

**Drugs, Sex, Food, Alcohol, and Revenge: the Motivating Forces in the
Pursuit of Pleasure in *Alacranes en su tinta* by Juan Bas**

by

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Abstract

At the core of Basque author Juan Bas's novel, *Alacranes en su tinta*, is the incessant pursuit of pleasurable experiences involving food, drugs, alcohol, sex, and revenge. Each element serves as a source of pleasure for Bas's main characters, Pacho and Asti, and their interactions with these elements direct the overall development of the plotline on various levels from beginning to end. This thesis looks at the interaction of these elements and the psychological explanation behind their motivation and pleasure-producing capacities. It incorporates historical conceptual understandings as well as the advances being made in the field of Neuroscience in relation to our understanding of the human psyche, the experience of pleasure, and motivation. Within each dedicated sub-chapter for the five pleasure-producing elements, the actions taken by the characters Pacho and Asti are examined through these theoretical perspectives while discussing their impact and importance to the development of the plotline. During this process, a notable transition occurs in how pleasure is derived from each element – ranging from a purely biological explanation to one that focuses on the psychological aspects of our experience of pleasure. The examination of these themes transforms Bas's work into a springboard for further study related to the interaction between the chemical and cognitive components of human motivation and the experience of pleasure and may serve to establish connections and correlations between current cultural trends within Basque, Spanish, and Western societies.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the first pages of his novel *Alacranes en su tinta* (2002), Juan Bas includes a quote from the poem “Hoy te gocé, Bilbao” (Today I celebrated you, Bilbao) by Miguel de Unamuno – another acclaimed Basque author whose works have grounded him firmly within the 20th Century Spanish literary canon. The quote simply states “el mundo entero es un Bilbao más grande,” and, in doing so, it implies that in many ways this city is representative of much of the rest of the world. With the lives and pleasurable pursuits of its two main characters as its focal point, Bilbao has transformed into a microcosms for the ideas this study intends to explore. Its ample illustrations from the daily lives of each of these characters provide us with an intimate look into current cultural trends in Bilbao, and, in the process of exemplifying these cultural standards, they implore us to discover the correlations not only with the rest of Spain but with the vast majority of western countries, including our own. At the same time, one cannot assume that a Basque from Bilbao will behave in the same way as a Madrileño nor a New Yorker; cultural restrictions and norms dictate otherwise. But, as modern science has proven, we must also acknowledge the fact that physiologically we are the same and therefore motivated and controlled by the same chemical processes governed by our brains. While the particular cultural trends may vary, the pursuit of pleasure through the material – in this case through drugs, sex, food, alcohol, and revenge – is universal. Within this analysis, I will explore how these five elements of pleasure motivate the main characters Pacho Murga and Antóntxu Astigarraga (o Asti) and identify how they affect both the development of these characters and the plotline of this work. Through the application of various combined theoretical approaches, it will be noted in how character motivations and the experience of pleasure transition from purely biological to

psychological experiences, including the hijacking of biological systems to serve psychological motives.

As cultural boundaries begin to blur in cadence with the rapid globalization of the modern world, consumerism has become an inescapable part of our culture (at the very least in the United States if not elsewhere in the Western world and beyond). We are often captivated by the next electronic device, the newest fashion trend, or the next big thing in culinary innovation, and it is hard to deny the motivating power these material things hold over us. Though these observations may seem obvious to most readers and participants in this powerful economic process, it soon becomes evident that studies concerning these trends have largely been absent from current publications and databases such as the Modern Language Association's International Bibliography. As this lack of research become apparent, it only encourages the further development of studies concerning these topics within the field of Spanish Literature and the greater field of general Literary Studies as a whole.

Though preliminary in nature, this examination intends to explore the implications of these consumer-driven motivations within a previously unexamined work that offers the right combination of elements for an examination of these cultural trends on multiple levels. Through his masterful portrayal of convincing characters and scenes from their daily lives, the works of Juan Bas become our windows into the current culture and controversies of the Basque Country now and in the past several decades. At the same time, it is important to recognize that works such as *Alacranes en su tinta* have gained much praise from readers in Spain and Europe, but, perhaps due to their topics or their position as literature of the peripheries, Bas's novels have won little attention within the academic sphere. Nevertheless, because of its strong reflection of

current tendencies, this particular novel written by a Basque author better known by his readers than by academics, will serve as the springboard for this investigation.

Though these works serve as faithful representations of Basque culture, it is not uncommon to face challenges in interpreting and understanding their significance. While historically theory has enabled a deeper analysis of literary works, in recent years the field of Psychoanalysis has lost much of its esteem and has experienced various drastic changes. Perhaps one of the most notable changes has been the negation of many of the ideas of Freud and more recently the application of recent advances being made in the field of Neuroscience have opened new perspectives that provide us with an understanding of the processes and workings of the human brain (Barry 92). But, for Psychoanalysis to continue to have relevance as field and as a literary theory, it must adapt to a world that is evermore scientific in nature and less conceptual in regards to our understanding of the human psyche. As the current field of Psychology has already begun to embrace, it is essential that our perceptions come from concrete evidence provided by neuroscientific advances than from the now defunct, abstract models of the past.

While these theoretical tools enable us to explore these themes, the work itself serves as a window into a particular culture at this moment in history. Although the majority of literary theories of the past 40 years have tried to destroy the idea of “great books” whose value was based on the close-minded, ideological concepts of Liberal Humanism, we cannot deny that literature contains information at the social and psychological level that provides us with a greater understanding of the conflicts and the reality of contemporary life. Though inherent ideological inclinations remain inescapable for both authors and literary critics, we cannot deny that the concepts within literary works add to our knowledge of human experience and support

the idea that literature will continue to have significance within our society as both a reflection and a sounding board for our triumphs, virtues, and vices.

With respect to the enlightening capacity of literature, the novel *Alacranes en su tinta* enables us to explore the function of pleasure-seeking behavior and how these pursuits serve as catalysts of human action and as examples of our experience of reality through the material. Pleasure motivates all human beings to seek out that which brings us happiness or which produces a sensation of well-being and, at the same time, avoid that which causes pain or displeasure. Within the framework of the novel, much of what motivates these characters is deeply connected with that which is material (in contrast to any higher or more spiritual motivations). It is physical objects and the actions taken to obtain them that bring a sensation – many times fleeting – of pleasure which propels these beings to continue to respond in one way or to be moved to act. But because that which is material is also ephemeral, these same characters enter into a never-ending cycle where an incessant search for the next thing that will provide pleasure becomes all consuming. It is through this process that the motivating capacity of pleasure-seeking behavior is seen at its fullest, as an impulse that never ceases to drive us forward. Within my own investigation of the novel *Alacranes en su tinta*, these characters will demonstrate how drugs, sex, food, alcohol, and revenge serve as motivation and as catalysts for both the actions taken by them and for the plotline as a whole.

Chapter 2: Juan Bas – his life, his works, and surroundings

In examining the works of Basque author, Juan Bas, it is obvious that he is an author faithful to his roots, who brings to us from the peripheries a window into the culture and history of his birth city, Bilbao, and also of the Basque Country in general. Many of his works find their origins in fragments from modern history, and their themes often confront controversies such as the Basque terrorist group, ETA, or relate to fragments of daily Basque life such as their rich gastronomic traditions and pastimes. In the process, these works take us to a world apart from our own, where the characters carry out their lives in a truly Basque environment full of vices, conflicts, and pleasures. It is in our appreciation of Bas's origins, works, and surroundings that we begin to value and fully comprehend the contributions of this Bilbaoan, Basque, and Spanish author.

Bas was born on December 19, 1959 in Bilbao and his childhood and adolescence took place during a crucial period in Spanish history – the end of the dictatorship of General Franco and the transition to a newly established democracy. Franco would die in November of 1975, when Bas was just 16 years old. But it would be another six years until 1981 when Bas published his first professional work – a script for the radio serial on Radio 3 entitled *Los casos de la Ribera: las andanzas de un detective marginal y fumador de hachís por el casco viejo de Bilbao*. In many ways this first work, as the title eludes, exemplifies the essence and common preoccupations of this author – a strong sense of regionalism coupled with an interest in marginalized peoples, drug use, and the skillful use of elements of mystery.

In 1983, a mandatory period with the army brought him to Barcelona where he would begin working as a scriptwriter for several popular comics, including El Víbora, Totem and Cimoc. Bas would continue to work and live in Barcelona for another three years in which he

also wrote several articles for *Playboy* and *Penthouse* – not of an erotic nature but of his characteristic “género negro” style. Even though he worked on several projects during this period, none of them were enough to earn a living and, looking back, Bas describes this time saying “me dio para vivir a salto de mata” (“Biografía” 1). In 1986, he returned to Bilbao to work as an administrative assistant and spent three years in this “oscuro puesto” before beginning a career as a television screenwriter.

In 1989, Bas began living exclusively from his work as a screenwriter and co-wrote his first situational comedy entitled “Juntos y revueltos” with Juan Vázquez in this same year. According to Bas, this first screenplay “fue bastante mala,” but in the following years he would continue to work as a screenwriter on various projects including commercials, documentaries, industrial videos, and several biographies (“Biografía” 1). Bas calls most of these projects “olvidables,” but through an assignment in Madrid he would meet and later become close friends with Fernando Marías. Later in 1996, Bas and Marías worked on their own series entitled “Páginas ocultas de la historia: historias de ficción de fondo histórico,” which were false documentaries that were a huge success all across Spain. This popular series first appeared on TVE in 1999 and would be the key work in Bas’s transition from screenwriter to author (“Biografía” 1).

According to Bas, he felt like he had exhausted his efforts as a screenwriter and that the normal progression at this point was to either become a director or a narrative writer. Since he had no interest in becoming a director, he decided to dedicate his talents to writing. With the help of Marías, the two screenwriters converted the “Páginas ocultas” into a novel and had it published with the Destino publishing house in 1999. Bas followed this first work with another series of short stories published with Destino in 2000. This collection, called *La taberna de los*

tres monos: y otros cuentos sobre el póquer, would be his first solo creation after working with Marías. Bas describes the book saying “La presencia del póquer en todos los cuentos aporta la tensión, análisis psicológico y suspense que acompañan a este apasionante juego” (“Libros” 1). His next projects would be two juvenile historical fiction novels – *El oro de los Carlistas* (2001) and *Glabro, legionario de Roma* (2002) – as well as the first publication of *Alacranes en su tinta* (2002). *Alacranes* would become his most popular and successful novel to date, with five editions in print with Destino and several other editions available in German, French, Italian, and Russian. On the back cover of the first Destino edition, the publishers describe the book as “Una novela provocadora, cruel, amoral, apasionante y tierna, articulada a través de un humor hilarante y negrísimo.” The novel won the Silver Plume Award for most copies sold during the Feria del libro de Bilbao in 2002 and soon after Alma-ata International Pictures purchased the film rights. Bas states that “Me siento muy honrado de que bastantes años después de su primera publicación, siga viva, dándome satisfacciones y consiguiendo nuevos lectores” (“Libros” 1). Furthermore, Bas was also able to fulfill a long-time goal, saying “con este libro cumplí el sueño de publicar en Francia en la mítica Série Noire de Gallimard,” an honor for any aspiring author writing in the “género negro” style (“Libros” 1).

