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Grado de Estudios Ingleses
Trabajo de Fin de Grado

Spanish Gastronomy and Richard Ford's '*The Spaniards and their Country*'

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Curso: 2024-2025

Abstract

Spanish gastronomy is more than just a collection of traditional dishes; it is a reflection of culture, history, and identity. During the 19th century, travel literature became a key tool through which foreign authors shaped the image of Spain abroad. Among them, Richard Ford stood out for the detailed attention he paid to food and drink in *The Spaniards and Their Country*. This study aims to explore how Ford uses gastronomy not only to describe Spain but also to judge, interpret, and construct a national identity. Through an analysis of dishes, customs, and drinks, this study highlights how food becomes a powerful tool full of cultural and ideological importance. It concludes by showing how Ford's perspective is marked by both admiration and irony, and that his work illustrates the role of gastronomy in travel literature as a means of shaping how a country is perceived from the outside.

Keywords: Richard Ford, Spanish gastronomy, *The Spaniards and Their Country*, travel literature, 19th century.

Resumen

La gastronomía española es algo mucho más que una simple recopilación de platos tradicionales; es un reflejo de la cultura, la historia y la identidad. Durante el siglo XIX, la literatura de viajes se convirtió en una herramienta fundamental a través de la cual los autores extranjeros construyeron la imagen de España en el extranjero. Entre ellos, Richard Ford destacó por la atención que prestó a la comida y la bebida en su obra *Los españoles y su país*. Este estudio tiene como objetivo analizar cómo Ford utiliza la gastronomía no solo para describir España, sino también para juzgar, interpretar y construir una identidad nacional. A través del análisis de los platos, las costumbres y las bebidas, este estudio destaca cómo la comida se convierte en una poderosa herramienta llena de importancia cultural e ideológica. El estudio concluye con la forma en que la perspectiva de Ford está marcada tanto por la admiración como por la ironía, y que su obra refleja cómo la gastronomía en la literatura de viajes puede influir en la forma en que se percibe un país desde el exterior.

Palabras Clave: Richard Ford, Gastronomía Española, *The Spaniards and Their Country*, Literatura de viajes, Siglo 19.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Historical context.....	3
2.1. Richard Ford.....	3
2.2. Travel Literature of Spain.....	4
2.3. Gastronomy in Spain.....	5
3. Analysis.....	10
3.1. Food.....	10
3.2. Drinks.....	16
4. Conclusion.....	24
5. Works cited.....	26

1. Introduction

In the 19th century, travel literature became one of the most influential devices for European readers to imagine foreign countries. These texts often combined personal narratives with cultural descriptions, making personal experiences a tool for social commentary. Spain, long excluded from the so-called “Grand Tour” of European aristocrats, suddenly became a key destination for Romantic travelers in search of the exotic. Among the many authors who visited and wrote about Spain during this period, one of the most prominent and enduring voices was that of Richard Ford.

Ford (1796-1858) was not a professional writer, but rather a well-educated English gentleman whose stay in Spain between 1830 and 1833 led him to create some of the most influential texts in the English language about the country. He collected notes, sketches, and reflections that would later become the basis for his major publications: *A Handbook for Travellers in Spain* (1845) and *The Spaniards and Their Country* (1852). Even though they were originally conceived to guide travelers, Ford's work goes far beyond practical advice. His writing is infused with wit, cultural criticism, and some detailed observations on everything from architecture to everyday habits. What sets him apart from many of his contemporaries is the level of attention he gives to Spanish gastronomy.

In Ford's narrative, Gastronomy is not a secondary element, but a key to understanding the country. With his descriptions of traditional dishes, wine-making processes, and gastronomic customs, Ford describes food as a cultural asset and a symbol of Spain's diversity. For example, he links the rustic simplicity of peasant meals to the country's history of scarcity, the legacy of Muslim and Catholic traditions, and the manipulation of wine in cities, with other concerns about everyday life. In this way, Ford turns food into a narrative tool: a way to “taste” the history, values, and contradictions of Spain.

This approach to gastronomy offers a rich perspective for interpreting Ford's work and his contribution to the construction of Spanish identity. His descriptions are sensory, often full of admiration, though frequently laced with sarcasm or condescension. Ford is both passionate about Spanish culture and a critic of its perceived deficiencies, a position typical of British travelers of the imperial era. Studying how he writes about food allows us to better understand the power dynamics involved in travel literature: how a foreigner's

opinion can influence a country's international image, and how everyday practices such as cooking and eating become charged with ideological meaning.

To sum up, this paper explores the role of gastronomy in *The Spaniards and Their Country*, by focusing on how Richard Ford uses culinary reviews to describe, illustrate, and even sometimes judge Spanish society. In his approach to food and drink, we will see how Ford's writings go beyond a travel guide and become a social and national portrait. The dissertation starts with a brief historical background on Ford and the travel literature genre, and the gastronomy of Spain, followed by an analysis of the dishes and drinks Ford mentions. Concluding with how these descriptions tell us about how Spain was seen, and perhaps misrepresented, from the British traveler's point of view.

2. Historical Context

2.1. Richard Ford

Richard Ford was born into a highly aristocratic and wealthy British family. He graduated in 1817 from Oxford Trinity College, then entered Licon's Inn and although he passed the bar he never practiced law. In 1824 he married the daughter of the V Earl of Essex, with whom their combined fortunes contributed to the lack of need to practice law and live a life dedicated to traveling, writing, and collecting paintings.

In 1817 he began to travel around Europe, visiting some of the most emblematic cities such as Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Rome, Monaco, and Paris. His first contact with the Iberian Peninsula was not until 1830 when, after the death of his second son, he decided to spend the winter abroad, where there was a more pleasant climate. He remained in Spain from 1830 to 1833 and during those years he traveled with his family throughout Spain, entering from the south and touring central Spain, the north, and the east, riding around 2,000 miles immersing himself in the Spanish culture and life and writing notes and sketching and drawing many scenes.

