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Sips and Giggles: Alcohol, Tragedy and Ideo-Aesthetics in *La sombra del caudillo*

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the ideo-aesthetic function of alcohol in Martín Luis Guzmán literary magnum opus *La sombra del caudillo*. Specifically, I read alcohol as a broader process of consumption, inebriation and affective transformation that concurrently reflects and influences individual and collective power dynamics at play. Rather than a mere object of consumption, it behaves as an active agent that participates in, ignites and transforms other processes in the text. Within the ideological domain, I focus on what the individual and collective drinking practices reveal about those who drink and how questions of gender, class and race are negotiated through literary representation. I then consider the aesthetic and symbolic function of alcohol in relation to the broader sociopolitical practice of state-building. I analyze how alcohol consumption becomes a double-edged sword with the potential to foster comradeship or conflict and how its excess transforms social relations from amicable encounters to violent confrontations. Ultimately, I argue that the ideo-aesthetic role of alcohol in *La sombra del caudillo* contributes to the work's overarching theme of tragedy.

KEYWORDS: Mexican Revolutionary Literature, Martín Luis Guzmán, *La sombra del caudillo*, Alcohol, Ideology, Aesthetics, Tragedy

To date, much attention has been dedicated to Martín Luis Guzmán's *La sombra del caudillo*'s aesthetic character, most notably its binary imagery and the interplay between light and dark. Another fundamental yet less explored theme in the novel is alcohol. Despite being a recurring motif, it has received very little scholarly attention. Recently, Daniel Zavala Medina made an important move in this direction, recognizing that 'el alcohol circula pródigo a lo largo de muchas páginas: licores copiosos, inmoderados y con cargas de significación en la trama de enorme interés' (112). I argue that, similar to the imagery of light and dark, the alcoholic trope embodies another binary element in the novel that simultaneously fulfills an aesthetic as well as ideological function in the work. Specifically, I read alcohol as a broader process of consumption, inebriation and affective transformation that concurrently reflects and influences individual and collective power dynamics at play. More than a mere object of consumption, alcohol becomes a transdisciplinary agent that participates in, ignites, and transforms other processes in the text.

Within the ideological domain, I consider what the individual and collective drinking practices reveal about those who drink. Building on Gretchen Pierce and Aurea Toxqui's idea that 'alcohol [serves] as a way to understand bigger topics within Latin American history, such as identity, ethnic and communal bonding, race, class, gender, power relations, state-building, and resistance,' (9) I show that the process of alcoholization in the novel offers insights into how questions of gender, class and race are negotiated through literary representation. I also consider Guzmán's text in the context of Tim Mitchell's argument in *Intoxicated Identities: Alcohol's Power in*

Mexican History and Culture regarding the writers of the Revolution who, as he argues, helped to create 'literary images of a pervasive death-wish culture, inseparable from heavy drinking' (9). Building on Mitchell's notion that 'Mexicans seeking to understand their 'fiesta of bullets,' were extraordinarily dependent on binge drinking for metaphors, for concepts of time, for ideas about death, for modes of memory and representation,' (9) I consider the symbolic function of alcohol in relation to the broader sociopolitical practice of state-building. Viewing alcohol consumption as a double-edged sword with the potential to foster comradeship or incite conflict, I analyze the ways in which its excess transforms social relations from amicable political encounters to violent confrontations. Ultimately, I argue that the ideo-aesthetic role of alcohol in *La sombra del caudillo* contributes to the work's overarching theme of tragedy.

Laughter, Power, and Masculinity

In the chapter, 'El banquete en el bosque,' Ignacio Aguirre attends a political event where the drinking practices reveal a great deal about the protagonist and his surrounding environment. To set the scene, we learn that the Minister 'sabía darse a desear para que su prestigio creciera,' and as such, 'hizo que sus admiradores y partidarios lo aguardasen esa vez más de una hora' (103). When he does arrive, the guests 'extremaron las manifestaciones del entusiasmo al ver que al fin se presentaba el joven ministro de la Guerra' (103). This opening underscores Aguirre's need to be the center of attention and his flair for the dramatic. We are then told that, 'Restablecida la calma, las copas de los aperitivos invitaron al reacomoda-

miento. Se instaló al ministro en el sitio que allí podía considerarse como de honor' (103). Not only are the drinks personified but they also possess the agency to facilitate an adjustment in seating whereby Aguirre occupies the place of honor at the table. Alcohol is portrayed as an independent agent, a character, who exerts influence over others, and Aguirre's position as head of the table establishes the respect, power, and influence that he holds within the political circles.

Upon sitting down, Aguirre is served a drink. We are told that 'no tuvo que mencionar lo que debían servirle,' and that, 'José, el camarero predilecto de los políticos de importancia, fue, de propia iniciativa, en busca de una botella de Hennessy-Extra, que trajo pronto, que descorchó allí y que se apresuró a colocar delante del ministro de la Guerra, así que le hubo llenado hasta el borde la primera copa' (104). Aguirre is influential enough for the waiter to know not only his drink of choice but also the way he likes to drink it. His preference to have his glass filled to the brim is indicative of his lack of moderation—a tendency he displays continuously. His go-to drink being a foreign liquor also reflects his Eurocentric elitism and underscores his elevated social status. While agave-based drinks such as tequila and mezcal were traditionally associated with the lower classes, European liquor was considered a marker of civility (Brulotte 911). Throughout the novel, Aguirre and other politicians repeatedly drink Hennessy Extra, the *crème de la crème* of cognacs. Tequila on the other hand, is used during acts of high incivility, first in the kidnapping of Aguirre's right-hand man, Axkaná, and later against the police chief who headed the kidnapping, Zaldivar. From the beginning, the reader can detect that Aguirre's personality is one marked by an inclination toward excess and lavishness.