Only a year after publishing this remarkably successful novel, Bas published a collection of essays related to drinking called *Tratado sobre la resaca* (2003) and then another novel, *La cuenta atrás* in 2004. He followed this work with the second book in his “Trilogía de Exceso” – *Voracidad* (2006) – which kept Pacho Murga as protagonist and dealt with similar themes as *Alacranes*. In 2007, he published another compilation of his writings, this time a collection of articles he published in various newspapers from 2000 to 2007 called *El número de tontos*. His next work would be his only work to date to be first published outside of Spain, a humoristic

essay entitled “La resaca de amor” that first appeared in print in Italy in 2008 and later in Spain in 2009. Shortly after, Bas worked together with his daughter, María, to publish a children’s book entitled *Los desastres de Asier Cabezón* (2009) which appeared in both Spanish and Euskera editions. Finally after a few years focusing on his journalistic duties, Bas published another humoristic essay called “En mi furor interno” (2011) and then in 2012 finished his “Trilogía de Exceso” with the novel *Ostras para Demitri*. With this most recent work, Bas says farewell to his protagonist Pacho Murga, stating “Ya se estaba pareciendo demasiado a mí o yo a él” (“Libros”). In a recent newspaper article, Bas continued to describe Murga saying “No sé si el personaje evoluciona o involuciona, pero se va haciendo mayor y más descreído de sí mismo y de toda la raza humana, amargado, y le pasan cada vez putadas mayores” (Sierra 1).

While the trilogy has ended, the popularity of these works is likely to continue, especially with the possibility of a film version in the near future. Within the Basque Country, this collection of works has brought fame to Bas having won the Premio Euskadi de Literatura in 2007 for *Voracidad*. As further testament to the popularity of *Alacranes* within Bilbao, two local chefs have opened their own “El mapimundi de Bilbao”, in honor and named after the restaurant Pacho and Asti open in the novel, which features several dishes inspired by the novel and is decorated with quotes from the novel on the walls (Gómez 1).

Even though the popularity of Bas’s literary works may be obvious among readers, only one academic article has been published to date. This article, entitled "Toxic Substances, Semiotic Forms: Towards a Socio- and Textual Analysis of Altered Senses" by Gianfranco Marrone, focuses on Bas’s thoughts on hangovers which he presents in his book *Tratado sobre la resaca* (first published in 2003 with Ediciones Temas de Hoy).

While this article is currently the only academic piece written on this author, Bas has also made a name for himself as the chief organizer and as a participant in the newly inaugurated international humor fest, “La Risa de Bilbao,” held each October in his birth city and home. When asked “Why a humor fest and why in Bilbao?” Bas simply responded “se me ocurrió a mí” (Asry 1). With the goal of converting his birthplace into “una referencia europea de humor literario,” Bas spent three years obtaining the necessary local governmental permissions to hold the event, a task that was achieved through the assistance of the local Mayor and the Minister of Culture. In an interview that appeared in *El país*, Bas further supported his choice of Bilbao as the location for his festival, saying “La idiosincrasia del bilbaíno valora el sentido del humor. Tenemos una forma un tanto propia y peculiar, con ese afán por el exceso, la fanfarronada y la exageración. Nuestro sentido del humor no pega mal con un evento como este” (Asry 1). In total, the premier event lasted five days, spanning from Wednesday to Sunday and featuring authors from Spain, France and England and a series of lectures, round table events, and book fairs. Some of the key participants included Tom Sharp, Lola Beccaria, Rodrigo Fresán, Fernando Trías de Bes, Raúl Argemi, Fernando Iwaski, Kirmen Uribe, and Bas’s friend and writer, Fernando Marías (GPS 8-9). The event was held again this past October and Bas hopes for it to continue to grow and expand in the coming years.

In returning to the novel pertaining to this investigation, *Alacranes en su tinta* is the first of a trilogy of novels surrounding the life, mishaps, and friendships of their protagonist, Pacho Murga. *Alacranes* focuses on the relationship between two unlikely friends who first meet in Bilbao – the directionless, Bilbaoan slacker Pacho and the mysterious gourmet assassin chef Asti. The novel skips from scene to scene and begins with Pacho’s journey to the hospital by taxi on the New Year’s Eve 2001. We are later introduced to Pacho’s compulsive gambling and

drinking habits, his rough first encounter with Asti, and various other fragments that tell the story of these two characters and Asti's troubled past as a taster for Franco that later drove him to seek revenge. After a violent encounter at the Twins Bar in which Asti threatens to beat Pacho for bringing his dog into the bar, a severely drunken Asti is thrown out into the street and Pacho is left fearing for his life. After several weeks, Pacho discovers that Asti is the head chef of his favorite gourmet pincho restaurant and the two begin to talk after Asti apologizes for his outburst of violence in the Twins. The two quickly become good friends and decide to open their own pincho restaurant called El mapimundi de Bilbao in a posh neighborhood near the Guggenheim Museum. Finally, in the hours before a grand New Year's Eve party featuring the culinary delights of this now immensely popular and revered chef, Pacho discovers Asti's true motives in opening the restaurant and his plan to assassinate the final member of a failed plan to poison General Franco in 1962, when Asti and his father were his tasters.

Asti, then just a young boy, was convinced by his revolutionary uncle to help him and several other members of the terrorist group, ETA, to poison Franco with a special type of neurotoxin placed in the dictator's favorite dish – *chipirones*. Believing he held the antidote in a capsule below his tongue, Asti ingested the poisoned squid right before it was given to the aging dictator, but Franco refused the dish, saying that the trip through the Basque mountains had caused his stomach to be upset. The dish was taken back to the kitchen, where Asti's father ate the rest and both were poisoned. Asti would slip into a coma and later paralysis that lasted 13 years and his father died from the incident – both considered to be just sacrifices for Eta's cause.

During this period of paralysis, Asti laid in a hospital bed with only the ability to hear and smell. He spent his days plotting his revenge with these desires giving him the motivation to continue on while also driving him mad. When he regains his ability to move, his mission for

revenge begins, and in nearing its end he leaves his story behind for Pacho. Pacho encounters Asti's story saved on a diskette left for him in the bar as he prepares to deliver one last dish to the party at the Guggenheim. He learns of Asti's past and his systematic assassination of each member of the failed plot with the exception of one last member – the lehendakari (the president of the Basque Country). Pacho rushes to the museum before finishing the last few pages and believes that Asti is carrying a bomb under his costume of the Basque Santa Clausesque character known as Olentzero. When Pacho alerts the police, they gun down Asti in the middle of the party and then Pacho realizes he had been mistaken; Asti didn't plan to bomb the crowd. Instead he had poisoned the lehendakari's favorite dish- his famous oyster pinchos – as well as the majority of the attendees. Pacho leaves Asti's body and tries to catch a taxi to the hospital before the rest of the crowd realizes they too have been poisoned. At this point, the fragmented vision of the novel comes full-circle and as readers we realize that they first scenes in the taxi are actually the end of the novel – Pacho's journey to the hospital. We never know if Pacho lives or dies, but we are left with either his hallucination or his posthumous experience of meeting again with his dear friend Asti and his beloved dog Milo as they are driven off into the night on a deserted highway somewhere in the Basque country.

While his novel provides a window into the lives of two very Basque protagonists – Pacho and Asti – in doing so, Bas breaks away from many of the literary norms of Spanish literature by focusing almost entirely on the culture and controversies of a region from the peripheries. Some of the most influential and talented writers of the Spanish literary canon such as Miguel de Unamuno and Pío Baroja have called the Basque Country home, but unlike Bas these authors tended to overlook the rich cultural heritage and uniqueness of this region in favor of the far away plains of Castile. Instead of focusing on writing a truly Basque narrative,

Unamuno, Baroja and many others of their generation choose to extol the image of a wholly Castilian vision of Spain while ignoring almost entirely the peripheries of Cataluña, Galicia, the Basque Country, and even Valencia (Kurlansky 173). Surprisingly enough, despite their marginalized position, most Basques were Carlists, partially due to the great influence of the Catholic Church and partly due to more rebellious, historical ties against the monarchy (Hooper 232). After disagreements over foral rights, two key provinces of the Basque Country – Guipúzcoa and Biscay - were left on the wrong side of a conflict with General Franco. Their anti-Franco stance during the Spanish Civil War would result in what many would consider retaliation with the bombing of Guernica in April of 1937 (Hooper 244). Little did many Basques know that later on Franco's attempt to create a unified Spain would suppress much of their rights and forbid them to speak or write their native language, Euskera (Hooper 232). Only in the waning years of the dictatorship would a new interest in Euskera emerge, and since then its use has been growing among the inhabitants of this region.

Out of years of oppression under Franco, the subversive group ETA, or Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (the Basque Nation and Freedom), began to form in 1960. Their original goals were to oppose the General and his dictatorship and to seek the independence of the Basque Country from the rest of Spain. The roots of this movement began almost a century before with writings of revolutionary and Basque nationalist, Sabino Arana, and then later with the establishment of the Basque Nationalist Party, or PNV, in 1894 (Hooper 245). One of their goals, as reflected in the failed poisoning depicted in *Alacranes*, was the assassination of General Franco, and they would succeed at eliminating one of his closest advisors, Prime Minister Admiral Carrero Blanco, in a car bombing in Madrid in 1973 (Kurlansky 253). Over the years ETA would be divided into violent and non-violent factions and “each time the more violent, less intellectual

group survived intact” (Hooper 245). Though a so-called permanent ceasefire agreement was made in 2011, in past years ETA has been a source of conflict in the Basque Country and much of the rest of Spain with an estimated 800 individuals dead at the expense of their efforts.

In an interview from 2009, Bas stated that while some Basques are still divided on the issue of independence, the desire to end the violence from ETA is unanimous (“Email” 1). He is quoted saying “es muy destacable la progresiva concienciación de la gran mayoría de la sociedad civil vasca de que hay que oponerse explícitamente a ETA. Ha sido un buen logro ilegalizar a sus brazos políticos y sacarlos de las instituciones” (“Email” 22). His position on the actions of ETA and their movements have been made clear through his stance within his works, but he sees their sentiments as a continued threat. Bas commented that “todo nacionalismo es un sentimiento, no una ideología. Esto hace que sea difícil razonar con los nacionalistas. Es un sentimiento de nación, de patria, exclusivo (en el sentido de excluir, de mantener fuera) hacia todo y todos los que no se considera lo nuestro y los nuestros” (“Email” 1). There is no current historical evidence to support this particular assassination attempt by poisoning described in Bas’s novel, but the author seems to suggest that Franco was constantly fearful of being poisoned and took with him a staff of tasters wherever he travelled.