In 1845 he published the first edition of his first travel book entitled *A Hand-Book for Travellers in Spain and Readers at Home* in two volumes belonging to Murray's Handbooks for Travellers series. Murray's series of *Hand-book for travelers* consisted of 'handbooks for Travellers giving detailed and precise information respecting Steamers, Passports, Money, Guides, Servants, etc; with Directions for Travellers and Hints for Tours' (Ford, 1845, p. 1). Ford's Hand-book caused a great sensation and mostly positive reviews and became the most famous volume of Murray's books. Later Ford edited this book and cut it into shorter and more detailed versions and, the parts that were less in keeping with the concept of a 'travel guide' were published by Murray's Editorial as essays under the title *Gatherings from Spain* in 1846 and later in 1852 *The Spaniards and their country*. Ford spent the rest of his life collaborating on works by other authors on Spain such as Lake Prince's *Tauromachia or The bull-fightings of Spain*, was a regular contributor to the Quarterly Review, writing some articles on Spain such as *Panorama of the Alhambra and Valley of Granada* and reviewed books by other authors on Spain such as *Castile and Andalusia* by Lady Louisa Tenison.

In the next few years, he had opportunities to visit Spain but he ended up rejecting them due to the sudden death of his second wife and afterwards of his mother.

Finally, for various reasons and to his regret, he never returned to Spain. On the day of its death (31st August 1858) William Stirling, Ford's friend, and colleague, wrote an obituary in *The Times* stating, referring to the Handbook, that 'such a great literary achievement has never been accomplished under such a humble title' (Stirling-Maxwell, 1858).

2.2. Travel Literature of Spain

Around the mid-19th century, after The War of Independence (1808-1814) and through Romanticism the influx of foreign travelers to Spain increased after the country was left out of the "Grand Tour" of tourism and the formation of the European bourgeoisie of XVII century (Márquez, 2019). This increase in the influx of foreign travelers is mainly due to following the influence of Romanticism and traveling the peninsula with the intention of finding the particular, the exotic and different from the Western world. This would lead to the Muslim culture and aesthetics in southern Spain acquiring great prominence due to its past as Al-Andalus, which exerted an extra motivation for all these travelers.

It could be said that the precursor of travel books is the American author Washington Irving, who in 1832 published *Tales of the Alhambra*. He tells of his arrival in Spain and how his trip took him to Granada where he lived and wrote about the Alhambra, Granada, of the time, its streets, its people, their customs, etc. This author managed to put Spain back in the spotlight of authors, especially American women who would later follow in his footsteps. However, Washington Irving along with Richard Ford are arguably the writers with the most extensive background in the domain of mid-19th century Spain.

Richard Ford depicts Spain in the introduction of his book *A Handbook for Travellers in Spain* as one of 'the most romantic and peculiar country in Europe' (Ford, 1845, p. 7) but also as a very enclosed country that looks askance at tourists and avoids sharing information, responding with what it calls the national expression '¿Quien sabe? no se sabe' (Ford, 1845, p. 7) (Who knows? I don't know).

He also explains that his motives for writing this guide are that the national ones are "unsatisfactory" as the Spaniards don't travel through their country and very few travel out

of it, which implies that they are restricted when it comes to contrasting and identifying differences or preferences tourists might possess. In his own words ‘This Hand-book attempts to show what may be known and what may be done in Spain, with the least difficulty and the most satisfaction’ (Ford, 1845, p. 7), and through all his books he gives a detailed description of each aspect he considers important as the safest ways of traveling, where to sleep, and on what we are focusing at: what to eat and drink.

2.3. Gastronomy in Spain

The philosophical conception of the 17th century in Spain was altered by the Renaissance and humanism. This period changed the perception of life, which included food preferences, and food quality became a priority over quantity. Spanish eating habits and gastronomy evolved from a typical European cuisine in the Middle Ages to become a “national gastronomy” at the end of the 19th century, with changes in ingredients, preparation, and presentation. Political, religious, and gastronomic identities in Spain gradually blended to form a mixture of medieval Spanish traditions. The Muslim domination of centuries left a strong Islamic influence and the ingredients and traditions brought from the Americas combined with the constant tension between the need to maintain tradition and the need to accept change. Politically, Spain experienced the conquest of other territories and the domination of others, especially during the reign of the Habsburgs in Europe and their empire in the Americas. In terms of religion, seven centuries of Muslim presence left an important legacy that was controversial for the Catholic majority, which became part of the country's history through culture and institutions.

In terms of politics, Spain was oppressed by other countries but it was also an oppressor through Europe and through the Americas. In terms of religion, the seven hundred years of Arab/Muslim rule left to the Catholics a legacy and social memory seen as problematic.

Between the 18th and 19th centuries, certain factors such as the country's history, religion, and politics influenced the evolution of Spanish cuisine. The Spanish concept of food played an important role in the country's identity, with the monarchy and Catholic Church institutions playing a significant role, not only by enhancing regional culinary diversity, but also by creating a common sense of national gastronomic culture.

During the reign of the House of Bourbon, the Spanish monarchy had a huge impact on the culinary traditions of the aristocracy. The royal family embraced classical Spanish cuisine alongside the rise of the French haute cuisine, creating with it a culinary environment that combined international elegance with local traditions. As Beth Marie Forrest mentions in *Hungry and Thirsty: The Role of Food and the Senses in Spanish Identity, 1750–1850*, ‘the monarchy’s patronage of specific dishes not only elevated their status but also embedded them within a nationalistic framework’ (Forrest, 2015, p. 109). This situation created an ongoing conflict between the prestige of international cuisine and the conservation of Spain's distinctive culinary traditions.

The Catholic Church and its traditions also had an impact on Spanish eating habits. Food restrictions, such limiting meat consumption during Lent and on specific days, encouraged people to eat more fish, legumes, and dairy products. Over time, these fasting practices became part of Spanish gastronomic culture, reinforcing a tradition linked to faith and discipline. As Forrest points out, “Spanish fasting traditions not only determined the availability of food, but also reinforced a collective memory of Catholic dietary discipline” (Forrest, 2015, p. 115). These traditions differentiated Spanish gastronomic practices from those of Protestant European countries, where dietary restrictions tended to be less strict.