As the banquet continues, the reader gets more insight into Aguirre's character, particularly his relationship with alcohol. The narrator explores this aspect, stating that:

Tal costumbre de Aguirre—beber siempre de botella intacta—la conocían en México todos los camareros y cantineros de algunas ínfimas. De ella se derivaba algo del acento muy masculino que el joven general ponía en su afición a beber.... Para Ignacio Aguirre, sólo en la botella íntegra, en la botella que iría él vaciando poco a poco, existía realidad bastante a contentarlo. (105)

His drinking habits and expectations provide insight into the parallels invoked between the means of alcohol consumption and masculinity. Specifically, Aguirre's mode of drinking suggests that the masculine subject is one marked by excess. This reflects Deborah Toner's idea in *Alcohol and Nationhood in Nineteenth-Century Mexico* (2015), that the excess of alcohol is seen as crucial for masculinity (34). At the same time, Toner points out that too much excess can also be viewed as problematic (34)—something that also becomes evident by the end of the novel. Secondly, the idea that Aguirre looked for happiness at the bottom of the bottle suggests a depen-

dent and unhealthy relationship between the Minister of War and his alcohol. His compulsiveness to drink comes on display again in the following description:

Esta vez insistió buen rato en las chanzas con Encarnación y en la charla con Olivier—cual si, en efecto, el coñac no existiera en el mundo—, y si al cabo consintió en extender el brazo hasta la copa para llevársela a los labios, lo hizo como por mera condescendencia con sus amigos, no porque la deseara. De estar solo, hubiese hecho otro tanto, si bien entonces por amables impulsos de simpatía hacia las cosas, ya que no hacia los hombres. (105)

For Aguirre, joking, chatting and cognac go hand in hand. There is also a kind of denial, followed by a rationalization of his drinking habits. Once inebriated, Aguirre behaves as if liquor didn't exist and as if it wasn't a social lubricant. For him, it's an act of comradeship and sacrifice toward his friends. Yet, this sacrificial act is undermined when we learn that had he been alone, he would have drunk regardless, only under a different pretext. As such, there is an underscoring of the duality of alcohol's social function. While it can be a bonding exercise, it can also be a solitary escape.

With the banquet in full swing, alcohol becomes the agent that gives characters a palpable push to experiment with various power dynamics. In the case of Aguirre, the show of authority begins in his voice, which, 'jovial y franca, sonó más audible que hasta entonces, lo que hizo que se interrumpieran las otras conversaciones y todos se volvieron para oír' (105). Having become once again the center of attention, Aguirre directs his loud tone to Encarnación, and asks: '¿de cuándo acá vienes tú a México sin mi permiso, y te atreves, además, a no empezar aquí presentándote en la Secretaría de Guerra?' (105). We learn that 'Encarnación sabía que aquella pregunta no era reproche de funcionario, sino escarceo palabrero de compañero de armas, frase juguetona de superior amigo—, donde se le brindaba el reconocimiento oficial de su derecho a cometer travesuras' (105). Aguirre's sarcastic reproach to Encarnación and the latter's acceptance of this act of comradeship and humiliation displays the hierarchy at play in the relationship between the two men. While he does not immediately respond to Aguirre's question, a response registers in his smile. As the narrator explains:

Quiso, en consecuencia, hacer él también gala de espiritualidad, y empezó, para ello, por sonreírse; sonrió de modo que su rostro ... vino a iluminarse con fulgores inciertos. Para Axkaná, que lo veía de medio perfil, aquella sonrisa fluctuó por un segundo—como todas las de Encarnación—entre lo imbécil y lo torpe, y en el segundo siguiente, entre lo astuto y lo zafio. (106)

To respect the hierarchy, Reyes opts for replying to Aguirre's question with a smile. The response is Encarnación's way of taking the

high road and laughing off the underhanded comments directed towards him. Yet, as Axkaná perceives, the General's smile is deceiving and oscillates between stupid and clumsy as well as cunning and uncouth. Subsequently, we see that Encarnación, 'según Aguirre le servía coñac tras de servirse a sí mismo, seguía sonriendo, sonriendo' (106). The smile becomes a show of contemplation for Reyes, after which, 'por fin, consciente del favor anticipado por todos a sus palabras y gozoso de ello, dijo de súbito: "Pero pa qué, pues buscarte en el Ministerio, si sé, Aguirre, que donde te jallo es en las tabernas?"' (106). The General's response carries a heavy punch for the Minister of War. Though formulated as a joke, the remark is laden with commentary on Aguirre's well known habits of excessive consumption. Taken together, the banter between Aguirre and Encarnación embody ongoing displays of dominance disguised as joking around. At this point in the novel, whatever hostility exists between political actors is kept to a minimum and surfaces only in the form of passive-aggressive jokes. The culminating effects of Aguirre and Reyes's conversation on the rest of the room highlight this point. Following Reyes's comment, Aguirre 'ríe el chiste—lo río de buena gana—, y a carcajadas lo río con él la turba satisfecha de los jóvenes políticos. Lo rieron también Tarabana y Mijares, lo río ... el mismo Axkaná' (107). Laughter, in this case, becomes the cathartic mechanism for release of tension for Aguirre, Reyes and the other guests. Following this release, 'se multiplicaron por tanto en alabanza de chiste de Encarnación, las risas y los aperitivos, las risas y el tequila, las risas y el coñac; y para mejor celebrarlo fueron corriendo, de mesa en mesa, chanzas fuertes, soeces, acres, que eran a modo de expresivas primicias de la euforia' (107). The confrontation between Aguirre and Reyes ends with laughter, as joking and liquor come together to dispel pre-existing tensions and produce an environment of euphoria and ecstasy for the characters.