Though ETA continues to cause controversy in the Basque Country, it is just one of many elements of Basque culture that Bas describes in his novel – two others being their affection for food and drink. The people of the Basque Country are known for their green wine called txacolí, as well as for their passion for local ciders and beers and more recently the world-renowned wines of their neighboring region, La Rioja. John Hooper, in his book *The New Spaniards*, intends to link the Basques’ appreciation for food and drink to a time when the poor peoples of this region would eat in excess whenever the opportunity arose (usually during festivals and

other community celebrations) (239). The establishment of countless gastronomical societies in this region and the fervor for gourmet culinary creations seem to provide further testament to the idea that food and drink are essential elements of Basque culture. Paddy Woodworth, in his book *The Basque Country: A Cultural History*, also portrays the Basques as avid drinkers and *aficionados* of gourmet cooking through a series of culturally centered vignettes, but links these tendencies to modern, consumer culture (195). F. Xavier Medina makes a similar assertion in his article “Social Wine,” where he explains the significance of good wines accompanied by gourmet pinchos to the establishment of Basque social identity through the practice of “ritualized interaction” known as *txikiteo* (a form of Basque bar-hopping involving wine) (117). Bas exemplifies these tendencies in the drunken rages, late-night bar crawls, and general appreciation of eating, living and doing everything in excess that both Pacho and Asti demonstrate within the novel. Through their consumption of material goods, his characters seem to radiate the current conceptions of what it means to be Basque.

Because his characters and their surroundings reflect the reality of modern Basque culture, the novel provides a high-degree of verisimilitude. The events of the story are fictional but nevertheless credible. The characters are consistent in their behavior and well-developed, there are multiple allusions to actual historical events in Spain, and there is an over-abundance of pop culture references and cultural norms (or deviations from them) presented within Basque society. While it is easy to appreciate the cultural and historical elements of this tale, Bas’s work also allows us to go deeper into the motivations and meaning behind his character’s pursuits of pleasure at an individual and social level.

Chapter 3: Approaches to Understanding Pleasure and Motivation

In the process of determining how pleasure-seeking behavior relates to character motivation, it is necessary to identify what is meant by both the terms “pleasure” and “motivation”. Even though their definitions vary from field to field, we are able to connect our basic idea of both terms to their more specific and scientific definitions. At the most basic level, we know that “pleasure” is what we experience when something “feels good.” But for the purpose of this investigation we must go deeper – what does pleasure mean at the neurochemical level? How can it motivate us? Is it an emotional response, an impulse to consume, or both? The term “motivation” is similar in that we know it signifies the desire “to want to do something or not.” But we must ask ourselves, what does being “motivated” really mean? Does it mean we act on our desires? Or is it simply the manifestation of our emotions through action? It is through a deeper look into the meaning of both terms that we are able to better analyze and draw conclusions about how pleasure-seeking behavior and character motivation are related and what they reveal to us as readers and researchers.

In many ways our basic notion of pleasure holds true within the field of Literary Studies. *Webster’s Dictionary* defines pleasure as “a feeling of enjoyment or delight; a cause or source of this feeling; (or a) desire; preference” (517). Therefore, in the traditional sense, a character experiences pleasure when they act upon or receive an action or item that gives them this feeling of enjoyment within the greater framework of a literary work. It is when we take a psychological approach to understanding a character’s emotions and actions that the term “pleasure” takes on new meanings.

Within the field of psychology there exist two distinct definitions of the term “pleasure” as well – a historical definition based on Greek philosophy which relates to the early work of

Sigmund Freud and a more recent, neurochemical definition. Freud, considered to be the father of Psychoanalysis, developed the concept of the *pleasure principle*. This concept, often erroneously considered as a uniquely Freudian creation, first came to us from the Greek and Roman philosophers and was known as the *hedonistic principle* (Higgins 11). The stance of these early philosophers is evident in the writings of the Roman, Cicero, who commented on the earlier writings of the Greek philosopher, Epicurus, saying:

“(Epicurus) holds (pleasure) to be the Chief Good, pain the Chief Evil. This he sets out to prove as follows: Every animal, as soon as it is born, seeks for pleasure, and delights in it as the Chief Good, while it recoils from pain as the Chief Evil, and so far as possible avoids it. This it does as long as it remains unperverted, at the prompting of Nature’s own unbiased and honest verdict.” (1.9.29-30)

The Freudian concept, as well as that of antiquity, is based on the idea that human beings operate through the search for that which produces pleasure and the avoidance of that which causes pain. The only difference is that, for Freud, it is the *id* of the unconscious that is responsible for the action of seeking or avoiding (Straker 1).

In concordance with the *pleasure principle* but relating to our motivations, Freud’s discussion of *repression* also plays an important role in a psychoanalytical analysis of characters. According to Freud, *repression* is related to the constant urge of our unconscious that motivates us to reveal our desires, secrets, and most basic thoughts which we have tried to inhibit (Barry 96). In many ways, this idea encourages us to examine how character behavior may also reflect that which has been repressed and what effects this repression may have caused on their desire to act or to pursue something pleasurable or not. Though interesting, this sort of examination poses an additional challenge in that it creates the possibility that, regardless of how sure one may

become of a character's reasons for behaving in one way or another, there will always exist the possible intervention of repressed motives.

While Freud's principles opened the door for a preliminary type of analysis of pleasure, the field of modern Psychology has chosen to negate much of his ideas in favor of scientific discovery and empirical research concerning the human psyche. In further examining how we can be motivated by the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, it is necessary to move beyond the early conceptual ideas of *pleasure* through an analysis at the neurochemical level.

In his book entitled *Affective Neuroscience: the Foundations of Human and Animal Emotions*, the neuroscientist, Jaak Panksepp, takes on the task of defining our relationship as humans with pleasurable experiences at the neurochemical level. Within Panksepp's model, pleasure is closely related with motivation and regulatory systems within the brain. He calls this important component of pleasure-seeking behavior the SEEKING system, or the "foraging/exploration/investigation/curiosity/interest/expectancy SEEKING system that leads organisms to eagerly pursue the fruits of their environment – from nuts to knowledge, so to speak" (Panksepp 145). This SEEKING system is responsible for the invigoration of the brain's systems which we call "motivation" or "drive," and which Panksepp asserts that "clearly this type of feeling contributes to many distinct aspects of our active engagement with the world" and "to extract meaning from our various circumstances" (145).

Within the SEEKING system, there also exist two essential components: the *appetitive* and *consummatory* impulses or motivations. These components correspond to an on/off switch in our brain that activates and deactivates the SEEKING system. According to Panksepp, "the appetitive phase of behavior corresponds to high arousal of the LH system (the lateral hypothalamic region of the brain), while consummatory pleasures are more closely related to the

offset of neuronal activity in this system” (147). Stimulating the LH then results in our motivation to seek some pleasure, which once attained/consumed then deactivates this same system. Because the SEEKING system is an integral part of our brain functioning, so are the *appetitive* and *consummatory* impulses as well. In other words, the desire to seek and consume is hard-wired into our brains and remains a constant part of our neurochemistry from birth (Panksepp 146).

But how do these impulses relate to the experience of pleasure? According to Panksepp, pleasure is achieved through reaching a state of *homeostasis* (164), which is regulated by an intricate system of retention and release of dopamine and opiates within the brain (184). *Homeostasis* is reached when various complex bodily systems are in equilibrium (processes such as those which regulate our temperature, blood oxygen levels, energy levels etc. and which are usually essential to survival). Panksepp reiterates that “sensations generate pleasure or displeasure in direct relation to their influence on the homeostatic equilibrium of the body,” in which “a variety of distinct pleasures may arise from essentially the same types of neurochemical systems”(164) (in this case the release of dopamine or opiates). From this comes the need to determine “set points” which enable us to determine whether an experience is pleasurable or not in relation to how chemically imbalanced our systems have become and how difficult it is for them to achieve homeostasis again. This fact is reaffirmed in the conclusion that “Pleasure is nature’s way of telling the brain that it is experiencing stimuli that are useful – events that support the organism’s survival by helping to rectify biological imbalances” (Panksepp 182). From this perspective, pleasure is equivalent to a compensation being made in order to return ourselves to a balanced state. We seek some element because the pleasure received compensates for something the neurochemistry of our brains tells us we are lacking.

In regards to how pleasure is actually experienced, we must go further into the workings of the brain in relation to the limbic system which actually controls the release of dopamine and other opiates. This system is set up to reward behaviors such as eat, drinking, or having sex by releasing chemicals – primarily dopamine – which stimulates the pleasure centers of the brain when such behaviors occur. Thomas H. Schmid talks about this process in detail when he states:

“Then something activates the VTA (ventral tegmental area) neurons, they release dopamine into your nucleus accumbens. When this happens, you feel pleasure. A variety of natural events, such as eating when you are hungry or drinking when you are thirsty, turns on the brain reward system.”(170)

It is through a combined effect of the Panksepp’s SEEKING system and knowledge of how the limbic system functions that we are able to understand how pleasure works within our brains and then understand how it may motivate us to act.

As key components to understanding both Panksepp’s SEEKING system and his ideas on pleasure, there are two basic, but nevertheless important, assumptions being made: first that emotions are the result of chemical processes (and not vice-versa) and are our way of making sense of these chemical stimuli, and secondly that the concept we call our “consciousness” is very much controlled by these chemical processes. In relation to this second postulation, the author states:

“It may be hard for us to accept that human strivings are ultimately driven by the welling up of ancient neurochemicals in primitive parts of the brain. This view does not easily fit our conception of ourselves as moral and spiritual beings. Although the details of human hopes are surely beyond the imagination of other creatures, the evidence now clearly

indicates that certain intrinsic aspirations of all mammalian minds, those of mice as well as men, are driven by the same ancient neurochemistries.”(144-5)

The question then becomes: are we able to have any level of control over these processes and how might we accomplish this? While “control” of these systems may be beyond our current capacities, I propose that through remembrance and learning one becomes able to anticipate the stimulus and response and then work to control/limit the resulting behaviors. Panksepp reaffirms the idea of learning/remembering these stimuli and responses when he states:

“In other words the SEEKING system is initially activated by the unconditional distal incentive cues of rewards, such as smells and sights; eventually, through learning, neutral cues can come to arouse and channel activity in this system through a reinforcement process that is linked to the inhibition of approach in some presently unknown manner.”(147)

What he proposes is that regardless of the fact that we do not fully comprehend the implications of this system, we are able to acknowledge that learning and remembrance can occur in relation to these pleasurable experiences. Therefore, in many ways controlling our behavior in relation to pleasure comes down to controlling our responses to neurochemical processes that are beyond our control.