Spanish cookbooks from the late 18th and early 19th centuries played an important role in documenting and preserving culinary traditions. Unlike the French approach, which aimed to unify cuisine, Spanish gastronomic writings seek to highlight the country's regional identity by incorporating local and foreign influences. However, certain dishes, such as *olla podrida* and *cocido madrileño*, became symbols of Spanish culinary heritage. This inclusive method emphasized Spain's unique relationship with food, where local identity was preserved while also interacting with outside influences.

Spanish culinary identity had also been influenced by its long Islamic past. Many main ingredients and cooking techniques; like rice, almonds, citrus fruits, saffron, slow cooked stews, and desserts made of honey, came from the Moorish period. After the Reconquista, when Christians regained control of the peninsula, tried to erase the traces of the Muslim influence failing on erasing the culinary elements. These elements and traditions of food could be seen in the cookbooks of the time, demonstrating that even if politics tried to erase their traces, history prevailed. The tension between historical heritage and religious identity became a defining aspect of Spanish food culture.

Another major influence on Spanish gastronomy was its colonial Empire, specifically its relation to the Americas. Ingredients like tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, chocolate, and maize were introduced and transformed Spanish cooking. Nevertheless, despite having access to such a wide range of ingredients, Spanish agricultural systems remained stuck in relation to modern innovations, which was an ironic situation, having abundant resources but many areas still had food scarcity. British and American travelers usually noted the limited food variety in Spain, depicting it as too reliant on garlic, olive oil, and stews. Richard Ford, in *'Gatherings from Spain'* (1846), described Spain as a 'hungry, thirsty, tealess, beerless, beefless land' (Ford, 1846, p. 165), reaffirming the fact of Spain lagging behind its European neighbors.

Among the first foreign writers who helped shape the international perception of Spain, including its cuisine, were Henry Swinburne and Joseph Townsend, two of the most influential British travelers of the late 18th century. Both were role models and sources of inspiration for Richard Ford. These authors traveled through Spain while documenting their personal experiences in travel narratives, which had a huge impact. These narratives, that often focused on food and everyday customs, illustrated the ways in which foreigners built an image of Spanish identity through sensory experiences. Although these narratives were presented in different ways, with Swinburne favoring a more romantic and narrative style and Townsend opting for a more empirical and analytical approach, both played a key role in portraying Spain as a country rich in culture but economically and socially behind its European neighbors.

Henry Swinburne gives a romanticized view of Spanish life in *Travels through Spain in the Years 1775 and 1776*. He describes the ingredients and methods used to prepare Spanish food, but at the same time he also talks about the complete sensory experience of eating, through aroma, flavor, and tradition. Swinburne described rural meals as simple but full of character, often contrasting their modest charm with the more refined cuisine of France and England. And although he valued the warmth of Spanish hospitality, he criticized the monotony and lack of elegance in the presentation of the dishes. His writings reflect a mixture of admiration and criticism, portraying Spain as a land of cultural richness marked by economic challenges.

On the other hand, Joseph Townsend approached Spain with the view of a physician and political economist. In *A Journey Through Spain in the Years 1786 and 1787*, he

adopted a more scientific and practical perspective. Townsend focused on the quality and nutritional value of the Spanish diet, pointing out the heavy reliance on bread, legumes, and garlic, and criticizing the lack of meat and variety in rural areas. For Townsend, the deterioration of eating habits in Spain was a symptom of much more serious problems, such as poor agricultural planning, inefficient agricultural infrastructure, and social inequality. In his observations, he directly linked eating habits to health problems, implying that malnutrition and poor public health were a reflection of more serious economic mismanagement. While Swinburne viewed Spain from a romantic perspective, Townsend drew on Enlightenment ideals of rationality and reform.

Swinburne and Townsend represented two key perspectives that influenced how Spain was perceived in late 18th-century Britain. In their travel narratives, they used gastronomy not only to discuss culture, but also to express romantic nostalgia or make social and economic critiques. Through their observations, food became a symbol of Spain's history and a way of showing what they saw as the country's decline. These foreign perspectives were key to creating a broader narrative about Spanish national identity.

Spain's gastronomic culture during this period was influenced by a mixture of monarchy, religion, exchanges with the colonies, and historical heritage. The monarchy and the Church, in particular, imposed dietary regulations, and colonial and Islamic influences turned Spanish cuisine into a unique and multicultural blend built on different traditions. Although Spain never developed a culinary ideology as formalized as the French one, its gastronomic traditions remained strongly connected to history and regional identity. This combination of tradition, adaptation, and external influences made Spanish cuisine a powerful symbol of national identity, even without a single dominant gastronomic authority.

As it is stated in Forrest *Hungry and Thirsty: The Role of Food and the Senses in Spanish Identity, 1750–1850* conclusion, gastronomy functioned not only as a cultural expression but also as a political and ideological tool. Through travel literature, cookbooks and historical memory, Spaniards and foreigners alike used food to reflect on Spain's past, evaluate its present and imagine its future. Institutional forces and culinary texts helped construct a pluralistic food identity, (a series of overlapping Islamic, Catholic, and Imperialism legacies that were transmitted in the experience of eating, cooking, and remembering. The monarchy and the Church played an important role in shaping dietary norms, while travel writers and outside observers interpreted these traditions as signs of

rustic authenticity or cultural stagnation. In addition sensory experiences, such as taste, smell, and memory-were used to reinforce or critique national identity. Forest's *Hungry and Thirsty: The Role of Food and the Senses in Spanish Identity, 1750–1850* argues that the act of eating in Spain was deeply political and that, through their engagement with food, individuals and communities claimed heritage, modernity, and belonging.