By the end of that banquet, the social gathering appears a success; especially to Olivier Fernández, the leader of the Bloque Radical Progresista, who 'esperaba de aquella comida excelentes resultados para el plan que traía en proyecto' (107). His plan was to convince Aguirre 'del entusiasmo profundo con que los 'radicales progresistas y otros elementos afines' lo proclamaban candidato a la Presidencia de la República, en oposición a la otra candidatura, la del general Hilario Jiménez' (108). Olivier's scheming behavior reflects the chapter's opening quote, made by Axkaná about the way politics is conducted in Mexico: that behind every social function is a purpose to push forward the interests of one political agent or party over another. In this case, Olivier's reason for arranging the banquet was to warm up Aguirre to the idea of running for presidency, which he did by appealing to his ego.

Following the banquet, Olivier continues his work on Aguirre by arranging a night of drinking at a brothel. Since Olivier 'conocía bien a Aguirre, sabía que sólo el vino y la efusión de la crápula eran capaces de conmovirlo,' (114) he makes sure to bring the Minister to a place where drinks are abundant. By exploiting two of Aguirre's biggest weaknesses—women and alcohol—Reyes hopes to

manipulate Aguirre into expressing his desire to run for president. Once Aguirre arrives and everyone is seated, 'fueron alineándose las botellas de cerveza,' and, 'frente a Ignacio Aguirre colocaron otra, ésta de coñac; trajeron copas, vasos, ceniceros' (115). With the characters and the scene set, we learn that 'a poco de empezar a beber, Olivier Fernández se puso a disertar sobre política,' and that 'los demás le siguieron' (116). Once again, alcohol behaves as a provocateur of conversation in this political circle. It is not long before 'las botellas vacías iban acumulándose sobre el hule pegajoso,' and 'del Hennessy-Extra no les restaba a Encarnación y Aguirre ni la mitad' (116). The only individual who is not drinking heavily at this event is Axkaná, who, 'como en el primer momento, se conservaba sobrio, templado, fuerte' (117). By the end of the night, we see the aftermath of the heavy drinking that took place: 'la mesa negreaba de botellas vacías, [y] ... Encarnación, semivivido, ya no hacía sino oír' (117). By getting so drunk Reyes undermines his own plan to convince Aguirre to run for president, and when morning rolls around we learn that Aguirre, 'siempre alerta, no había dicho aún, pese a la plenitud optimista que el alcohol le producía, las palabras reveladoras que Olivier esperaba desde el fondo de su propia embriaguez' (118). Despite his best efforts to ply the Minister with booze and women, Olivier is unable to get Aguirre to publicly express his interest in the presidency.

After this failure, a secondary plan is set into motion. At Olivier's request, rumors begin to circulate about Aguirre's supposed run for presidency. The Caudillo, for whom Aguirre has been working for over ten years and whose presidency would be contested, learns of the false news and calls a meeting with the Minister. Though Aguirre denies the rumors, the Caudillo does not believe him. As a result, not only is a decade-long political relationship permanently severed, but Aguirre now finds himself as an opponent to the most powerful strongman in Mexico. It is at this point in the novel that his fate begins to look decisively less promising. When Aguirre shares the news of the Caudillo's rejection with his closest confidant, Axkaná, it turns out that he 'pensaba lo que el Caudillo' (134). Specifically, what Axkaná saw in Aguirre that night was 'la tragedia de un político cogido por el ambiente de inmoralidad y de mentira que él mismo ha creado; la tragedia de un político, sincero una vez, que, ... aun no abre los ojos a las circunstancias que han de obligarle a defender, pronto y a muerte, eso mismo que rechaza' (134). We see that Axkaná explicitly evokes the notion of tragedy to imply Aguirre's inevitable destiny. As the most rational character in the novel, Axkaná can explain intellectually how Aguirre has found himself in such tragic circumstances; yet he cannot conjure a way out of them, signaling at the inexplicable nature of the tragic process. By labelling Aguirre's situation a tragedy, Axkaná foreshadows the catastrophic ending that awaits the Minister of War for going against the wishes of the Caudillo.

With tensions building between Aguirre and the Caudillo, Olivier begins to devise a new plan to ensure that he himself does not end up on the Caudillo's bad side. Quickly, he realizes that 'todo lo