Even though Panksepp’s neurochemical analysis of pleasure and motivation seems to have suggested that the two are almost entirely interrelated, it is also important to recognize those distinctions which do exist. In the same way that “pleasure” may be defined differently according to the context and field of study, the term “motivation” functions in a similar manner within this investigation. From a general, non-scientific perspective pertaining to the field of Literary Studies, “motivation” pertains exclusively to the characters and their reasons for

choosing to act or not. Peter Auger, in his book *The Anthem Dictionary of Literary Terms and Theory*, reiterates this idea when he defines motivation as “the reason that a character acts as he or she does (based on) personality, circumstance, or self-protection/interest” (191). Furthermore, he adds that motivation is also essential to the creation of a unified and credible storyline (191). For example, in the case of Bas’s novel, we might determine that the character, Asti, is motivated to seek revenge after the suffering from a 13 year paralysis caused by the failed assassination attempt of General Franco. At this level, it is important to recognize that, while valid within the field of Literature, an analysis of character motivation of this type remains relatively superficial, and the possibility exists that these hypotheses may be true or false. It is with the additional assistance of a psychological analysis based on findings related to the motivating forces of the human psyche that we are able to better identify and determine these motivating factors. Thanks to the additional dimension this field provides, we are able to examine motivation at a much deeper and more profound level.

In comparison with the definition provided by the field of Literary Studies, within the field of Psychology the term “motivation” contains a high level of complexity, with connotations based on long-standing traditions and which are simultaneously parts of a constantly evolving process of interpretation and reinterpretation as new discoveries are made and research carried out. The principal fields that deal specifically with motivation are that of Motivational Psychology and Positive Psychology – two closely related sub-categories of the more general field of Psychology. While both fields have their corresponding approaches, they are equally useful in providing insight into the different aspects of human motivation. In general, the term “motivation” has been key to the study of human behavior, and due to its long-standing presence in the field it has taken on different meanings and names over the years. Understanding

motivation has been an integral part of understanding the “why” behind human action as well as being closely related to the experience of pleasure and pain (as described earlier in relation to pleasure).

As earlier described in the work of the neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp, we are able to assert that the SEEKING system is largely responsible for our motivations as the neurochemical level and that these motivations lead us to seek pleasurable experiences. Motivational Psychology, on the other hand, takes a more conceptual approach that has only recently begun to take into consideration the advances being made in the field of Neuroscience. These modern conceptions function at a limited level in relation to what are described as neural hierarchies/heterarchies that categorize neurological responses with the goal of bridging the gap between our understanding of emotion, motivation and cognition at the neurochemical level (Bertson and Cacioppo 199). Nevertheless, historically Motivational Psychology has been closely related with the attainment of goals and the motives required to encourage a person to take steps towards achieving those goals. In an introductory chapter to the *Handbook of Motivational Science*, psychologist, Susan T. Fiske, defines motivation saying:

“Motivation combines both (instinct and traits) to operate at a manageable level of analysis, and its agents – goals – are even more specific. For our purposes, a *motive* is a *predisposition to behave in a directed fashion*. Motives act as the motor for action, energizing purposive behavior that serves a function for the individual. Motives operate via specific goals in specific situations.”(4).

In many ways, this definition is reminiscent of the literary definition presented earlier by Auger, but in actuality the exploration of these ideas is a daunting task that results from the multiple perspectives and conceptions that have risen only within Motivational Psychology.

For the purpose of this study, the focus has been on two classic approaches that relate to the *hedonistic principle* and our desire for control of ourselves and our environment. The earliest conceptions of motivation dealt with our desire to seek pleasure and avoid pain and were best explained by Freud's *pleasure principle* within Motivational Psychology as well. Fiske relates motivation with the Freudian concept of drives and the desire to release pent-up emotions and psychic energy, where "a need remains active, creating pressure to meet it, until it is fulfilled" (5) (commonly referred to as Freudian drive reduction theories).

Often based on the ideas of Freud, later researchers such as Abraham Maslow and Henry Murray sought to show the meeting of needs could also motivate humans to take a specific course of action. In many ways, their research correlates well with the neurochemical conception of homeostasis in that needs are met in order to return the body to a satisfied state where desires and survival elements are no longer sought out. Nevertheless, these perspectives still fell under the Freudian "self-enhancement motive" umbrella that focused on the how actions could benefit the initiator (Fiske 6) and took little stock of other motivating factors.

For other researchers, including John Atkinson, motivation is more closely aligned with goal attainment and the factors that shape this process. For Atkinson, his "Theory of Achievement Motivation" suggests that "the tendency to approach an achievement-related goal is a joint function of need for achievement, probability of success, and incentive value of success" (Fiske 10). In other words, motivation is based on goals, but the achievement of goals is determined by a range of factors that may positively or negatively affect one's motivation. For example, motivation will be low if a goal is unlikely to be achieved, if time constraints are too demanding, or if the eventual pay-off does not correlate with the energy expended in working towards the goal.

As evidence of yet another take on motivation, several other researchers – namely Clark Hull, Edward Tolman, and Kurt Lewin – also sought to identify how control could affect motivation. Control becomes important when a person’s motivations are influenced by their ability to control the outcomes (and hopefully assure the attainment of positive ones) (Fiske 9). These perspectives often resulted in over-simplified and mechanical formulas such as Hull’s “behavior = drive X habit X incentive” model where “*drive* (and *incentive* are)... need(s) that energizes behavior, and *habit* is past learning that directs behavior,” and where “drive is a push from the organism, and the incentive is a pull from the environment” (Fiske 10). In the end, we find that Motivational Psychology offers multiple but sometimes conflicting approaches that make the establishment of one universal definition of what motivation actually constitutes a challenge.

An interesting counter-example that is worth mentioning in relation to human motivation is one of the studies discussed in Tory E. Higgins book *Beyond Pleasure and Pain: How Motivation Works*. Higgins does not deny that both the pursuit of pleasurable experiences and the avoidance of painful experiences are key elements of human motivation as discussed in relation to the *pleasure principle*. What Higgins accomplishes is to help us to also recognize other motivating factors besides the binary relationship of pleasure and pain. He does this through the presentation of several case studies, including ones that show humans may be motivated by the pursuit of truth, by the desire to control our perception of reality, or by the desire to establish a truth about our personalities.

One provocative and curious study that exemplifies one of these alternative motivations is called “The ‘Eating a Worm’ Study.” Based on the title, one can imagine the purpose and goals of this study. Participants were first asked to indicate if they wanted to take part or not

based on their willingness or not to “eat a worm”. For a small percentage the painful/displeasing experience of potentially eating a worm was enough for them to choose not to participate, but if they agreed to participate they were asked two questions. These questions asked the remaining participants to identify if they were going to eat the worm because “I am brave” or because “I deserve to be punished.” At the end of the experiment, no one was made to eat a worm, but regardless of their answers to this second question no one decided not to participate either. According to Higgins, this study suggests that we may also be motivated to establish an aspect of our personalities and make it true (in this case by actually eating the worm). Following this idea, if someone believes “I am brave,” they will eat the worm to make this declaration to the rest of the world. From Higgins viewpoint, the participants do not think about avoiding the “pain” or the “displeasing sensation” of eating a worm because the idea of fixing an idea/characteristic of their personalities is more important, therefore outweighing the idea of the *pleasure principle* (Higgins 9).

While Higgins affirms through his use of various case studies that our motivations are more complicated than what the *pleasure principle* indicates, these same studies may be interpreted in such a way that these actions relate back to a general idea of pleasure and pain. For example, the intention to declare a characteristic of our personality in “The ‘Eating a Worm’ Study” could also be interpreted as another manifestation of pleasure-seeking behavior at a meta-level. Proving one is brave would give pleasure/satisfaction in fact of being known as a brave person. For me, what these studies show is that motivation is a complicated concept that can be simplified (sometimes at the risk of over-simplification) into the categories of pleasure and pain or interpreted at a deeper level based on sub-categories, or sub-motivations, within the desire to experience pleasure or avoid pain.

In varying from the goals of Motivational Psychology, Positive Psychology as a whole is concerned with a shift of patient focus to positive (or pleasurable) experiences with the goal of healing and serving as a catalyst of change (Seligman 3). This branch of Psychology is important to understanding the emotions one experiences and therefore create connections between these emotions and the resulting motivations or actions taken or not taken. For the purpose of this investigation, it will be used as a means to understanding character emotions with a particular focus on those that cause a sensation of pleasure. At this point, explanation of these specific applications of this field would be redundant with the information provided in the individual sub-chapters dedicated to each pleasurable element – alcohol, food, sex, drugs, or revenge.

Lastly, in understanding the implications of applying both psychoanalytical and psychological theories, several additional assumptions must be discussed and taken into consideration in regards to characters as faithful representations of actual human beings. By analyzing character behaviors in such a way, we as readers and researchers make in implicit contract where we agree that these characters are like ourselves and are not fictitious (in the sense that they are not actually human or portrayed differently than actual human beings). We deny the possibility of the extra-normal and assert that these beings live under the same physical laws as the rest of us and can thus be studied and evaluated with the same psychological tools used on humans.

Therefore, with the negation of any fantastical characteristics, we reaffirm the classical idea of *mimesis* – in which a work and its characters should be a representation or reflection of reality in accordance with the original concept as proposed by the Greek philosopher, Plato (Barry 27). When we put our faith in the idea that these characters exist within the boundaries of the storyline, we support the idea of *mimesis* because they come to symbolize a reflection of

reality and ourselves, or at the very least that which is real within a particular society at a particular moment in history. Bas accomplishes this with the creation of his principal characters, Pacho and Asti. Both come to represent actual, credible beings that live and act within an entirely Basque environment – imitations of a reality that we know to exist. From an affective stance, we are able to make postulations based on a text about the emotions and feelings of characters in relation to our own feelings if placed in a similar situation. We empathize and are therefore able to relate and understand them in part because, as humans, “we suppose that other people when they use the same words, experience the same emotion as we do” (Groen 109). Postmodernism, with its propensity to deny one’s conception of reality as universal (Barry 79), poses a threat to these sort of perspectives, but it cannot be allowed to destroy or negate them entirely. Though we must take them into consideration, we must also not allow them to prohibit our ability to explore or establish conclusions about the relationships between character actions and motivations nor our ability to rely on these literary beings as faithful representations of ourselves (or as beings different from ourselves) from which valuable information and insight may be gained.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Individual Elements

The following sections of this chapter will contain a detailed analysis connecting the theoretical information provided in Chapter 3 with the events of the Juan Bas' novel, *Alacranes en su tinta*, and further research pertaining to each element. These sections intend to describe how the two main characters, Pacho Murga and Antónxu Astigarraga (or Asti), might experience pleasure through the utilization of five core elements – alcohol, food, drugs, sex, and revenge. Each section will explain how these elements might cause pleasure, in what ways these pleasures can serve as motivating factors, and then how these observations relate with the events taking place in the novel and the actions of these two main characters. The end goal is to gain insight into what effects each element might have on Pacho and Asti and how they affect the overall plotline of the novel.