3. Analysis

As has already been stated before, the influence and affluence of travelers through Spain and writing travel books about it had a peak in the mid-eighteenth century, being the writings about Spanish Gastronomy, along with the accommodations and the ways of traveling, one of the main points of interest for readers. This section is going to analyze the way in which gastronomy is presented, what aspects of it are considered important when informing potential travelers, and the author's personal opinions, both negative and positive, in Ford's travel book *The Spaniards and their Country* which as it has already been said, it is a more detailed version of some parts of Ford's original manuscript *Gatherings from Spain*.

The analysis is divided into two parts, being the first one an introduction with details gathered from the author which explains cooking traditions, methods, and best quality ingredients and all the food dishes of the time that the author considered important to mention. The second part focuses on drinks mainly on wines either for national consumption or for international exportation, also mentioning other kinds of drinks popular in Spain.

3.1 Food

As the author himself states 'It would exhaust a couple of Colonial numbers at least to properly discuss the merits and digest Spanish cookery' (Ford, R. 1848. P 119), he is just focusing on the main points to be known for a tourist traveler and as he also states briefly after 'Those meats and drinks will be briefly noticed which are of daily occurrence' (Ford, R. 1848. P 119), playing with the meaning of digest as it refers to Spanish cook as difficult to comprehend. Ford also introduces Spanish food as 'fat and unctuous' which is an anticipation of how he sees the food as heavy and oily. Ford using an ironic tone asks the reader to try the meals without disgust, even if they are made in the most poor districts of Spain where the resources are limited 'in the most larderless ventas and hungriest districts of the Peninsula, and which provident wayfarers may make and eat again, and, as we pray, with no worse appetite' (Ford, R. 1848. P 119).

The sentence that best describes what Ford thinks about Spanish cooking would be this one:

'Be able to make something out of nothing' (Ford, R. 1848. P 119),

He essentially describes his trip through Spain, not just the main cities but also the rural areas where there is scarcity, and how the cooks manage to make in his own words ‘Genuine and legitimate Spanish dishes excellent in their way’ at the same time criticizing how some ruin the national cuisine by trying without any success to imitate foreign cuisine.

For Ford a successful cook ‘must never appear to have anything when he arrives at an inn; he must get from others all he can’ and ‘never fall back on his own reservoirs except in cases of extreme need’ following the line of the scarcity on rural areas and the need to gather all you can and then try to make the best dish out of it, summarizing it with this famous Spanish proverb used by Ford himself:

‘Quien no llora, no mama’ (Ford, R. 1848. P 123).

Ford mentions numerous times through his book the influence of the Muslim occupation of the Peninsula, being ‘the national cookery of Spain for its most part Oriental’ and has it is said the ruling principle of preparation being the stew, the roasting practically never used as the scarcity affected the fuel too. As the resources were scarce and sometimes not high quality the sauce had to make up for that, based on that time on ‘oil, garlic, saffron, and red peppers’, some meats so scarce, as for example the hare said to be by the Spaniards ‘the glory of edible quadruplets’ that for example the cook would change it for a cat and as long the consumer didn’t find out then ‘there is no great harm done’.

With these two sentences:

‘The pork of Spain has always been, and is, unequaled in flavor’ (Ford, R. 1848. P 126)

‘Of all the things of Spain, no one needs feeling ashamed to plead guilty to a predilection and preference for the pig’ (Ford, R. 1848. P 126)

Ford introduces the importance of pork as a food in Spain as something remarkable and highly appreciated by the Spaniards. Ford says that at the time there were more pigs than asses, being the ones of the region of Extremadura, ‘the Hampshire of the Peninsula’ as he calls it, the most valued ones. There were many districts of this province covered with oaks, beech, and chestnut, and the pigs that were fattened by acorns (“bellota”) were sweeter and larger.

The death of a fat pig was a motive of celebration in a Spanish family that had fattened one, the “matanza” as it is named and still celebrated in some regions of Spain, an event impossible to hide and celebrated by sending them a portion of the chitterlings to close friends, in Ford’s words ‘It is the whole duty of a good pig to get as fat and as soon as he can, and then die for the good of his country’ (Ford, R. 1848. P 128).

The writer provides several recipes which we are going to analyze by separating them into antique dishes, those that no longer exist in actual Spain, and contemporary dishes, which are the predecessors of some very traditional dishes that Spaniards consume nowadays.

Starting on what we have assigned the name of antique dishes we have the ‘olla podrida’, a dish which was said to be difficult to make for two main reasons: the first that many things had to be gathered, and that led to the problem of scarcity of that period and the second one that great care was needed. The author separates the elaboration of this dish into three parts; the first “olla”, and the second “olla” and how it must be served correctly. The first “olla” consisted of “Garbanzos” (chickpeas) which had been soaked overnight, a big piece of beef, a chicken, and a large piece of bacon. In this part, we can notice that the author hasn’t bothered to translate the chickpeas despite having a literal translation but has indeed translated ‘bacon’ even if the Spanish concept of bacon: “tocino” differs slightly from the English concept of the word. To be finished with the first “olla” the cook must boil the ingredients together once and let it simmer for five hours to be cooked properly. At the same time the “olla número 1” is simmering, the cook should start with the “olla número 2” for which it needs water and ‘whatever vegetables are to be had’, again another notion of the scarcity of ingredients, recommending some as ‘lettuces, a slice of gourd, of beef, carrots, beans, celery, endive, onions and garlic, long peppers’ and cut them as if they were for a salad, the adding ‘red sausages’ which is the translation used by the author for “chorizos”, and ‘half a salted pig’s face’ which would correspond to what in Spanish is called “careta de cerdo” also soaked overnight. When all the ingredients are in the saucepan and boiled the water has to be strained and proceed to the serving. On a large dish the vegetables have to lay in the bottom, the beef in the center, surrounding the beef, the bacon, chicken, and pig’s face, around those; the sausages as if forming a crown and finally the soup of “olla número 1” poured over it, always served hot.

Ford points out using the sentence: ‘Que no contiene cosa que se oponga a nuestra madre Iglesia y santa fé católica, y buenas costumbres’ (Ford, R. 1848. P 126), that it is a dish that does not contradict the laws of the church, which, as already explained in the introduction, was a fundamental factor in establishing food standards.