que tenía que hacer era abandonar a Ignacio Aguirre, o, mejor dicho, pasarse a Hilario Jiménez' (151). As a result, Olivier approaches Jiménez directly and expresses support for his candidacy on behalf of the Bloque Radical Progresista. To test his loyalty, Jiménez demands for Olivier to guarantee 'que lo proclamara candidato a la Presidencia de la República en la convención del partido 'radical progresista' del Estado de México' (153). Olivier agrees, and a day ahead of the convention he gets in touch with the governor of México, General Catarino Ibáñez. Olivier provides the governor with 'instrucciones sobre el curso que debía seguir la convención que se preparaba' (153). Here, we learn that 'al general Catarino Ibáñez ... le encantaron aquellas órdenes de Olivier ... porque él ... andaba ya algo comprometido en materia electoral. Y sus compromisos, justamente, se inclinaban del lado de Jiménez' (154). The private scheming that occurs between Olivier and Ibáñez displays the mechanism of corruption at work in Mexican politics. First, Olivier switches sides and abandons Aguirre in support of Jiménez because it benefits his own political livelihood. Second, Ibáñez is prepared to go along with Olivier's plan because he already has vested interests in seeing Jiménez get elected. We see that political alliances are not the same as political allegiances. That is, support is contingent upon mutually converging interests rather than loyalty. As one actor's interests fluctuate, so does his political alliance. By showing how state politics are largely determined by the pursuit of mutual interests shared among individual state actors, the novel provides a blueprint for understanding the logic that drives the mechanism of political corruption in Mexico. Viewed from this angle, the notion of tragedy in the novel functions as less of an ambivalent aesthetic and more as an ideological mechanism. Rather than being a tragic hero consumed by multiple corrupt forces beyond comprehension, Aguirre's downfall can be explained as a rational ending resulting from a series of calculated political moves made by state officials pursuing their individual ambitions.

Dining, Conflict, and Class

While the trajectory of state politics is shaped by converging interests among separate actors, these individuals do not support each other beyond their immediate goals. For Olivier and Ibáñez, their partnership to ensure the candidacy of Jiménez is largely a question of convenience, and their personal relationship is fraught with disdain and contempt. We observe this tension most clearly in the chapter, 'Brindis,' where alcohol and laughter highlight the duplicitous nature of their relationship during the closing banquet of the political convention. In addition, alcohol illustrates not only Ibáñez's deceitful personality but also his elitist attitudes regarding race and class.

To mark the end of the Convention, Catarino Ibáñez 'había hecho preparar, en el mejor restaurante de Toluca, una comida digna de él, digna de sus amigos, y merecedora al propio tiempo de que se la recordara, por su trascendencia, entre los demás sucesos de

aquella fecha memorable para el civismo' (177). In preparation for his opening toast, Ibáñez 'no quiso ... decir nada del banquete mientras no llegaba el momento estrictamente oportuno,' and instead waited until 'la hora en que los mil indios de la manifestación roían sus huesos y sus tortillas en el jardín de la casa incautada' (177). While Ibáñez organizes a dinner to celebrate and honor the public spirit which should, in theory, extend to all Mexican citizens, this celebration does not play out equally among different social groups. There is a clear separation between the elites who are dining in the most expensive restaurant in Toluca and the thousands of Indigenous citizens who are portrayed as animals gnawing on leftover bones just outside the restaurant. This class division is reinforced when Ibáñez imagines himself as 'autor del festín para los mil indios semidesnudos' (178). By envisioning himself as the author of the feast for the masses, Ibáñez places himself as the authority figure over the Indigenous class whose social powerlessness and lack of resources is expressed as nudity. The governor's patronizing attitude toward the lower classes is evident when he imagines himself 'perorando ante los mil indios de la manifestación política,' proclaiming things like: 'Sí, hijos míos ... cuando *la Revolución sea ley en las ciudades y los campos*, ya no habrá más ricos codiciosos, más ricos explotadores de la miseria del pobre, sino que todos seremos ricos buenos, ricos revolucionarios y útiles' (179). Ibáñez's imaginary address not only carries with it an air of condescension but is also laden with irony. In calling the masses his children, Ibáñez underscores his superiority as their parental figure. The Indigenous are portrayed as an underdeveloped group that is unable to govern itself without a supreme leader. Furthermore, Ibáñez's use of absolutist language, along with his reference to the Revolution becoming law in an undefined future scenario suggest an empty political rhetoric that puts forward utopic ideals without a clear plan to execute them in practice. This description captures the disconnect between the grandiosity of the Revolution as a philosophical ideal in which all Mexicans are equal and the unimpressive reality that continues to re-constitute state subjects based on their class and race. This incongruity is personified through Ibáñez, who believes he embodies these revolutionary ideals while in reality he undermines them through his treatment of the lower classes.

This incongruity is further reflected in the descriptions of the lavish space where the banquet occurs. The political actors are seated at tables with 'floreillas dispersas sobre la albura de los manteles,' and with 'servilletas, primorosamente dobladas, que dejaban en los dedos la ilusión de castillos que se desbaratasen' (180). In front of each guest there are 'cuatro copas, alineadas de mayor a menor, anunciaban frente a cada cubierto la pluralidad de los vinos' (180). The intricate table settings in this upscale restaurant run in stark contrast to the mentions of the outside garden where the lower classes have congregated to eat. The sheer multitude of wine glasses signals the abundance of alcoholic beverages, further underscoring the difference in alcohol consumption by the elite classes. At one point in the banquet, Ibáñez speaks 'en voz bastante alta

para que lo oyeran hasta el otro extremo de la mesa,' and makes a point to comment on the drinks. He insists that the drinks are there 'para que se beban! ... Beba cada quien lo que guste y de lo que guste, como yo. Yo, ni vinos tintos ni vinos blancos: mientras más caros, menos me gustan. Yo pura cerveza de Toluca, y para luego yo sí mis coñaques' (181). Ibáñez wants everyone to know that he is sparing no costs when it comes to alcohol at the banquet. While highlighting his own generosity, he also attempts to position himself as a man of the people by stating that the more expensive a beverage is, the less he prefers it. Despite presenting himself as a lover of local alcohol, Ibáñez's elitist taste comes through a reference to 'his' cognacs, undoubtedly expensive and imported, which he consumes after drinking his beer from Toluca.