4.1 Alcohol

It is no coincidence that the first true events of the novel take place in a bar. Alcohol plays an important role in the character's interactions with one another and their pursuits of pleasure throughout the novel – whether it be a fine wine, a fancy cocktail, or a night of wild intoxication. In fact, if it weren't for a shared appreciation of alcohol and an interest in a common place – the Twins Bar in Bilbao – Pacho and Asti may have never met and the whole plotline would not have come into being. But before delving into the events of the novel pertaining to this substance, it is important to understand its historical role, its effects on the brain, and how the pleasurable aspects of drinking can motivate people.

Our love affair with drinking is by no means a recent development. Early records show that humans were drinking alcohol in various forms over 6,000 years ago within Egyptian and Mesopotamian settlements. From the beginning, wine and beer were associated with pleasure, and Greeks believed wine was “equated with happiness, well-being, and virility” (Durrant & Thakker 64). But pleasure was not the only reason early peoples chose to drink alcohol; in fact, it had less to do with pleasure and more to do with subsistence and survival than modern cultures (who tend to demonize this practice) would like to think.

According to Russil Durrant and Jo Thakker in their book, *Substance Use and Abuse: Historical and Cultural Perspectives*, alcohol was “primarily consumed in a dietary context;” that is people drank beer for the nutritional value, its taste, and its thirst-quenching properties and not necessarily to reach intoxication (22). Furthermore, because of the scarcity of potable water in growing urban centers (where water was likely to carry disease) as well as the fact that they were calorie sources, alcohol in the form of beers, ales, and wines became important parts of daily life and survival (Durrant & Thakker 67). This does not mean that intoxication was not

looked down upon nor that drunkenness was not a problem in early societies. Regulatory practices for alcohol consumption date back as far as Egyptian papyri of 1700 B.C.E., and the Greeks also recognized the negative effects of this substance that were “capable of generating good or evil depending on the way it was used and the context of its consumption” (Durrant &Thakker 65).

What early societies grasped perhaps better than some Western cultures do today were the positive, pro-social benefits of alcohol as well as its negative effects. In addition to its dietary value, alcohol served various purposes that benefited early peoples immensely. For example, the Greeks used wine not only as a social lubricant but also as an anesthetic, solvent, coolant, and disinfectant (Durrant & Thakker 65). There are also known psychological benefits to moderate alcohol consumption such as “positive effects on mood, stress reduction, increased sociability and social integration, and improvement in mental health” (Durrant & Thakker 25). Recent medical research has also suggested that for middle-aged and elderly individuals moderate alcohol consumption may reduce their risk of cardiovascular disease (Durrant & Thakker 25).

One might ask then why has alcohol received such negative attention? The costs of prolonged, excessive alcohol use are also high – resulting in an increased risk of stroke, liver cirrhosis, cancer, and dependency. Alcohol also plays a role in violence, homicide, and traffic and occupational accidents (Durrant & Thakker 24). With such a fine line between the benefits and the dangers of using this substance, it helps to understand how these effects may come into being. Through a look into not only what surface behaviors or physical maladies alcohol may cause, we are able to see how it affects the chemistry and functioning of our brains and therefore our actions as well.

Alcohol has several interesting effects on the neurochemistry of our brains that explain why it can produce sensations of pleasure and/or effect our emotions and motivations. When alcohol reaches the brain, it simultaneously increases the level of GABA inhibitory neurotransmitters (which slow down the transfer of chemical messages across the brain) while also decreasing glutamate excitatory neurotransmitters (which normally facilitate the transfer of chemical messages). This produces a doubly suppressive effect on cognition that is compounded by the increased release of dopamine – our brain’s key “feel good” chemical (Watson 5).

Together these processes have two profound results: the suppression of our ability to control our emotions and behaviors and the activation of pleasure and reward centers in the brain. When alcohol causes this increase in GABA neurotransmitters and a decrease in glutamate neurotransmitters, the higher-order thinking centers of the brain located in the cerebral cortex are impaired. These regions affect our conscious thought processes, the monitoring of our behaviors, and our ability to think clearly (Watson 5). This is why humans are prone to behave differently when intoxicated – either by becoming more talkative, open, forgetful or sometimes even violent and irrational. Our bodies lose control over the neurochemical processes of our brains while our consciousness loses control of our emotions and behaviors.

In regards to pleasure, the experience of this sensation becomes a part of drinking alcohol due to the release of dopamine and the activation of our brain’s limbic system. This activation of the reward centers in the brain can also have a rewiring effect – in that new set points are established and associations made within the brain that indicate pleasure will be experienced from drinking (Schmid 170). These associations are part of what motivates us to drink aside in addition to the SEEKING system which would reward us for quenching thirst or drinking something that tastes good (Panksepp 145).

Another interesting set of components relating to alcohol consumption deal with our expectations and the cultural and behavioral norms associated with drinking within a particular society. Several studies have shown that the way we expect alcohol to affect us largely determines how it actually does affect us. Different cultures have their own unique associations of alcohol with behavior. Russil Durrant and Jo Thakker cite various instances in which one culture views drinking as a gateway to violence while for others it can be a calming or even spiritual experience. They continue by stating:

“These profound cross-cultural differences in the behavioral consequences of alcohol consumption led MacAndrew and Edgerton (1969) to conclude that drunken comportment was essentially the product of culturally shared beliefs about the effects of alcohol on behavior, rather than the consequence of alcohol per se.”(170)

Therefore, in the case of Pacho and Asti, their behavior may relate to what Hooper asserts in relation to cultural norms that include relatively lax social constraints and a greater acceptance of drunkenness (239). What might seem like unacceptable behavior or excessive within one culture might be more acceptable within another. Nevertheless, as will be discussed later, it is evident that both Asti and Pacho are aware and perceive the negative effects of alcohol which in their case relate to aggression and violence. In many ways, we can then assume that their behavior lives up to their expectations of what drinking in excess may do to them.

So how exactly might pleasure-seeking behavior motivate and be examined within the storyline of *Alacranes en su tinta*? The first and perhaps most poignant example is Pacho and Asti’s first encounter in the Twins bar. From a Motivational Psychology standpoint they are both there with a goal – to escape their troubles through intoxication and experience pleasure through the release of dopamine in the brain. We know that intoxication is capable of achieving this first

goal because of the impairing effects it has on the cerebral cortex which controls memory and cognition, as well as the second in which dopamine stimulates the pleasure centers of the brain (Watson 5). For Pacho, he comes to the Twins after an unsuccessful night of gambling that leaves him almost penniless and with notices of “insufficient funds” from all his bank accounts and credit cards. In his mind, the Twins is “El lugar ideal para terminar una noche de derrota como aquella” (Bas 27) and his goal appears to escape his focus on his financial troubles. When Pacho enters the bar, Asti (at this point just another “barfly”) is already intoxicated and sits at the end of the bar. We learn later that for Asti alcohol enables him to forget a troubled and tragic past, something he alludes to when he says “a veces me pongo bastante faltón con quien no tiene ninguna culpa de mis malas historias”(Bas 53). The two characters exchange words when Asti, on his way out the door, becomes infuriated by the sight of Pacho’s foxterrier, Milo, in the bar.

At this point, there are several indicators that Asti has lost control of his behavior and has gone much beyond simply experiencing pleasure from drinking. Through the physical descriptions of Asti made by Pacho, we know that he is flush, breathing heavy, red-eyed and all-around visible intoxicated (Bas 29). Asti also exhibits delayed reaction when, in the process of fighting over the dog being in the bar, Pacho delivers a final insult that leaves Asti described as follows: “Se quedó perplejo, anonadado. Tardó en reaccionar. Había dado en el centro de la diana. Pasó del cárdeno al gris ceniciento y algo de espuma sanguinolenta o del tinto le asomó por la boca” (Bas 30). After this moment of stasis, Asti bursts into a rage that causes Pacho to seek refuge in the bathroom as Asti angrily awaits him to leave the bar so they can fight (Bas 31).

This scene is important because it marks the beginning of their relationship with one another, something that was “facilitated” by the use of alcohol. If both characters would not be

suffering from personal baggage they may not have been motivated to enter into the Twins bar in the first place. Building on this point, if Asti would not have become angry about the dog and approached and threatened Pacho, the two may have never met. This first scene demonstrates the how the motivations of these individual characters are essential to the overall development of the storyline, both of which would never move forward without these actions having taken place.

Though this scene is important in establishing how these characters meet, it is complimented by two later scenes also involving alcohol. The first takes place several days later when Pacho and several friends stumble upon the gourmet pincho bar call “El bar Antóntxu”. At this point Pacho does not make the connection, but he soon realizes the culinary masterpieces coming from kitchen are the products of the same man that wanted to violently beat him only a few days earlier. Nevertheless, he is motivated by his appreciation for these masterpieces (as will be discussed later in regards to food) to reenter the bar a few days later in which Asti recognizes him. Here the social and cultural implications of alcohol enter into the picture when Asti offers Pacho a glass of fine wine (and several pinchos) as a gesture of friendship and forgiveness for his earlier actions (Bas 46). Now we can assume that their motivations may have shifted from purely a pursuit of pleasure via the alcohol itself to the pleasure of friendship and reconciliation, or as Higgins might argue the fixing of characteristics about one’s personality (11).

Nevertheless, these actions demonstrate the motivating force of alcohol in establishing relationships as well as later hinting on Asti’s knowledge of his own weaknesses and reactions in relation to alcohol. Pacho comments on how “el resto de la botellita desapareció vista y no vista por las bien dragadas tragaderas de Antontxu,” and after several bottles of wine during this same second encounter, Pacho asks if Asti wants to go for another drink elsewhere. As this point, Asti shows that he is aware of how alcohol affects him when he replies: “Será mejor que no. Prefiero

no beber nada más fuerte que vino fuera de casa; no me conviene en ningún sentido...Y no quisiera volver a reñir con usted ni con nadie esta noche” (Bas 58). This scene is important because it connects with the previously expressed idea that our conceptions of our behavior under alcohol seem to also play a role in how they affect us in addition to the neurochemical occurrences we know to take place.