Ford ends up highlighting with two Spanish proverbs the importance of two ingredients of the “olla podrida”: ‘the vegetables ‘la olla sin verdura, ni tiene gracia ni hartura’ (the pot without vegetables is neither funny nor satisfying) and the bacon ‘No hay olla sin tocino, ni sermón sin Agustino’ (No pot without bacon, no lecture without Augustine’)

The next antique dish is ‘The Guisado’ or stew, which is done in a Spanish pipkin (cazuela de barro), and as the author states ‘Andalusian ones draw flavour out the best’. Ford also states that this dish is ‘well cooked by every cook of every venta’ but as he had already mentioned when describing the Spanish cooking is heavy on spices and oil, and to avoid it you must do it yourself. For preparing the dish you need to cut hare, partridge, rabbit, chicken, or ‘whatever you have foraged on the road’, save the blood, the liver, and the giblets, and with a cloth dry them and then fry them with onions and a bit of oil until is turned brownish. Then put them on the olla with the three equal portions of water, wine, and oil, add a bit of bacon, onions, garlic, salt, a bunch of herbs such as thyme, pepper, and “pimientos”, and let it simmer and half an hour before serving it add the giblets. The grease of the stew must be skimmed off when it rises to the surface as the author states is ‘the ruin of all cookery’. Ford recommends serving it with a salad to elevate the dish.

The final antique dishes are briefly described by Ford: the “manteca Valenciana”, also called ‘Valencian bitter’ by the author, consists of ‘equal portions of garlic and hogs’ lard pounded together in a mortar’ for serving it; it is just spread over a slice of bread. Although it is some kind of butter as Ford has described it, it is made from pork fats, ‘the cow has nothing to do with it’ in his own words. The final antique dish is the ‘sopa de gato’, named after making cats sick, made of bread and garlic in equal portions, fried in oil, and diluted in hot water, and eaten as a soup.

In the last section regarding the food we are going through the modern/contemporary dishes, starting with “Pollo Valenciano” which is elaborated as what nowadays Spaniards

would call “Paella”. Starting with cutting ‘a fowl’ (chicken) into pieces, then heat a wine glass of fine oil in a saucepan, to know when it is ready place a piece of bread into the oil and when is brown take it out and throw it away, when the oil is ready put in two cloves of garlic taking care it doesn’t burn and stir it until is fried, then put the chicken and stir until it is browned (‘dorado’) which Ford says it would take around 10 minutes while keeping stirring add ‘chopped onions, three or four red or green chilis’ then add some tomato divided into quarters, parsley and ‘two teacupsful of rice’ and mixed it all together adding hot stock to cover all and let it boil until the rice is done. This dish is described as an excellent yet very difficult-to-elaborate dish, and its elaboration in Valencia is praised.

The next dish featured is the traditional salad which is said by the author to be ‘truly delicious’ and that following a Spanish proverb ‘four persons are wanted: a spendthrift for oil, a miser for vinegar, a counselor for salt, and a madman to stir it all up’, meaning that this salad must have a good quantity of oil but few vinegar, the salt varies according to the consumers taste and everything must be thoroughly mixed. The author mentions that in England salad is a disgrace for most of the houses of England because its preparation is done long before eating so the products that should be crisp and fresh become sodden and leathery. To avoid this we must prepare the salad in two separate containers, one for the herbs and one for the willow and never mix them ‘until the instant that you are ready to transfer the refreshing result to your plate’. You need a lettuce or ‘whatever salad is to be got’ and cut it but not with a steel knife as it ‘turns the edges of the wounds black’ leaving a bad flavor, the leaf must be torn from the stem as it also leaves a ‘bitter’ bad flavor, then wash the leaves and rinse it with napkins until is dried. Then in a small bowl, you must mix equal parts of water and vinegar, ‘a teaspoonful’ of salt and pepper, and four times as much oil as vinegar and water. For ending the salad Ford suggested chopping some herbs very small, such as ‘tarragon and chervil’, and pouring them onto the salad, when everything is prepared then mix it and ‘lose no time in eating’ as he had already stated that the contents might lose their properties.

Keeping on the line of the salads Ford presents the “gazpacho” which he also calls ‘floating salad’, a dish of Arabic origin that ‘during the summer forms the food of the bulk of the people in the torrid portions of Spain’ a traditional dish that is kept nowadays and the tradition of consuming it has extended through all Spain during the summer. For the elaboration, Ford explains the traditional Roman and Moorish method which consisted of

garlic, onions, cucumbers, and chilis chopped very small and mixed with crumbs of bread, oil vinegar, and freshwater. Ford mentions that this dish was could be found 'in every house in Andalucia during the summer' and was 'not well digested by strangers'. Although this dish has varied its recipe through the years, the essence and tradition still remain as well as the original name. If the weather was cold the "gazpacho" was heated and called "gazpacho caliente" and it would also be found on the carts of the farmers as provisions, along with another traditional meal that also is well consumed in Contemporary Spain: the "migas"; consisting on crumbs of bread fried in oil with some pepper and garlic. This meal was very common among the farmers at the time as oil, vinegar, and bread were 'all given out to the lower class of laborers by farmers'.

To end up with the food section we have similar dishes: starred eggs or as the locals called them: "huevos estrellados" which were as the author states 'the grasp of the meanest culinary capacity', in other words, it was an easy dish to elaborate for anyone. When fat bacon was added then it was called "Huevos con magras". Both dishes consisted of taking eggs and frying them on a pan with oil or lard ('manteca de puerco') the later mixing it with the bacon. All these "modern dishes" have evolved over the years although they retain their main essence.