Ibáñez extends his simpleton image through the food served at the banquet. When someone comments on the delicious guacamole, he replies, '¿Le gusta, amigo? Pues ya lo ve usted: este guacamole es el mismo que están comiendo allá, con sus tacos de barbacoa, los compañeros que dejamos hace rato en el jardín' (181). Speaking these 'palabras con sonrisas de profundo convencimiento democrático,' (181) Ibáñez makes a point to highlight that both the restaurant guests and the ones outside are consuming the same food, falsely suggesting that there is no class division between the two groups. This last comment prompts Olivier to call him out directly. With his patience running thin, Olivier proclaims: 'no seas farsante.... Lo que estás diciendo es mentira y tú sabes que es mentira' (182). Furthermore, he states:

El guacamole será igual ... Pero la mentira consiste en que llamas 'compañeros' a los pobres indios de la manifestación ... Si son 'nuestros compañeros', ¿por qué a ellos les das huesos y tortillas martajadas, dejando además que esto lo coman en el suelo, mientras a nosotros nos tratas regiamente? Aquí no pasamos de treinta, allá son más de mil. Sin embargo, estoy seguro de que la comida nuestra va a costarte el doble o el triple de lo que pagarías por la mísera barbacoa de los que vinieron a gritar tus vivas y tus mueras. (183)

Olivier's observations highlight Ibáñez's duplicity by pointing out the disparity between the inclusive rhetoric with which he speaks of the masses and the exclusive reality to which they are subjected at the banquet. Olivier questions the notion of referring to the Indigenous crowd outside as 'compañeros,' which would imply equality between the outside and inside guests. The social inequality between the two groups is evidenced by the difference in the quality of the food consumed by each class of people. Furthermore, while there are more than a thousand people eating in the garden, the total cost for their food amounts to less than what it costs to feed the thirty-odd people inside the restaurant. Olivier's comments to Ibáñez underscore the socioeconomic disparities between the two groups and call attention to the governor's opportunistic discourse.

The verbal confrontation initiated by Olivier provokes an immediate change in Ibáñez's mood. We learn that 'Catarino no volvió a hacer gala de su jovialidad. Fue, al revés, dejando de hablar, encogiéndose, tornándose sombrío, hosco' (183). Despite others' efforts to alleviate the tension through jokes and laughter, neither man is prepared to excuse the other and so the tension continues to build. Instead of discussing the situation with Olivier, Ibáñez 'cesó de beber cerveza: pidió coñac; se dedicó a tomarlo con ahínco,' (183) and dialogue is swiftly replaced with drinking. As the chapter continues, excessive consumption of alcoholic beverages contributes to the developing atmosphere of hostility. With the banquet in full swing, the liquor consumption intensifies, as does Ibáñez's drunken state: 'puesto en pie, su embriaguez crecía: al mareo de la cerveza y el vino se mezclaban en su cuerpo el vértigo de la nueva postura y el que le daba la doble fila de comensales' (184). Yet, this does not stop him from wiping his 'labios para limpiarse la bocera de la vigésima copa de coñac,' (185) in preparation for another speech. Catarino begins with a story about his 'amigo Emilio Olivier, que es buen revolucionario...' (185). Specifically, he tells the guests that Olivier 'dijo la semana pasada que habíamos de sacar candidato a mi general Hilario Jiménez,' and yet 'luego, hace dos días, me dijo que ya no, que ahora el candidato había de ser el ciudadano general Ignacio Aguirre' (185). As the reader will know, while Olivier did approach Ibáñez regarding Jiménez's candidacy, he did not breach the topic of Aguirre, so the last part of Ibáñez's comment is factually untrue. The governor follows up this lie with another provocation, stating: 'Y yo, compañeros, les pregunto a ustedes como revolucionarios conscientes y honrados: al chaquetear de ese modo mi amigo Olivier, ¿no da pruebas de que si yo soy farsante, como él me decía hace un rato ... él, quiero decirlo, es más farsante que yo?' (186). Ibáñez's drunken accusations do not go unanswered by Olivier, who retaliates with more than just words: 'rápido e impulsivo, arrojó el champaña de su copa a la cara del gobernador y le dio en seguida, con la copa misma, un golpe en la frente' (186). Whereas in the case of Ibáñez alcohol precipitates a verbal attack, with Olivier the alcoholic vessel becomes a literal instrument for physical violence. Following the attack, 'desencadenó entonces, tan rápida como intensa, la batalla,' in which 'volaban platos y botellas... Sonó un disparo... Sonó otro... Y así se prolongó la lucha varios segundos, mezclado el olor del vino y del tabaco con el de la pólvora, y la atmosfera de los gritos con la de los fogonazos y las detonaciones' (186). As we can see, alcohol and violence share a complementary relationship in the novel. In the descriptions of the brawl, sounds of flying alcohol bottles accompany the echoes of gunshots just as the smell of wine is intertwined with that of gun powder. Through such parallels, alcohol becomes a tool for violence that is similar to the gun itself; as such, the two are simultaneously connected on a symbolic and material level. Lastly, the back-and-forth banter between Ibáñez and Olivier makes the title of the chapter –'Brindis'– ironic. That is, the toasts which would normally function as markers of comradery are seized as opportunities to carry out attacks.

