

ALL THE BETTER TO EAT YOU, MY DEAR

Once upon a time...

I could begin by telling a story. One of those that start off with "Once upon a time", full of stage settings, woodland animals and brave heroes-to-be. One of those stories where birds sing, clouds disperse and they all live happily ever after "dining on pheasant", as they say in Spanish. I could never understand why it was always this particular kind of bird and not, for example, quail – since "codornices" also rhymes with "felices". The truth is, the connection between the good life and eating this type of food was never clear to me...Of course if you stop to think about children's stories you'll notice the many allusions to food and the consumption of substances – some of them healthier than others. We've got Hansel and Gretel dropping their breadcrumbs until birds come along and spoil their plan to get home. They nevertheless innocently come across a mansion made of sweets and cakes, where a wicked old lady tries to fatten them up in the hope of eventually gobbling them up. Then we have Lewis Carroll's Alice: one minute she's drinking something and shrinking, the next she's eating and turning into a giant; or having tea with the Mad Hatter...

And that's not to mention wolves, the animals that fare worst in fables (which is why Hobbes resorted to them when he said "Man is a wolf to man."): There's the wolf who wanted to have the three little pigs for dinner; the silly boy who cried wolf and lost his herd of sheep. And a classic: Little Red Riding-Hood's wolf with

the big eyes, all the better to see you my dear, and that big mouth...I think you know the rest of the story.

Fairy tales are like mass-produced cakes. They're full of good intentions in fancy wrapping, an occasional surprise, and peopled with princes and princesses in silks and velvets. But beneath lie hate, rancour, revenge, destruction and death wishes. Hey, the best of mankind. One of the reasons for this is that many of these stories were written around the time of the Industrial Revolution, a time when children worked full-time just like their parents; they were treated like adults. In fact, they were often brought into the world just so that there would soon be another wage brought home. They even slept squashed in with their own parents in the same filthy cubicle, often aware of sexual arousal. Then came along Hans Christian Andersen, The Brothers Grimm and company, and like the Royal Academy of Language, they "cleansed, established and gave splendour" to tales they thought needed to be liberated from all that sex, lust and desire of murder. They gave them their own "happy endings", and the finished products were ready for children's ears, with not a whiff of evil on the surface. However, they did leave traces...

In a not-so-faraway land...

We could ask Rosalía Banet (Madrid, 1972) to tell us a story. In fact, the project she has been working on for nearly three years, her *Golosa Twins*, Sara Li and Ana K and their companions, bears all the aspects of a children's story. It's like a 3-D animation or a moral fable: simple rounded forms; gentle pastel colours....But

don't be taken in by first impressions. The sensual unusualness of the Siamese Twins, the sugary name, the intimate cosiness of cooking for others all house underlying meanings. The Ana and Sara project came into being in 2008, an offshoot of the Carnicería Love show at Espacio Mínimo Gallery in Madrid. A large part of the Golosa universe was revealed at that show, which displayed the setting where Sara and Ana created attractive dishes whose main ingredients were their own loneliness, pain, fears and frustrations. The result is an array of cannibal recipes which would startle even the bravest of us, especially those "whose eyes are bigger than their stomachs" (a popular culinary expression...).

As you progress into their story, you soon discover that these lassies are a couple of weirdoes who come across as really nice until their anecdotes take you by surprise and freeze the smile on your face, something like the Hilton Sisters' monster show. Not only are Ana and Sara joined at the shoulder but they were created from the remains of other humans. (Their mothers, Li, Kath, Sara and Ana, also cooks, wanted to have a baby, and their wish led them to make what became their masterpiece, a human being created at the Carnicería Love, where feelings are cooked. However, as they didn't have quite the right ingredients for the babies, they had to make up a double being in one body).

Thus, the Siamese Twins defy, from the moment of their birth, biological developments in cloning. Not to mention natural reproduction methods, there being no male present at their conception. They are a new Frankenstein "monster", made up of carcass remains but, let's not deny it, with lots and lots of love.

But we need to be careful with the term “monster”. Because of their double physical nature the Siamese Twins have a multiple identity (though they respond at interviews in unison: “We appreciate friends who are revolted by nothing, who eat everything.” “The fault we can’t bear in people is leaving food uneaten on a plate.” “Our motto: Eat and let yourself be eaten”¹, in other words, in the face of uniformity, otherness; in the face of singularity, diversity...