Perhaps motivated by their SEEKING system or the knowledge and drive to have further pleasurable experiences, Pacho and Asti meet again for what results in a night of complete and total excess as well as yet another key development in the plotline. While in the previous scene where they shared drinks indicated that Asti was motivated in some way to reconcile with Pacho, thus resulting in their friendship, the next encounter truly binds the two together. A fight with an unruly customer, Asti invites Pacho out for drinks after Pacho has helped him in the bar, both motivated by pursuit of pleasure and relaxation through alcohol. After another angry and violent, alcohol induced outburst in the Twins, Asti and Pacho are thrown out, and we see a totally inebriated version of both characters as they wander to one last drunken refuge – La cocina del infierno. While their motivations to seek pleasure are essentially the same, this particular night is key to the development of the plotline as a whole. After the alcohol has affected both in such a way that they agree to take part in an orgy, Pacho has a revelation in which he envisions the opening of their own bar called “El mapimundi de Bilbao”. While this section will be discussed further in the chapter pertaining to sex, what is important to realize is that alcohol was the gateway to these revelations in that it brought both characters together, enabled them to open up, and then also to partake in other pleasures that would result in the creation of the Mapimundi. As we will discover later, the establishment of this restaurant will

further push the plotline forward as Pacho learns of Asti's past and his plans to use his position and newly gained fame from the Mapimundi to accomplish his last vengeful assassination.

While the motivation of these characters to consume alcohol and their subsequent actions may be better interpreted through an understanding of the functions of the brain in relation to pleasure-seeking, it is also worth noting a prominent characteristic about the character Asti. There are relatively clear indications that Asti may be considered an alcoholic, and he is referred to on many occasions as a "dipsómano" by Pacho. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this investigation I will not enter in to the addiction side of pleasure-seeking nor will I affirm that either Asti or Pacho are affected by alcoholism. These conclusions require a different set of diagnostic tools and a distinction, often according to cultural norms, between what is considered "normal" or acceptable drinking behavior is necessary to comprehend their behavior within the society in which they live. What I find interesting in noting is that addiction in relation to pleasure actually is capable of creating an adverse effect. Drinking in excess does not necessarily indicate alcoholism, and a distinction must be made because the latter of these two is an addiction. According to Higgins, addictions differ from pleasure-seeking in that over time the pleasure disappears but the motivation to seek the addictive substance increases (11). These findings are important to mention only because, if it were true that Pacho or Asti, were alcoholics is would indicate that their initial motivations may be driven more by addiction's rewiring of the brain than as mentioned by Schmid (107) than by the pleasure experienced from alcohol's release of dopamine into the limbic system.

While exact motivations may sometimes be hard to pinpoint, there is definite evidence that seeking pleasure through the drinking of alcohol has had a profound effect on the initial development of the plotline and the characters general motivations to act or behave in one way or

another. Alcohol is the element that first ties these two unlikely friends together, and its impact on the further development of both the characters and plotline will only continue to be appreciated as we piece together how these elements combine to form a work from which valuable insight into our own motivations and behaviors may also be gained.

4.2 Food

In a modern context, food has become a motivating force that goes beyond a mere desire for survival. While this survival impulse is essential to our understanding of food and pleasure, it by no means is the only way in which food has come to motivate us to act. Food has become associated with other pleasures that gone beyond taste sensations to aesthetic appreciations of the affects food may have on us. The appreciation of gourmet foods within *Alacranes en su tinta* is a testament to both aspects of the pleasurable experience of consuming food while also a demonstration of this elements ability to motivate us in various ways. As in the case of alcohol, these motivations result in actions that determine the course and development of both characters and the storyline as a whole. Through an examination of how food interacts with the chemistry and hardwiring of our brains and the pleasures that extend beyond simply eating for survival, we are able to identify how character behavior reflects these motivating forces and the overall pursuit of culinary pleasures.

The search and consumption of food has always been one of our most deeply ingrained motivations that enabled the survival of our species. As modern thought evolved, food kept its essentially functional connotation and an association with the “lower sense” of taste. The ancient Greeks first categorized the senses with taste, touch, and smell being “lower, bodily senses” while vision and hearing were “high senses” that involved more sophisticated cognitive functioning associated with the mind (Korsmeyer 217). According to Carolyn Korsmeyer in her article, “Delightful, Delicious, Disgusting,” she comments on these early beliefs stating, “Food is *merely* functionally, keeping the body healthy so that more important mental business may proceed” (217). While we know that from a mental standpoint food is capable taking on various

functions and connotations, biologically the consumption of food is still very much related to pure survival instincts which are reinforced by production of pleasurable sensations in the brain.

Like any other element that triggers a sensation of pleasure, food stimulates the same brain centers that release the chemical dopamine into the limbic system which causes us to sense pleasure (Watson 5). The neuroscientist, Jakk Panksepp, links these processes with his model of the SEEKING system, which motivates us to search for food and then rewards us for consuming it by producing a pleasurable sensation. As he explains it, food is essential to returning the body to a state of *homeostasis* where all systems are balanced and the SEEKING system is no longer triggered – the goal of the neurochemistry of our brains always being the return to this balanced state (Panksepp 164).

While these chemical processes explain our biological relationship with food as needed for survival, the science of gastronomy takes our appreciation of food to a new level. In response to the neurochemical explanation of our motivation to eat, Fabio Parasecoli, in his *book Bite Me: Food in Popular Culture*, explains that:

“Nevertheless, as modern Western consumers, we are definitely more complex than a simple bundle of drives and impulses... We think, we evaluate, we decide, basing our choices and actions on values and goals. Although crucial, the emotional and physical influences of hunger and ingestion on our day-by-day choices and behaviors are not sufficient to explain their impact on our perceptions and on the ways we categorize reality and deal with it.”(15-6)

What Parasecoli suggests is that our experience of pleasure from food also comes from more sophisticated sources of cognition than simple biological impulses, especially in relation to foods categorized as “gourmet.”

There is no denying that pursuing the pleasurable experience of consuming food, or even gourmet food, involves higher level thinking than determines our tastes and choices and effects our emotions. Parasecoli states that “precisely for its key role in our survival since infancy as physical beings, eating is charged with very intense and complex emotional significance”(15). While the emotional significance may sometimes seem paramount, the important factor to take into consideration is that all of these processes still come down to the sense of taste. Taste is interesting because it can always be traced back to two basic sensations - either pleasure or pain (in the sense of displeasure/disgust). Jukka Gronow comments on this phenomenon in her article “Need, Taste and Pleasure: Understanding Food and Consumption,” when she states, “Whereas need and taste constitute two distinct and antithetical discourses on food, pleasure cannot be separated from taste (taste is a source of pleasure) nor taste from pleasure (tastes are either pleasant or unpleasant)”(35). The goal of gastronomy and eating gourmet foods is to stimulate our sense of taste, which will inevitably result in either a pleasurable or displeasing experience (of course the goal of any good chef being the former of these two).

In considering the events of the novel, food is the element that remains a constant motivating factor for the characters and an essential element in the development of the storyline from beginning to end. Even though Pacho and Asti first encounter one another through drinking and various subsequent important events are facilitated by alcohol, what truly brings them together is their appreciation for gourmet food. This results in the opening of their own gourmet pincho bar, El Mapimundi de Bilbao. Before even meeting Asti, Pacho’s passion for *alta cocina* has even gone as far as to contribute to his challenging financial situation. When his father sends him a letter informing him of his soon to be “orfandad económica,” Pacho responds to the situation saying:

“No tuve fuerzas para abrir el sospechoso sobre hasta después de consolarme un poco de la pública degradación con media docenita de ostras de confianza y media botella de Viegarades, mi albariño de cabecera, en el bar Fernando de toda la vida de la Plaza Nueva ¡Ah! ¡Esta innata afición mía por las ostras!”(33).

In this scene, not only does the experience of indulging in oysters gives him pleasure at the biological level through the release of dopamine when having eaten, but they also become a form of coping with the negative emotions he is dealing with having lost access to his financial resources. Pacho shows that he is conscious of the pleasure that oysters can provide, which help him face this situation and for which even returns to the bar again for another round after reading the letter (35).

For Asti, his appreciation, and the subsequent pleasure he derives from food, comes partly from his recognition of pleasurable effect of his creations on others. He deeply appreciates when Pacho compliments him on his skills and is surprised to find someone that shares his passion (Bas 54). This is evident first when he thanks Pacho and tells him, “Muy amable. Parece usted un conecedor, y no abundan,” and then later when he asks his opinion saying, “Si no es abusar de su paciencia, me gustaría darle a probar y que me diera su opinión sobre algunas de mis cosillas. Aquí nadie entiende nada; son todos una cuadrilla de animales de bellota”(Bas 54). In contrast with Pacho, who revels in the foods he eats (giving descriptions that border on poetic of Asti’s creations), we are only able to guess at the pleasure Asti receives by his excitement and passion for his skill. We see indications of this when he describes his methods with scientific precision and when Pacho describes him saying “Disfruté enseñándome sus juguetes y hallazgos y la verdad es que yo también” after Asti shows him his collection of culinary treasures ranging from French truffles to rare Japanese algae. Asti is not so much portrayed as indulging in the

pleasures of eating food as in the pleasure of creating food that induces this sensation for others – a notable deviation from the neurochemical understanding of our experience of pleasure in relation to fulfilling bodily needs for survival only.

So far the positive effects of food on the motivation of characters and the movement of the storyline have become apparent. Food motivates Pacho to seek out gourmet dishes which results in a close friendship with Asti, who is the provider of these pleasures. Together, their shared passion and recognition of the potential for financial gains (mainly by Pacho) serves as motivation for them to open the Mapimundi. In each of these developments and relationships with these two characters, food has held the role of a positive motivating force. But food also serves to bring about pain and even death when it is utilized in a more sinister manner that plays off of our desire to indulge in the pleasures of eating.

In the second half of *Alacranes*, entitled “Confesiones de un catador de Franco,” Asti describes in detail his experiences as a taster, how he becomes paralyzed from ingesting poisoned squid, and how his life becomes a mission for revenge that eventually ties back to his opening of the Mapimundi with Pacho as a way to get closer to his last victim. In order to kill Franco, Asti agrees to his uncle and four other conspirators’ plan to poison one of his most favorite dishes of which Asti must first consume. The cruel twist is that, by placing poison in a dish that gives Franco pleasure, they are using food as a tool to achieve their motives. This “disparity between expectation and reality,” defined in literary terms as irony (Auger 156), plays off of the body’s biological hardwiring, where pleasure is received from food and therefore sought after. But in this case, instead for providing sustenance the foodstuffs being consumed brings the consumer death. In this case, the impulses of the SEEKING system unknowingly

move the individual towards something that causes harm – a hijacking of biological system that serves the purposes and motives of higher cognitive powers.