The abundance of alcohol serves both an ideological and an aesthetic function in the chapter. First, it presents a clear demarcation between different social groups through the types of drinks accessible to the elites in the restaurant versus the masses dining outside. While the banquet is meant to be a celebration of the 'civismo' for all Mexicans, the material manifestations of this event capture various patterns related to social inequality. The abundance of alcohol for a select few versus the absence of alcohol for the masses denotes the unequal distribution of resources among the rich and poor. The sheer variety of alcoholic beverages offered to the guests indoors runs in stark contrast to the lack of alcohol served to the guests outside. Ibáñez's insistence that the indoor dining experience is equivalent to the one in the garden illustrates the disconnect between the material reality of the lower classes and the elites' perception of the same space. The guests' access to different types of wine, beer and liquor, and their ability to choose among them as they please, exemplify their privileged access to resources and their limitless freedom to consume them. Furthermore, the governor's framing of the banquet as a celebration of 'civismo' and his self-proclamation as a drinker of local beer capture the duplicitous style of his political rhetoric. That is, in evoking the ideals of the Revolution as the dinner's guiding principles while highlighting himself as a man of the people, Ibáñez conceptualizes national identity as a homogenous whole in which all Mexican are equal. In reality, the dinner itself serves as a demarcation of social inequality prevalent in the post-revolutionary milieu.

Viewed as an aesthetic element, alcohol functions as a symbolic actor capable of steering individuals towards comradeship or conflict. Although the drinking begins as a celebratory gesture shared by the political attendees, following Olivier's provocative comments, the drinking promptly turns excessive. As the consumption of alcohol intensifies, so does the guests' propensity towards violence. We can note this in the change it provokes in Ibáñez, who begins the night uttering a series of unifying political speeches and ends it by launching a chain of verbal attacks at Olivier. In this instance, alcohol takes on the role of agent of provocation and attack. After the physical altercation between Olivier and Ibáñez, an all-inclusive brawl ensues among all the guests, promptly ending the banquet. Whereas at the start of the banquet alcohol behaves as a social lubricant that fosters a sense of community, by the end it becomes a literal instrument for violence.

An Instrument for Violence

The chapter analyzed above presents the first explicitly violent episode in *La sombra del caudillo*. As tensions escalate among characters in the second half of the text, so too does the physical violence, and accompanying this growing (ab)use of force is alcohol. The kidnapping of Axkaná (carried out as a provocation of Aguirre by Caudillo's men) provides a clear example where alcohol is used to inflict physical harm. During the episode, we learn that 'con el cuel-

lo de la botella golpeaba el desconocido los labios de Axkaná. Lo hacía, evidentemente, con intención de causarle daño y mantenerlo dócil,' and that 'para que cesara en aquello, Axkaná bebió' (205). In this instance, alcohol bottle serves as a means for directly subduing and controlling the kidnappee. By sticking 'entre los dientes varios centímetros de la botella,' the kidnapper forces Axkaná to 'tragar enorme cantidad de líquido' such that 'no acababa de pasar todavía lo que le echaron en la boca, cuando ya estaban obligándolo a tomar otro trago...' (206). As a result, it does not take long for Axkaná to feel 'veloces amagos de una borrachera terrible, de una embriaguez extraña que lo inundaba, más que en mareo, en ahogo' (206). The imagery of Axkaná drowning in alcohol is as literal as it is symbolic. In the literal sense, the kidnappers torture Axkaná by forcing him to drink until he is inches away from death. Symbolically, the intoxication of Axkaná represents the destruction of the revolutionary ideals that he represents. That is, the political purity of his character—symbolized among many things through his lack of participation in drinking practices—is subverted by excessive alcoholic intake. Furthermore, considering that alcohol can be used as a purifying agent, the physical and metaphorical contamination of Axkaná through this agent is doubly ironic.

Another instance when alcohol is used as an instrument of power occurs shortly after the kidnapping, when Aguirre calls Coronel Zaldivar—the police chief who headed the attack—in for questioning. After disarming Zaldivar, Aguirre orders one of his associates, Cahuama, to bring 'papel de escribir, una botella de coñac, otra de tequila y tres copas' (230). When Cahuama returns, we observe that 'Aguirre cogió la botella de coñac y sirvió dos copas; luego vertió una de tequila. 'Para usted' dijo a Zaldivar, alargándole la copa de tequila. A Tarabana, en silencio, le dio una de coñac. Para sí cogió él la otra. '¡Salud!' Los tres bebieron' (231). Here, the decision to single out Zaldivar by giving him tequila instead of cognac is deliberate psychological intimidation on the part of Aguirre. When Axkaná is found on the morning after his kidnapping, we are told that he 'rezumaba tequila, literalmente, hasta por las uñas' (225). By placing in front of Zaldivar the same liquor that was used to torture Axkaná, Aguirre aims to instill fear by hinting that a potentially similar outcome awaits the coronel should he choose not to cooperate. Read in this way, the initial drinking practice shared by Zaldivar and Aguirre is not so much a customary conversation starter as it is an outward display of hostility.