3.2 Drinks

As Ford states when talking about 'Spanish liquids' the water and wine shouldn't be mixed but kept separate as the Spaniards had a 'quite Oriental profound regard for water'. Ford explains that the Spanish idea of a paradise on earth is a 'well watered district'. Ford attributes this preference of the Spaniards for water to the Moors who occupied the peninsula for centuries and left their works such as the water systems: damming up narrow gorges into reservoirs, collecting the best springs 'with the greatest care', constructing pools and underground cisterns and stemming valleys with aqueducts 'that poured in rivers', all this irrigations system constructed so perfectly that Spaniards didn't dare to improve it nor destruct it. One of the many things that the Moors left were the fountains, especially in the 'Moorish districts', and these fountains apart from their function also had a social function as a meeting place for the womankin, where they used to socialize when they went to collect water in their pitchers. So even as the Iberians were 'decided water-drinkers', people were amazed that even 'rich Spanish should prefer water to wine' but this has a simple answer:

the climate demanded it. For explaining this Ford cites Howell: 'Those rayes that do warm you in England, do roast you here', comparing how the sun was more damaging in Spain than in northern Europe and why the Spaniards felt the necessity and preferred water over anything. There were some proverbs used by Ford to describe the water: 'ni sabor, olor, ni color'; good water mustn't have color, taste nor smell, 'que no enferma, no adeuda, no enviuda'; water was cheaper than spirits, wines or beer so less money was spent, it doesn't harm the consumer nor 'deprive him of his common sense or good manners'.

Moors also left some utensils regarding the water, such as the "Alcazarra" a clay utensil used as a refrigeratory vessel, 'in which water when placed in a current of hot air becomes chilled by evaporation' and every 'posada' had them hanging on the ceiling at the entrance.

The profession of "Aguador" was a common one as 'the Spaniards at all times were dry as the desert or a sponge', and consisted of an "aguador" carrying a porous jar of water on the back and selling that water, often offering also "azucarillos" made of egg and sugar to be dissolved in the water. In winter they were provided with an "añafe" which was a portable stove that kept the water hot.

Before going into the extensive subject of Spain and wine, Ford mentions other beverages consumed by Spaniards: the "agraz"; a delicious and refrigerating drink made of pounded unripe grapes, clarified sugar and water, the "Michi Michi"; equal portions of water and orgeat of Chufas, 'cooling fruits' as strawberries mixed with orange juice and sugar, 'Spanish ices' or "helados"; sweet and cold and frozen into fruit-shapes, a 'weak bottled beer mixed with iced lemonade'; what nowadays we call a "radler", some beer although few were consumed as Spaniards didn't drink as much as their ancestors used to.

About the Spanish breakfast, there is little to say as it was 'Universal breakfast' for the Spaniards and consisted of a small cup of liquid chocolate eaten with a toasted slice of bread or cookie and a glass of water afterwards. However, the author mentions that the breakfast of the Spaniards consists of 'a teaspoonful of chocolate, a dinner, of a knob of garlic soaked in water, and a supper, of a paper cigarette' but it is just an invention, 'a calumny devised by the enemy'.

For the analysis of the wines the main structure Ford described: Wines made to be kept on the Peninsula for national consumption and Wines made for exportation.

Starting with the first ones: the wines kept for national consumption, it must be highlighted that those wines lacked quality and Ford provides an extensive list explaining why it is. Taking up the scarcity issue again, Ford comments that ‘the Spaniards take the goods that the gods provide him, just as they come to hand’ enhancing the fact that not everybody had the same opportunities regarding the gastronomy they were to consume nor that they would seek out for goods with the sentence about the Spaniard: ‘He drinks the wine that grows in the nearest vineyards, and if they are none, then regales himself with the water from the least distance spring’ (Ford, R. 1848. P 146) .

The best wines of the Peninsula were the ‘port and the sherry’ which Ford attributed their perfection to foreigners as he considered the Spanish system was ‘rude, antique, and unscientific’ as well as ‘the fruit was thrown indiscriminately, the black colored with the whites ones’ and men ‘hurry jostling on to the rude and dirty vat’ making clear his dislike for the method of wine-making. If not clear with those words Ford indeed used phrases such as ‘the filth and negligence are commensurate with carelessness’ and ‘refining operation is left to fermentation’ to keep making clear the rejection he felt towards wine and its elaboration. If anything could be salvaged for Ford out of all this rejection, it was the “Valdepeñas” and the “Manzanilla” along with some wines of other regions such as the “Peralta” from the Navarrian, the “Chacolet” from the Basques and “Carineña” from the Arragonese.

In addition to the wines mentioned above, Ford also refers to other regional varieties that, although not as renowned as sherry meant for export, were widely consumed by the local population. Among them, the “Valdepeñas” one stands out, which, according to the author, was considered the table wine par excellence within Spain: simple, accessible, and “sufficiently potent for ordinary purposes”. Although it lacked the international prestige of sherry, Ford recognizes that its consumption was widespread among the middle and lower classes, especially in the interior of the peninsula. In spite of being such a celebrated wine, Ford criticized, as the rest of the wines made by Spaniards for national consumption, the lack of care and method at the time of making the wine.

‘Even at Valdepeñas, with Madrid for its customer, the wine continues to be made in an unscientific, careless manner’ (Ford, R. 1848. P 149).

At the same time, Ford criticizes the wine adulteration community and warns readers of the health hazards this can pose. The use of ‘logwood’ which the author refers to is a natural dye used to manipulate not only the quantity but also the appearance of the wine.

‘The wine, when taken to distant places, is almost always adulterated; and at Madrid with a decoction of logwood, which makes it almost poisonous, acting upon the nerves and muscular system’ (Ford, R. 1848. P 149)

Ford ends the chapter by emphasizing how difficult it is to get unadulterated wine to England.

‘The only way to secure a pure, unadulterated, legitimate article, is to send up double quarter sherry casks; the wine is then put into one, and that again is protected by an outer cask’ (Ford, R. 1848. P 150).

