis the Spanish by taking account of the food and drink available to them. He establishes white and black beans as a staple of the indigenous people's diet and elaborates on the array of methods that the poor prepare them. Gage notes that those that live in abject poverty lack beans and thus can only have a portion of tortillas for their daily meal. Yet even they devise means to season their daily ration, whether it be soaking the tortilla in salt water with chile peppers or rubbing salt on a toasted tortilla, altering the food in such a way that changes its taste.

Gage is struck by the versatility of chile peppers, which are the principal condiment in Guatemalan indigenous foods: "Sea como sea que coman esto o cualquiera otra cosa siempre es o con chile verde, o bien mojándolo en agua de sal donde hay chile machacado" (206). Gage finds pleasure in eating foods that might be commonly associated with the lowest rungs of society, such as young corn boiled and seasoned with nothing other than salt: "Yo he comido muchas veces, y los he hallado tan delicados y nutritivos como nuestros guisantes verdes" (Gage 206). While other Europeans may have looked askance at a table laden with produce and tortillas, with little or no meat and certainly no wheat bread to complete the meal, Gage shared his admiration for the flavors that graced his palate.

The praise that Gage sings to tables laden with corn and vegetables stands in contrast to the prevailing sentiment about New World foods. Europeans across social levels living in the colonies yearned for wheat and understood their craving for this food staple as a factor that set themselves off from the maize- and potato-eating indigenous peoples (Bauer 87). Though they had become accustomed to tomatoes and avocados, the meats of the New World represented a particular challenge for many Europeans. They disdained the household staple of guinea pigs and hairless dogs consumed by indigenous peoples and were much more comfortable with waterfowl and turkey. The most common meats across the Atlantic would have been pork, veal, lamb and rabbit; these meats were obtainable in certain regions of the Americas, but they were out of reach to Thomas Gage during the twelve years that he lived among indigenous peoples.

Thomas Gage doesn't restrict the times he asserts having tried a New World meat delicacy—he is far from being a picky eater. He explains that he has tried meats that would normally disgust Europeans and though he may not have developed a particular penchant for their taste, ensures the intended reader that they are tasty, nutritious and well regarded by the indigenous people. In one example, Gage describes how they hunts venison and once it is killed, it is covered in leaves for a week, by which time it has begun to smell and become infested with worms. The meat is then taken to a home where it is chopped to pieces, boiled with a local herb that eliminates the odor and turns the meat as white and tender as turkey. These chunks of meat are smoked and prepared with red pepper. As Gage explains, "esta es la venison de la América, de que yo he comido diversas ocasiones, y he encontrado que la carne es corta y blanca; sin embargo, no he comido mucho, no porque no tenga buen gusto, sino porque el recuerdo de los gusanos que yo había visto en ella me causaba basca" (Gage 207). Gage is frank about this meat's palatability—it tastes good and if it were not for the "memory" of the worms, he would still eat it. The author adds that he has even eaten porcupine and thoroughly enjoyed it: "su carne es blanca y de tan buen gusto como la de un conejo, y tan gorda como la de una polla cebada en el mes de enero. Yo he probado también y encuentro que es una comida delicada" (Gage 208). He informs the reader that although this last meat might seem strange to his reader, both Spaniards and Indigenous people eat it. It is in such high demand, Gage indicates, that Spaniards have

appealed to the heads of Church to let them consume porcupine during Lent. Furthermore, Gage falls just short of recommending the iguana to his readers. Having described the reptile as an animal that can be found both on land and water he adds that it is bigger than a rabbit, looks like a scorpion and has long green and black scales. Gage understands that his readers might find this description horrendous, but adds: "Son horrorosos a la vista pero cuando se les guise en estofado con un poco de especies, arrojan un jugo excelente; su carne es tan blanca como la del conejo y el lomo tiene la misma configuración" (Gage 208). Through his careful consideration of meats, Gage continues to manifest what he has done throughout the entire narrative—negotiate his European subjectivity as he submits to the pleasures of foods in the New World.

Conclusion: Parting Words on Food and Passion

The pronouns "us" and "them" are littered throughout Gage's travel narrative as he indicates who ate, who enjoyed, who disliked and who preferred the foods he describes. Yet the referent of these pronouns is seldom clear, as they are applied ambiguously throughout the narrative. Gage appears to alternate between including himself among the indigenous peoples that have historical knowledge the foods of the New World, counting himself among the Europeans who have recently come to know those foods, and still other times, more closely aligns himself with the English reader whom he anticipates will greet his reports of these American delights with some skepticism. This nuanced understanding of himself as a European subject who is passionate about food and the experiences associated with enjoying a fine range of foods for his sophisticated palate is key to understanding Thomas Gage's experience in the New World. Food serves as a vehicle throughout the narrative to bridge the two worlds. Developing a curiosity for the new cuisine, presenting it to the potential reader in a palatable way and examining the sensations its produces gives Gage an advantage. It reinforces his authority as a *gourmand* who is capable of inciting his readers across the Atlantic to own the Americas through its culinary delights.

Thus, *The English American* is more than just another seventeenth century travel narrative rife with geopolitical consequences. It is fertile ground for engaging discussion on food and passion—the passionate vindication of food, if you will. Gage's narrative moves from a gracious consideration of water and to a keen interest in how even rotting meat can be palatable amongst a people. It is a text that begins slowly, gently teasing its reader and reaches an apex when it fervently argues in favor of substituting alcohol with hot chocolate and slowly declines when it considers how the simplest and poorest of foods can be the tastiest. The levels are familiar: Temptation. Flirtation. Peak. Resolution. Though the subtext of food is socio-cultural, Gage's many references to the same also invite his intended reader to recognize the central place of gratification in all matters of food. Indulging in food is posited as more than a worthwhile experience; it is central to the subject's experience. The manner in which the senses are awakened by

food, furthermore, stands as evidence to its power and stands as a reminder that the subject must acquiesce to that mighty attraction.

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