Following the first drink, Aguirre's makes it known that he expects a written confession from Zaldivar. When he refuses, Aguirre informs him that 'a cambio de confesar por escrito habría usted evitado el tratamiento que merece; pero, supuesto que no confiesa usted ... tragará usted a fuerza, con embudo, todo el tequila que le quepa en el cuerpo' (233). To get a confession letter from Zaldivar, Aguirre uses tequila to threaten the coronel with the same fate as Axkaná's. Although Zaldivar agrees, 'no se puso a escribir en seguida: antes se sirvió una copa de coñac y se la bebió con ansia, la saboreó cual si no quisiera que le quedara en la boca recuerdo algu-

no del tequila que había tomado cinco minutos antes' (233). Before writing the letter, Zaldivar makes sure to savor the cognac until its aftertaste overtakes that of the tequila he drank moments earlier. Aguirre's use of tequila to threaten Zaldivar understandably left the coronel with a bad taste in his mouth. Whereas tequila invokes in him a sense of danger, cognac brings him a sense of safety. Likewise, while the Mexican liquor is utilized as a weapon, the European one signifies security, once again elevating the privileged status of the latter. By drinking the same liquor as Aguirre, the coronel returns to the same level of power as the Minister, and the cognac signifies a reached agreement. Zaldivar's varying emotional reactions toward different kinds of liquor reflect the psychosomatic role alcohol plays in the novel. For Zaldivar, tequila symbolizes threat while cognac embodies safety. The fear he experiences from one versus the calm he feels from the other are contingent on the emotional triggers associated with each type of liquor.

Although Aguirre succeeds in getting a written confession from Zaldivar, he is unable to move past what happened. Infuriated and betrayed, he resigns from his position as Minister of War and ultimately announces his intention to run for presidency, contrary to the wishes of the Caudillo. From there, tensions between the Aguirristas and the Hilaristas continue to escalate, and the decisive moment comes when Aguirre and his political allies decide to carry out an armed uprising against the Caudillo's government. Nonetheless, it is not long before news of a planned revolt reaches the state leader and an arrest warrant is issued for Aguirre and his men, forcing them to flee Mexico City.

Hubris, Betrayal, and Capture

The chapter, 'El plan de Toluca,' relates the moments when Aguirre and twelve of his closest associates arrive to their hiding place. After escaping in the middle of the night, they arrive at an obscure hotel where, with the help of their military insider, General Julián Elizondo, they will work out the details of their rebellion. Although Aguirre and his group are still being persecuted by the Caudillo, 'estaban ya bajo el amparo militar de Elizondo [y] se sentían fuertes' (296). The men anxiously wait for him to return to the hotel so that together they can start planning their next steps. In the meantime, Olivier realizes that 'las habitaciones que pidieron eran muchas; tomaría tiempo el prepararlas. Como habría, también, que esperar al general Elizondo, ... y como, por otra parte, hacía frío, pidió Olivier que se les abriese el bar' (296). Despite it being after-hours, Olivier manages to come up with a list of pretexts to justify his request to access the hotel's bar. Once everyone is there, we learn that Aguirre 'pidió su bebida cotidiana: Hennessy-Extra, la botella entera; los otros, análogamente' (296). This scene paints a very similar picture to the one depicted in the earlier chapter, 'El banquete en el bosque': a social gathering with Aguirre at its head, ordering an entire bottle of cognac while those around him follow. It also displays the theme of circularity to denote tragedy, whereby characters are stuck in a loop

of seemingly predetermined circumstances that bring about their demise. In the case of Aguirre and his supporters, the theme of tragic circularity manifests in their habitually excessive drinking, which contributes to their capture and lays ground for their execution.

Alcohol becomes a partial culprit in the seizure of the Aguirristas through its function as a simultaneously empowering and debilitating substance. As soon as the bar opens and the drinks are served, the men begin deliberating the uprising. Some generals suggest for everyone to 'alzarse en armas inmediatamente,' while Aguirre, 'entre sorbo y sorbo de coñac,' (297) contributes his own opinion. In the meantime, Olivier, who 'compartía con Aguirre y Tarabana la botella de Hennessy,' begins to jot down 'los puntos que a su juicio debían incluirse en el 'plan del movimiento'' (297). Empowered by having Elizondo's military support and filled with 'olas de plenitud interior, activadas por la misteriosa virtud del vino,' they are sure that 'la rebelión triunfaría en un mes' (297). Shortly after, Elizondo arrives at the hotel. Aguirre approaches him to discuss the details of their plan and reminds the general: 'Tienes cuatro mil hombres y somos amigos viejos, hermanos en las armas, puedes, por lo tanto ... impedir que el Caudillo cometa con nosotros un atentado infame' (299). Aguirre reasons with Elizondo, first rationally, by pointing out that he has enough troops to protect them from prosecution, and then emotionally, by reminding the general of their longstanding friendship. Elizondo responds affirmatively, stating: 'La justicia te asiste y eres mi amigo, amigo a quien debo multitud de favores. Dispón lo que quieras; mis tropas son tuyas' (300). With the general's military support secured, Aguirre and his men's excitement turns into a prolonged celebration. Almost immediately, 'pidieron más botellas ... Y en aquel estado, propenso a todos los excesos de la expansión, siguieron durante largo tiempo' (301). As we can see, alcohol accompanies the Aguirristas in their scheming and deliberations. It also empowers them by enhancing their sense of poise. Not only are they confident that they will not be found by the Caudillo, but they are also sure that their rebellion will succeed. Adding to the bravery is the promised support of Elizondo. Together, alcohol and the general's words help to instill in the men a high degree of confidence regarding their revolt, resulting in a kind of hubris. As such, the Aguirristas decide to let loose and continue drinking into the early hours of the morning.