As this point, the ingestion of the poisoned food translates into a paralysis that results in deep emotional pain suffered on the part of Asti. This will ultimately motivate him to seek revenge and this is where we see food be used once again as a weapon. After 25 years of seeking vengeance, Asti intends to eliminate this last member of the failed plan – Txoriburu, the lehendakari of Bilbao – through yet another play on the motivating pleasure of food. While lying on the ground after the police shot him (thinking he was armed with a bomb), Asti describes his motives saying:

“Me enteré de que también a Txoriburu le encantan las ostras...Ordené que las sirvieron desde el principio...Esta mañana inyecté en cada ostra crocante veneno suficiente...Lo de la bomba tampoco estaba mal pensado...Pero me pareció que las ostras envenenadas cerraban y rubricaban más poéticamente mi carrera de asesino.”(Bas 249)

Knowing that the oysters were the lehendakari’s weakness, Asti uses this against him as a way to finish his vengeful mission. This pleasure that cannot be resisted will be his last tool to accomplish his own motives and indicative in an overall change in the way pleasure interacts with these elements.

From start to finish, food has been an integral part of novel and a driving force behind the development of the plotline through its hold over the characters and their overall relationship to it. Its consumption builds off of basic, hard-wired needs that are initiated by the SEEKING system of the brain while a deeper appreciation may grow out of higher levels of cognitive processing related to our emotions and motivations. In combination, biological and emotion responses are deeply connected with our sense of pleasure and which constantly motivate us. It

has been shown how food can affect us positively or negatively based on its use – either for pleasure in the form of gourmet creations or for pain as hidden killers that attack us through our most basic desire to consume. Nevertheless, food is an essential part of the character motivation that is ultimately responsible for moving the plotline forward from its beginning until its end.

4.3 Drugs

Much of our understanding of how drugs are related to both pleasure and motivation originates in the research that has been done in relation to addiction. Drugs and addiction often seem to go hand-in-hand, but within *Alacranes en su tinta* the focus of these characters' relationships with drugs is not about addiction but about how it brings about action and pushes the storyline forward. While an understanding of the power of this element to motivate and affect us is essential, we begin to see a shift within the events of the story where pleasure is derived from secondary sources or events brought about in relation to this element than by solely the element alone. Asti and Pacho's relationships to drugs are examples of this change and serve as further evidence of how these typically pleasurable elements can motivate us and/or cause harm.

In relation to the neurochemistry of the brain, drugs have similar effects as food, alcohol, etc. in that they stimulate the limbic system or the reward center of the brain through the release of dopamine or opiates. The difference is how they interact with the brain, which Schmid describes saying: "Addictive substances and behaviors tend to 'commandeer'...the normal functioning of that system, creating new set points for the experience of pleasure and reward, and creating strong motivation to continue to seek the object of addiction" (170). Drugs in affect change the natural hard-wiring (such as that which Panksepp represents with his SEEKING system) and flood the system with pleasure producing chemicals that create these strong motivating forces. As Schmid describes it, drugs work by "immediately providing huge rewards with almost no work" and by "interfere(ing) with the reward pathway's natural mechanisms for limiting the intensity and duration of pleasure"(171). These powerful abilities explain why drugs hold such addictive power and can motivate us in such intense ways. But Asti and Pacho are by

no means “drug-addicts.” Their relationship with drugs relates more closely with their historical roles and, in some sense, their mind-altering capacities.

In a similar fashion to alcohol, as humans we have been aware of both the negative and positive relationships that can develop through the use of these elements and the multiple roles that they may play in our lives. Russil Durrant and Jo Thakker comment on this interesting, historical perspective in relation to drugs in their book *Substance Use and Abuse: Cultural and Historical Perspectives*, stating: “*Pharmakon*, the Greek work for ‘drug,’ could be used to refer to either a remedy or a poison, reflecting the dual role of drugs in classical Greek society”(23). Within *Alacranes* we encounter both interpretations of the term drug – one being in the form of several illicit drugs and the other being the poisons used for the assassination (or failed assassination attempts) of two important political figures.

Of all the pleasurable elements that appear throughout the development of the storyline, drugs are the least prevalent. Nevertheless, they play an important role in several key events that move the story forward; the first of these being the infamous “noche de exceso” that results in Pacho’s revelation for the creation of pincho bar called El Mapimundi de Bilbao. After indulging in excessive amounts of food and then alcohol only hours before, Asti takes Pacho to an underground den of sin called “La cocina del infierno.” Here the two partake in various drugs that leave them both nearly incapacitated and which can be said to contribute to Pacho’s enlightening experience regarding the bar which later occurs while having sex. Pacho describes this all-around seedy bar scene saying:

“Bebimos con *la Consuegra* el mismo mejunje que ella bebía...y esnifamos lo mismo que ella esnifaba: rayas de cocaína mezclada con *speed* y mescalina sintética – seguramente cortadas con resacaduras de cal de la pared, dada la profusión de

desconchados, que dotaron a todo y a todos de un doble o triple halo e hizo que el ruido, las canciones de Mari Trini, lo único que parecía sonar en aquella auténtica cocina del infierno, me llegara a los oídos a golpes, como a vaharadas de decibelios. Un canuto hecho con dos papeles de fumar empalmados, de marihuana nigeriana con hachís libanés, que hubiera tumbado a Bob Marley, me completó el cuadro clínico.”(79)

While representative of an impressively intoxicative mix of drugs, this scene illustrates the entire extent to which Pacho and Asti are portrayed using these substances within the novel. Neither character is motivated by the pleasures these drugs provide, but out of this pleasurable experience, Pacho comes to a revelation that will bind the two characters together, fusing their stories until its end. In fact, the greater effect of these drugs comes from their impact on the storyline than from their actual impact on individual character motivations.

Another way in which drugs have an effect on the plotline while also indirectly providing pleasure is through their presence in the form of poison and their role in Asti’s mission for revenge. Poisons work by penetrating the cell walls and causing damage, which if too severe may result in cell death. If too many of an organism’s cells are damaged or dead, the entire organism may die as well (“Poison” 1). Asti describes the poison that was used in the failed assassination attempt saying, “El veneno se disolvía rápidamente en un medio caliente y aunque la bolita no era mayor que un grano de mostaza reunía en su volumen más poder mortífero que una familia entera de alacranes” (Bas 125). The knowledge and use of this particular poison came from Asti’s uncle’s stay in the Guatemala rainforest. In describing its origins, Asti states:

“El veneno provenía de unos diminutos hongos que los indios ceiba...secaban al sol y convertían en un polvillo. Lo utilizaban para cazar. El veneno paralizaba rápidamente el

sistema nervioso central del animal hasta matarlo. Ingerido, el efecto tardaba un poco más en presentarse” (Bas 122).

What is interesting is that this poison is placed in a food source that is known to please General Franco – a hijacking of the body’s desire to seek pleasure through consumption as was discussed earlier in relation to food. But in this case, instead of pleasure, only pain comes from this experience – chiefly Asti’s emotional scars left from years spent tortured by his desire for revenge and the loss of his youth, lover, and parents.

Nevertheless, on a meta-level poison functions as a motivating force on the overall plotline. Its effects cause Asti to enter into a paralysis which causes him to go mad. Eventually, he seeks revenge through a series of events that drives the plotline forward from one assassination to the final attempt with the poisoning of the lehendakari. Poison succeeds in enabling Asti to carry out this final act of revenge by its placement in a dish (oysters) that both the lehendakari and his friend Pacho are unable to resist. As will be discussed later, Asti learns to receive great pleasure from his vengeful acts and poison enables him to experience this final pleasure before dying.

Therefore, drugs serve facilitate the development of plot events that carry the storyline forward while also enabling the experience of pleasure in indirect ways. Though a small portion of this examination, drugs remain a key element capable of producing pleasure in distinct ways from that of previously explored elements.

4.4 Sex

While the association between sexual experience and feelings of pleasure may seem to be an obvious one, in actuality our understanding of the interaction between the neurochemical and psychological aspects of this pleasure inducing activity is still relatively vague. For the purpose of this investigation, the underlying features of how sex, pleasure, and motivation relate to one another will be explored while also focusing on the general motivating effect sex has on the development of the overall plot of the novel. In a similar sense to that of drugs, sex plays two key roles: there are the events that take place in relation to the physiological pleasure related to orgasm and then an enabling characteristic related to how Asti uses sex to become close to his victims which later lets him derive pleasure from revenge.

From a biological and neurochemical standpoint, it makes sense that our bodies and in particular our brains have evolved to reward reproductive activities with the experience of pleasure (Panksepp 230). While there is evidence that sex, and in particular orgasm, involves the same chemical processes associated with the SEEKING system, the role of hormones and other pleasure inducing chemicals such as oxytocin are also important to the experience of sexual pleasure. Panksepp states that, “We now know with considerable assurance that sexual feelings emerge from primitive hormonally regulated mechanisms for the emotional-limbic brain that we share to a substantial extent with other mammals”(228). The key to this description is his inclusion of term “emotional-limbic” brain – emotional relating to elements of higher cognitive processing and limbic relating to the key pleasure center of the brain responsible for our experience of pleasure through the release of dopamine. What this indicates is that sex is neither entirely governed by impulse nor by reason – it is a biological process that takes on significant

emotional meaning. It can be said then that both the neurochemical and emotional aspects effect how sex can motivate us.

Though the exact processes involving the deriving of pleasure from sex are not fully understood, we know that experiencing pleasure motivates us to act and to seek out that which gives us pleasure. A key scene that relates to the neurochemical side of sexual experience and which is later responsible for important and necessary plot developments occurs during the “noche de excess” in which Pacho envisions the creation of the pincho bar, El Mapimundi de Bilbao while achieving orgasm. During this intensely emotional and chemical experience, Pacho relates that felt liberated the sensation of “un par de millones de neuronas al fundirse” and in which:

“Vi las letras en elegante caligrafía inglesa y neon blanco sobre un luminoso fondo rojo uniforme. A los cuarenta y un años, en una letrina y en medio de una orgía de fenómenos de feria, acababa de descubrir mi misión en la vida: poner en pie El Mapimundi de Bilbao, el mejor bar de pinchos de creación del planeta.”(81)

As discussed earlier, this experience has a profound effect on later events in that it will motivate Pacho to open the bar and further solidify the friendship between him and Asti. This friendship will lead to Pacho’s discovery of Asti’s past and the events that lead up to Asti’s death and Pacho’s poisoning are put into motion. All of this comes into being through this one singular thought that comes to Pacho in a moment of chemical and neurological ecstasy achieved through the pleasurable experience of human orgasm.