They symbolize what is monstrous only in that they are not “normal” (And what is normal?: “How much did you have to drink?” the doctor asks a guy who has just had a car accident. “How much? Just the normal amount”) And with no real male references (and here Rosalía’s work is a criticism of the patriarchal society in which we are immersed), they have managed to make social progress, be successful master chefs and even open their own preserve factory of tinned and preserved feelings, run a delicatessen², pose for Vanity Fear, be interviewed for the culture magazines of the Spanish national press³, open a restaurant, keep up with a busy blog site⁴. Their own labour as cooks is a kick in the teeth to this amiably male chauvinist society, which for years has relegated women to the warmth of the stove, but at the same time made it all but impossible for there to be successful female figures in the public domain of restaurateurs. Sara Li y Ana K, without hardly realizing it, turn each of their actions into a heroic gesture in an apparently cosy, happy atmosphere: they get together with their relatives, their cousins the

¹ Interview. Proust Questionnaire. Juárez, Ana S. “Vanity Fear. Golosa Twins Special Edition”. La Conservera. Murcia, 2009

² The Golosas Shop was part of Rosalía Banet’s exhibition at La Conservera (Murcia, 2009)

³ “Las Golosas”. Banet, Rosalía. Proyecto ABCD. ABCD las Artes y las Letras issue number 939. 6 March 2010 (pages 38 - 39)

⁴ <http://rosaliabanet.blogspot.com/>

Siamese twins Alicia & Alicia, Candi & Gabi, Tina & Esther; their friends Eli Love, Penis Boy, The Chocolate Man, The White Chocolate Man, Cry-baby, The Gingerbread Man...- with them they celebrate occasions such as Christmas and New Year, birthdays, St Valentine's Day, occasions on which they bend over backwards to welcome their guests with the best of hospitality...None the less, dark clouds loom over these idyllic scenes.

Lie to me, Pinocchio!

We live in a society which detests experience. A society which covers up ideas of death and old age and disregards the elderly in favour of young blood. Youth is adored as the greatest of treasures and because of this our values are based on concepts of beauty, power, wealth and vitality. Luxury, pleasure and exclusivity are not strange terms to us. They have become so interiorized that we are unaware of how they affect us all along with each and every aspect of our daily lives. The same is true of our food. Eating is a basic need which, like other needs (I'm thinking of dress for instance), has become so complex in Western society that it no longer addresses fundamental issues such as survival but surrounds them with a sophistication that blurs the original intention behind it. Which is why the act of eating can be turned into desires of devouring or being devoured- something unthinkable in a civilized society (in spite of what the news tells us); and thus the truth in the Levi Strauss's motto to which Rosalía Banet turns, food should be not only good to eat but also good to think.

In Rosalía's project for Denia Hospital, she invites us to reflect on eating as a cultural act. One that goes beyond knowing how to use cutlery or waiting till everyone has been served before starting. So she has prepared a grand feast for us. She has brought the most exquisite delicacies to her table, the most succulent fare...The problem is the ingredients: guts, tripe, novices' sectioned breasts, amputated fingers, semi-flaccid penises... and all served with a dressing of congealed blood, drizzled with tears, a big pile of eyeballs, boil crusts, crunchy scars...This act of cannibalism to which she so sweetly invites us is no more bloody than what we are subjected to each day in consumer society. We are brainwashed. We take the medicine we are given without a sweetener (poor Mary Poppins!). We approach the vending machines without any consideration, stick our money in the slot, and the system gives us not just a pile of saturated fats, preservatives, colouring, glutamates and whatever... included in the price we get prejudice, inequality, false messages... Watch out for the machine Rosalía has set up at the hospital!

At the last Pontevedra Biennial, in the installation *Consummons Racial!*, Jean François Boclé classified food produce according to the black or white stereotypes represented on the wrappers: happy tribal blacks in tropical Africa; big fat smiling healthy Arian babies; teasing exotic women and dedicated Anglo-Saxon housewives... We freely take part in a major exercise of oppression over ourselves, not just by eating these foods, but by the mere fact of choosing them. Rosalía's work condemns all of this, which is why we need to see in another light,

a better light, the wish of the Siamese twins to give us their all. Even if it is all from guts...

At Rosalía's feasts, in her scale models, in the Golosas' photo albums of their celebrations, in the monumental paintings she has created for this event, beauty is mixed with disproportion, sweetness with violence, careful detail in chaos...These are the contradictory messages with which advertising bombards us: fat people are naturally jolly, but get rid of those extra kilos in any case; by consuming a particular product we'll feel good about ourselves; we should help our digestion or body defenses with this or that food, which on the other hand is so full of preservatives it could kill an army in germ warfare; that we eat something not for its health benefits but because it confers status, power, success, because it transports us to another age, another environment, to a life that is not ours...Our crisis of values is an identity crisis which also wanders through the kitchen and dining-room. And it affects children and teenagers more than any, the most easily-influenced. To quote Brillant-Savarin, "We are what we eat." And we deserve to be, Rosalía seems to point out.

The Moral of the Story is...

I could tell you a story. Or I could leave it to Rosalía Banet, in her own words or through the Siamese Twins. But let's allow the story to become a warning which is voiced through the pieces of this project, complemented – healthily – by the advice of the Denia Hospital nutrition specialists, who have taken part in creating

this feast. The message may not be easy to digest. But we are still in time not to overeat.

Madrid
December, 2010