Ultimately, the alcohol-induced arrogance of Aguirre and his men proves dangerous. In the early morning, 'cuando la fatiga y el vino empezaban a rendir a los más resistentes, apareció en la puerta un capitán seguido de otros dos oficiales, de varios sargentos y de alguna tropa' (301). When the new guests arrive everyone in the bar is either drunk or asleep. As the troops enter, 'varias voces prorrump[en] a modo de bienvenida a los soldados,' (301) with the men believing that Elizondo sent over his services for protection. In the meantime, we learn that 'los tres oficiales y tres sargentos se habían acercado hasta la mesa de Aguirre,' while 'el resto de la tropa quedó distribuido, como de intento, entre la puerta de salida y el mostrador, entre el mostrador y las mesas, entre unas mesas

y otras' (301). The strangely coordinated formation of the soldiers does not phase Olivier, who shouts, "Un trago de coñac, capitán!" ... sin esperar siquiera a que el jefe de la escolta saludase al ex ministro de la guerra' (301). Yet, Olivier's invitation does not bode well with the captain, who empties the drink he's served. In doing so, the captain disrespects his hosts and begins his visit with an act of hostility. He also makes clear that the late-night visitors are not there to join in the celebrations. Although heavily inebriated, Aguirre regains a moment of clarity and attempts to assess the situation. Yet, before he can get to his feet, he finds himself detained and disarmed along with the rest of his crew: 'el asalto había sido tan súbito, tan inverosímil, que diez segundos bastaron para que se consumara' (302). Aguirre realizes that 'cuando ... se había apartado la copa de los labios, sus amigos estaban libres; al ir a ponerla en el plato, los veía presos' (302). His measuring of time through units of alcohol consumption reflects Mitchell's ideas about the use of drinking metaphors as concepts of time. In this case, the takeover occurred in less time than it might take to have a sip of cognac; in other words, so quickly that it leaves little room for anyone to react or defend themselves. In the end, 'la aprehensión de todos había sido sorda: sin un disparo, sin una exclamación' (302). As Aguirre regains his sense of sobriety, he replays the events in his head, 'la imagen de Elizondo, las escenas del bar, las formas vagas de los soldados marcando el paso a ambos lados del auto, ... coordinándose en la conciencia,' (303). As we can see, the attackers catch Aguirre and his men completely by surprise. The almost unconscious state induced by their excessive drinking debilitates the Aguirristas. Cognitively, their judgement is impaired such that they do not see the attack coming. When it does come, they are unable to defend themselves. By getting overly lax with alcohol in the midst of an extremely tense situation, the Aguirristas let down their guard and allowed themselves to be apprehended by Caudillo's men. As such, while at the beginning of the scene alcohol serves to empower Aguirre and his men with confidence and self-assurance, by the end it functions as an impairing agent that contributes to their capture and, ultimately, their execution.

Conclusion

Alcohol occupies multiple ideo-aesthetic roles in *La sombra del caudillo*. Throughout the novel, the act of drinking and the process of inebriation reveal the transformative power of the alcoholic beverage. That is, they show how alcohol possesses the agency to influence individual actors and events. Particularly, we note this in episodes where power dynamics are being asserted or challenged. While some of these frictions are kept to a passive-aggressive minimum—often with the help of diffusing agents such as laughter and jokes—there are times when alcohol aggravates an intense confrontation and pushes it over the edge. Likewise, it frequently serves as part and parcel of the other characters' political agendas. In some cases, it also becomes a literal tool for exercising violence. Aside

from inducing physical damage, alcohol works equally well as an instrument for psychosomatic torture. Together, these instances illustrate the extent of alcohol's agency and its influence over other characters.

Similarly, the drinking practices depicted in the novel offer a commentary on the social realities of the post-revolutionary milieu. By analyzing who is drinking, where and how much, we can note how questions of gender, race and class are negotiated via literary representation. While excessive drinking is often equated with masculinity, excessive consumption is not revered in the text. Instead, it is presented as a dualistic social practice capable of facilitating states of comradery or conflict. Likewise, the types of liquor and food consumed at celebratory events, including who has access to what resources, provide insight into the prevailing racial and class disparities occurring on a societal level. The apathetic yet manipulative attitudes that characters like Ibáñez express towards these disparities further denote the disconnect between the inclusive, populist rhetoric employed by elites in the name of the Revolution and the exclusionary customs and social practices in which they engage.

Finally, the ideo-aesthetic role acquired by alcohol interacts with and reinforces the theme of tragedy. On the one hand, a dominant notion in the novel is that once one is caught inside the immoral web of corruption, one is destined to face a tragic ending. The coming about of tragedy is portrayed as a seemingly inexplicable process with a definitively predictable ending—as much as individual actors like Aguirre attempt to steer clear of trouble, somehow trouble always finds them. On the other hand, there are times when the tragic ending awaiting those who engage in the corrupt world of Mexican politics appears as a perfectly rational outcome. Driven by the logic that the pursuit of individual interests trumps joint loyalty, this broader mechanism of corruption adheres to a set of predictably assessable actions. We see this enacted in characters like Olivier, Ibáñez and Elizondo, whose political allegiances oscillate throughout the novel depending on the personal gains at stake. Alongside this ambivalent conceptualization of tragedy as an irrationally rational occurrence in Mexican politics, alcohol emerges as an active facilitator of the tragic process. In episodes like the capture of Aguirre and his men, alcohol is a simultaneously enabling and debilitating agent whereby the increasing quantity of its consumption steers its affective influence from empowering to impairing effects. More importantly, the habitually excessive drinking habits of the Aguirristas contribute to the overarching theme of aesthetic tragedy through the cyclical imagery that denotes them. Ultimately, reading alcohol as a transdisciplinary agent allows us to appreciate the complementarity of the ideological and aesthetic elements at play in *La sombra del caudillo*. That is, alcohol's ideo-aesthetic function allows us to see that it is both symbolic and literal, ambiguous and explicit, circular and linear, making it a salient transdisciplinary element in the novel.

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