The chemical power of sexual experience through orgasm also plays a key role in a later event that serves as another essential plot development – the awakening of Asti from his coma/paralysis. Asti’s awakening coincides with an instance of the habitual sexual abuse he

experiences from Crescencio, a priest and member of the assassination plot that takes over his care after the death of his mother. Crescencio makes frequent visits to perform oral sex on Asti, which Asti only realizes later when his sense of pleasure is restored in his awakening from the paralysis (Bas 141). Asti describes his return to his senses saying:

“Sentí de golpe como si subiera en un ascensor vertiginoso, desde el fondo de un pozo o una sima profundísima, sin que se alterara en absoluto la negritud hasta que la turbadora sensación de ascender cesó. Entonces sí: un destello de luz blanca me atravesó la mente y desperté.”(Bas 139)

What is interesting is that his awakening coincides with his experience of orgasm, a sensation which until this point he was unable to feel even though he was being brought to this point many times before by Crescencio. He describes his realization by saying, “No podía imaginar que en mi anulada situación era capaz de eyacular. Si por lo menos hubiese sentido los orgasmos, pero con mi perra suerte, ni ese consuelo tuve” (141). His awakening is a key development in the plot that enables his mission for revenge to take place and which eventually lead him to encounter Pacho and open the Mapimundi.

While the significance of this experience is key to the overall plot development, an interesting shifting of roles takes place later in the novel in which the motivating forces of sex enable Asti to become close to two of his victims. Even though Asti is conscious of the fact that Crescencio has abused him, he does not reveal this information and he later uses the priest's desire and motivation to have sex with him to get close to the perpetrator (Crescencio) by staying at a convent with him (Bas 142). While Asti engages in sexual behavior with the priest as a way to use his desires against him, his real pleasure comes from the revenge he is able to pursue as he becomes closer to achieving his goals through their relationship.

Soon after these experiences, Asti repeats this behavior when he uses sex as a tool to become closer to another victim – the opera singer Blanca Eresi. In the case of Blanca, Asti also experiences pleasure in having sex with Blanca, encounters he describes as “me volvía tan loco de deseo como el primer día,” and which he says “en cierto modo, me había enamorado de ella”(Bas 187). Nevertheless these intense sexual and emotional feels do not override his greater motivation to seek revenge, which he eventually achieves with her and the other conspirators. The pleasure he receives, at least from these experiences, appear to be secondary to his overarching vengeful desires.

While both Asti and Pacho engage in various sexual acts throughout the course of the novel, the most important in relation to character motivation and plot development relate to orgasm and sex being used for manipulation. Because sex is thought to also provoke a sensation of pleasure through the reward systems of our brains, the challenge remains in how we are to distinguish between when these pleasures originate from a purely chemical origin or if they are able to motivate characters beyond that of reproductive impulses at an emotional and more complex level.

4.5 Revenge

Unlike any other element examined throughout the course of this investigation, revenge has been the only one that relates to pleasure on a purely cognitive level. There is no biological explanation that might account for how pleasure can be derived from inflicting pain and no evolutionary purpose that would encourage us to eliminate another member of our species. In fact, as Panksepp has shown, our brains are wired to reward us with pleasurable sensations when partaking in reproductive activities (227) and there is no bodily need that would explain our motivation to seek revenge. How then can “pleasure” be felt from revenge? The answer deals with emotional nature of human brain and is only beginning to be understood even from a psychological standpoint. There is no question as to the often overwhelming motivational power that comes from seeking revenge, but the goal is to understand how this process may occur and its especially its effects upon the character Asti.

Historically, the seeking revenge and the violence that often ensued were enough motivation for early societies to establish laws against vengeful acts. According to Stevie Simkin, “History and anthropology reveal revenge to have been fundamental to the customs and practices of primitive societies”(1). But even as the establishment of governing bodies and laws sought to limit our ability to “take the law into our own hands,” revenge remained a part of human social behavior. Simkin comments on this situation in Elizabethan England stating: “The frequent condemnations of acts of revenge in religious, legal and other discourse of the time prove that established customs died hard, and suggest that the lawlessness of the principle of revenge was profoundly unsettling for those in authority”(2). It can be said then that the seeking of revenge seems to have been both a constant threat to authority and a companion to that of other basic human behaviors both now and in the past.

Perhaps the best psychological explanation for revenge comes to us from the field of Motivation Psychology in relation to goals. The human psyche seems to be awarded a special type of pleasure through the attainment of goals and their ability to motivate us is widely agreed upon (Fiske 4). Therefore, it can be explained why seeking revenge, or the goal of seeking justice, can motivate us to act. But if we receive some mental sensation of pleasure, even if not fully understood how, is it possible that a physical sensation can also take place? And, is it possible for the mind and body to experience pleasure separately? These questions are yet to be answered by the field of neuroscience and psychology, but one might suppose that if revenge is capable of initiating some underlying chemical process that it would also be able to activate the same reward centers that enable us to experience pleasure from food, alcohol, or drugs.

Another perspective more conceptual in nature comes to us from the field of Positive Psychology, which relates the pursuit of revenge to our motivations. In their chapter entitled “The Psychology of Forgiveness,” authors Michael E. McCullough and Charlotte vanOyen Witvliet explain the forces behind revenge as follows: “Human beings appear to have an innate proclivity to reciprocate negative interpersonal behavior with more negative behavior” and that “People are motivated to respond to injuries and transgressions by committing further injuries and transgressions equivalent to those they have suffered”(446). We see examples of this in Asti’s desire to rob the members of assassination plot of their lives as compensation for his own life which he felt he has lost.

Though we may not fully understand how revenge is capable of motivating us as human beings, we can no deny its hold over us. Asti is no exception to this rule in that revenge is what motivates him perhaps more than any other pleasure-producing element examined thus far. In relating his feels while paralysed to Pacho, Asti comments: “Creo que ese odio, que pronto se

hizo extensivo a los otros cinco conspiradores, palió mi deseo de morir para librarme de aquel atroz limbo y lo substituyó el ansia de volver al mundo algún día para poder vengarme de todos ellos”(130). During this state where he is totally unable to act upon these desires and intense motivation, these thoughts drive him to the point of madness, where he states “Los mate con la imaginación cientos de veces, uno por uno, de muchas maneras, demasiadas”(138).

When he finally awakes, his mission for revenge consumes him in that he even confesses that part of his motivation to open the Mapimundi was so he could accomplish this last vengeful act with the poisoning of the lehendakari (Bas 236). At the same time, we have seen how he uses the motivation of others to seek the pleasures through sex and food to accomplish his own goals (through his sexual encounters with Crescencio and Blanca and his poisoning of Txoriburu). Goals which we can only assume give him a great sense of pleasure as well.

There also exists the possibility that a key part to understanding his vengeful mission comes from a connection with mental illness or mental disturbance that he has suffered as a result of his traumatic experiences. Asti comments at several points how he was driven mad by the desire for revenge during his paralysis (Bas 130), and then later reminds Pacho, “No olvide que estoy loco, no he dejado de estarlo en ningún momento” before finishing the story of his systematic assassinations (Bas 236). The assassinations are extraordinary in the level of detail and planning he undertakes to complete his goals – sacrifices that potentially increase the pleasure he feels from finally achieving his goals after investing large amounts of time and energy into their planning and fulfillment (Fiske 10). For example, in the case of Blanca Eresi, one of the six members of the assignation plot, Asti moves from Bilbao to Madrid, murders her boyfriend and then takes his place as her lover. He then encourages her to diet until the point that she dies from a heart attack related to her weakened condition (Bas 193).

Each assassination serves the purpose of moving Asti towards his end goal of killing the remaining five members (one which died while he was still paralyzed). This process brings him pleasure, motivates him, and pushes the events of his story forward until they intermingle with those of Pacho's story. We learn that Pacho has been present for only the very end of what has been a 25 year long search for revenge that has managed to continue to consume Asti's thoughts.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Further Research

Through the course of this study, Pacho and Asti's relationships which each individual element have reflected the motivating capacities of each in relation to their psychological and physiological effects. Through this progression, it has become evident that understanding character motivation offers much more than a simple understanding of plot elements and progression. Through the application of psychological approaches to understanding pleasure and motivation, a deeper understanding of what truly motivates these literary beings may be appreciated. Motivation is an essential element of plot development because our motivations often provoke action and action is what drives the storyline forward until its end. In many ways motivation is the heart of any novel, in that for a story to be told action must occur and this action is inevitably caused by a particular stimulus.

Analyzing these five elements of pleasure by applying current findings from the fields of Motivational and Positive Psychology and an understanding at the psychological and neurochemical level of how pleasure motives us, we are able to connect with characters as faithful representations of ourselves. By learning what elements motivate them and the processes under which this occurs, we are better able to begin to form conclusions about ourselves and our own personal motivations with the goal of better understanding what factors come into play when we feel compelled to act. The positive side of this knowledge is that it enables us to feel more in control and less controlled by the neurochemical processes of the brain.

Another important factor to take into consideration is also the counter-evidence provided by the examples Higgins provides in relation to motivation. Her goal and the results of her findings are that in addition to the pleasure principle, human beings may be motivated by several of other factors that can have an equal or greater hold over our psyche. We see example of this in

the transition from chemical explanations of how pleasure is obtained through each element to more conceptually based, psychological descriptions. These findings point to how biological needs may serve as the initial, pleasure-driven spark, but that our high-level thinking processes seem to be the great, and less understood, source of our motivations. Pleasure is an essentially biological experience, as the work of Panksepp shows, but also one in which our thoughts and subsequent actions impact greatly. These cognitive components of pleasure shape our experiences of these sensations in modern context and leave us with many questions as to the true nature of our motivations.

In examining the overall effect of this study, certain limitations and opportunities for further research should also be taken into consideration. First of all, the scale of this investigation is relatively small; it focuses on the work on one author, one work, and one particular point of departure – that of character motivation in relation to pleasure-seeking behavior. A deeper and more extensive analysis could be achieved through the incorporation of additional works, either from Juan Bas or other authors, or through the comparison of Spanish, Basque, and/or American perspectives in relation to the various elements discussed within this work.

Another limitation is the cultural specificity, in that any accurate conclusions can only be drawn in relation to Basque culture. While the Basques form an important part of the greater cultural mix that is Spain, their culture nevertheless remains somewhat secluded and distinct from that of the rest of the nation and the rest of the Western world. This cultural specificity hinders any generalizations that may be made and makes any general conclusions difficult to extend to any other populations. The only exception is the undeniable fact that biologically and neurologically we are same; a Basque brain functions under the same principles as any other

human brain. Therefore, any conclusion based on neurological evidence could be applicable to other populations as long as cultural factors are not of influence.

Currently, the amount of research available was also a source of limitations to the overall span of the study. Neuroscience remains in its infancy and as advances are made in this field it often causes us to reevaluate the conceptual ideas of the field of Psychology. Both fields are important pieces that contribute to our understanding of the human psyche, but, until further research is done and deeper connections made between the two fields, many of the concepts present here will remain in very preliminary state of understanding.

In the future, those wanting to examine similar themes as those presented here would benefit from the integration of the most recent information being made available in the field of Neuroscience with changes in the field of Psychology in relation to both pleasure and motivation. Also, due to space and limited focus of this study, there remain many topics relating to these characters behaviors that gone unexamined, to name a few: compulsive eating, sexual fetishes, murder and violence, gambling, and alcoholism.

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