It was a wine that cost about 5l the pipe but the transport by land was a high cost and the methods of transport were refined, to say the least. For this, he suggested that the person concerned send 2 casks of sherry to protect the wine, two for as he says ‘as accidents constantly happen’, which implies that the transporters and a guard make a deception to make it look as if one of the casks has been broken in an accident and they can share that cask. In the end as Ford states:

‘Very little pure Valdepeñas ever reaches England’ (Ford, R. 1848. P 150)

On the other hand, are the wines made for exportation, which, unlike those of national consumption, do not have a single negative connotation in the author's description. Regarding these wines, the author details several important factors that affect the quality of the wine. Starting with the wine-producing districts, the best ones are in the South of Spain extending through the towns of ‘Puerto de Santa María, Rota, San Lucar, Trebujena, Lebrija and Arcos’ the elaboration of the so highly praised by the English-men Sherry. In this area, we also find Xerez wine, which gets its name from the town where the vineyards where it was produced. Having established the area of Cadiz as the most superior when it comes to

finding the best vineyards the author mentions that ‘the wine becomes inferior in proportion as the vineyards get more distant from this central point’. Another important factor for the excellence of the wines is the type of soil, which was said to be ‘examined and analyzed by competent chemists’. The best soil type was the “Albariza”; ‘a whitish soil composed of clay mixed with carbonate of lime and silex’, the second best was “Barras”; consisting of ‘sandy quartz, mixed with lime and oxide of iron’, the third was the “Arenas”; as the names tells was ‘little better than sand’ and the most extended one and the most productive the wines that came out of this soil were described as ‘thin, ill-flavored’ and not improving after maturation. The fourth and last type described by Ford is the “Bugeo”; ‘a dark-brown loamy sand which occurs on the sides of rivulets and hillocks’ also described as ‘poor and weak’, yet all the ‘inferior produces’ were sold under the name of Sherry. The last factor described by Ford is the varieties of grape which are far more important than the soil location and type. Among more than a hundred types of grapes the “Listan” and “Palomina Blanca” are the most praised but the high demand of Sherrys forced the use of other inferior grapes types. Another highly praised type is the “Pedro Ximenez” a ‘delicious sweet-tasted grape’ originally from Madeira and brought to the South of Spain. From this grape the “Pajarete” is made, receiving its name from the town where it was originally made ‘Paxarete’, then extended and prepared everywhere. Its preparation was curious as the grapes were left to dry until they became raisins and then they were pressed and added some ‘fine old wine or brandy’ becoming a very expensive wine.

Due to the quarrels with England in the alliance with France during the wars of succession, the consumption of sherries in England decreased, causing the wine culture and wine-making to deteriorate notably, until the Gordon family reestablished it at the end of the 17th century.

In sharp contrast to the wine-making process of those wines consumed by the Spaniards, these wines were cultivated with the greatest care from planting to final decay. The vineyards begin to produce fruit at 5 years of age and for 35 years produce grapes of excellent quality. The task of caring for the vineyards was complicated as the grapes could be affected by the slightest bad smell or rank weeds, and even insects had to be taken care of as they would destroy the harvest.

‘It is a life of constant care, labor, and expense’ (Ford, R. 1848. P 154)

‘Niñas y viñas, son mal de guardar’ (Ford, R. 1848. P 154)

When the period of vintage arrives the care of the workers increases. The process starts with picking and spreading the bunches for some days, leaving the unripe grapes separated and longer exposed to the sun to improve as they have less substance. The grapes shouldn't over-ripe because saccharine prevails leaving a deficiency of tartaric acid, which functions as a corrector of the wine's acidity, and for the selected grapes lime is sprinkled to absorb and correct the acetous particles. The treading was usually done at night as it is cooler, and so the wasps were avoided as they used to sting the 'half-naked operators'. The larger vineyards had multiple buildings containing everything that was required for the process along with cellars where the pressed grape was left to fermentate until the next spring, when the new wine was transferred and housed together with those produced from the same house, being called "a partido".

Once the vintage concluded, the custom-house officers would note by districts the quantity produced on each vineyard, to whom it was sold, and where it was taken to, so it couldn't be sold without a permit and a four percent charge.

Ford compared the bodegas to cathedrals to emphasize their monumentality and internal organization 'These temples of Bacchus resemble cathedrals in size and loftiness, and their divisions, like Spanish chapels, bear the names to whom are dedicated, and few tutelar deities have more numerous or more devout worshippers' (Ford, R. 1848. P 158). In this case, the bodegas are above ground level, unlike those in England which were underground, designed to maintain a cool environment with air circulation, maintaining an average temperature of 60 degrees Fahrenheit (about 15/16° C). The bodegas were carefully located away from drains and offensive odors that could affect the wine, in normally modern areas and even had offices and workshops. In the Xerez (Jerez) district alone there were more than a thousand registered bodegas, the largest of them belonging to first-rate firms and mostly European (English or French). The wine of the bodegas is stored in American oak barrels, and the finest sherry wines spent there around 10 to 12 years. The most perfect matured sherry wine was composed of several butts, that is of various ages, vineyards, and flavor varieties, often blending barrels together to correct the flavor and obtain the aroma, body, and taste that customers demand. Moreover, unlike the younger wines, this wine

improved with age, becoming softer and more aromatic. For this wine little brandy was needed as the Andalusian sun provided sufficient alcohol, between 20-23° in fine sherries and 12° in clarets and champagne. Although color had to be chemically discharged to please some conventional English tastes that liked pale sherry over the natural brown color. Ford states at the end of the refinement process what it would be for him the secret to obtain the best sherry:

‘The real secret of procuring a good sherry is to pay the best price for it at the best house, and then to keep the purchase for many years in a good cellar before it is drunk’ (Ford, R. 1848. P 159)

The Capataz (foreman) was the authority figure who managed the vineyards and the workers and kept everything running.

‘The Capataz soon becomes the sole possessor of the secrets of the cellar’ (Ford, R. 1848. P 157)

‘As the chancellor is the keeper of the Queen’s conscience, so the Capataz is the keeper of the bodega or the wine-store’ (Ford, R. 1848. P 157)

They were often also employed by merchants, who didn’t have enough supply to sell and had to buy more, relying on the Capataz, who would usually cheat both employer and grower and buy those who granted him the largest commission.

The Capataz was in charge of tasting the wines, constantly evaluating the butts (barricas), noting their qualities and defects, and applying corrections. He also noted the dates and the remedies applied so that at his next tasting he could evaluate the process.

‘This head master passes this life of probation in tasting’ (Ford, R. 1848. P 160)

The Capataz was also in charge of the wine-tasting tours (cata de vinos), mainly done at big houses such as Domecq and John David Gordon, providing an explanatory lecture on vinology. Each wine tasting was carefully done, tasting each barrel from the youngest to the oldest, and reserving the best wine for the end. Ford advises not to get carried away and to

follow the example of the guide, who never swallows the sip but agitates it around in the mouth until the taste is mastered.

The export figures were very high but the demand generated in many second-rate houses, the decrease of quality in these wines as they were looking for quantity and not quality. It was also believed that much of the product exported to England was ‘doctored’ and there was a lack of confidence in its quality.

‘In 1843 25,096 butts were exported from these districts, and 29,313 in 1843; while in 1845 there were exported 18,135 butts from Xerez alone, and 14,037 from the Puerto’ (Ford, R. 1848. P 163)

To end up with this last section I am going through the wines Ford mentions and explain briefly what he stated about them.

Sherry, a wine not very appreciated by Spaniards due to its high price and strong flavor. Due to its high demand, it was very difficult to find it in the peninsula, in many places that despite being close to its production, such as Seville, only got them a glass in the best houses.

‘Sherry is a foreign wine, and made and drunk by foreigners’ (Ford, R. 1848. P 164)

Manzanilla, a wine that was made near San Lucar, where the grapes grew in poorer, sandier soil and were harvested before they were fully ripe. This wine was described as extremely healthy and not inebriating like sherry. Ford also comments that the taste of this wine is so pronounced that it is unpalatable to strangers at first. In addition, the author recommended taking it with a paste called “Alpistera” composed of a dough of flour, refined sugar, and fresh eggs rolled thinly and cut into strips shaped as ribbons, and then fried in butter, finally sprinkled with powdered sugar.

‘The natives of Xerez themselves infinitely prefer a light wine called Manzanilla, much weaker and cheaper than sherry’ (Ford, R. 1848. P 164)

4. Conclusion

Throughout this paper, I have discussed how Richard Ford, in *The Spaniards and Their Country*, builds a detailed and often ironic depiction of Spanish gastronomy as a reflection of national identity. Whilst written as a travel guide, Ford's text goes far beyond its intended purpose, providing readers in nineteenth-century Britain with an engaging method of collecting data through a sensory journey and the culinary customs of Spain. Food and drink are not presented as just sustenance or curiosities, but as a cultural guide, a way of accessing and understanding the daily life, values, contradictions, and historical heritage of the country.

One of the main conclusions to be drawn from this analysis is that Ford uses gastronomy as a primary storytelling device to construct a view of Spanish society. His descriptions of rural stews, city wines, Moorish water systems, or Catholic ceremonies of fasting provide a glimpse into Spanish regional diversities, religious habits, and other circumstances such as material scarcity. He praises the resourcefulness of cooks who managed to create tasty meals with few ingredients, but at the same time, he criticizes the general lack of refinement and “scientific method” in Spanish culinary practices. His tone constantly varies between admiration and criticism, sometimes even in the same sentence, which makes his work complex, but also emotionally rich.

Ford constantly marks the clear contrast between rural and urban spaces. While the countryside is presented as traditional and pure, it is also associated with scarcity and repetition. In contrast, urban areas, especially Madrid, are linked to corruption and adulteration, especially in the case of wine. His critics of wine adulteration and his comments on the difficulties of the transportation of pure Valdepeñas to England are not only indicative of concern for wine quality but a judgment about the perception of the decadence of Spanish standards in modern environments. For Ford, the essence of Spain remains in its rustic and historical traditions, but even those are marked by a nostalgia for a golden past that has already faded.

For evaluating the portrait Ford makes of Spain we have to take into account the perspective of Ford, who is not a neutral observer, but a mid-nineteenth-century British aristocrat writing for a foreign audience. His admiration for the exoticism and historical depth of Spain is always combined with an implicit sense of superiority. Spain is

romanticized and depicted as a land of intense smells, strong flavors, and decadence, but also criticized for its lack of efficiency, its rejection of progress, and its separation from the British ideals of hygiene, order, and efficiency. His travel writings fit into the picture of romantic orientalism, where the “foreign” is both admired and mocked at the same time.

Simultaneously, Ford's publication is one of the first and most detailed attempts to construct what we might today call a "Spanish culinary identity". Far before Spanish gastronomy was codified or institutionalized, Ford was already defining national dishes, regional variations, and historical influences. The tension between Moorish heritage, Catholic discipline, American ingredients, and monarchical preferences is brought out through his culinary commentaries in particular. In this regard, *The Spaniards and Their Country* functions not only as a description of food but as an archive of historical memory, where each dish tells a story of empire, religion, scarcity, and survival.

Nowadays, the analysis of travel literature such as Ford's is still significant because it reveals the cultural construction of national identities from an outsider's point of view. By analyzing how a British writer pictured, tasted, and narrated Spain, we enter a symbolic superiority on account of the English privileges of the nineteenth century. Moreover, Ford's work proves that gastronomy is never neutral: it is political, and mainly historical, and deeply emotional. His work shows us that to talk about what people eat is also to talk about what they value, what they lack, what they remember, and how they want to be seen.

In conclusion, we could say that Richard Ford's *The Spaniards and their Country*, Spain is much more than a travel guide: it is a literary text that describes the complexities of the nation's identity through sensory experiences, in particular through food and drink. Ford's portrait of Spanish cuisine is marked by both admiration and criticism, between tradition and modernity, between the perspective of an outsider and internal coherence. Through his blunt and ironic writing, Ford leaves us not only with a list of dishes and drinks, but also with a complex and challenging image of Spain, an image that helps shape how others imagine, remember, and experience the country.

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